



News Release

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National WWI Museum and Memorial Announces Planned Leadership Transition

President and CEO Matthew Naylor to depart in 2027 following 14 years of transformative leadership

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The National WWI Museum and Memorial today announced that President and CEO Matthew Naylor will conclude his tenure in 2027 after 14 years of leadership, relocating to his native Australia to be closer to family. The Museum's Board of Trustees has initiated a search for the institution's next leader, with the goal of welcoming a new President and CEO by early 2027. Naylor has committed to guiding the Museum and Memorial through its 2026 centennial and remaining through June 2027 to ensure a smooth and thorough transition.

The Board of Trustees expects to retain an executive search firm by spring 2026. The search will be informed by listening sessions with staff, trustees, volunteers, donors and community partners to develop a candidate profile reflective of the institution's values and aspirations.

"Matt has given this institution many extraordinary years," said Tom Whittaker, Board Chair. "His vision, his leadership and his deep commitment to this place have transformed what the National WWI Museum and Memorial is and what it can become. While we will deeply miss his presence, we are grateful for the thoughtful and generous way he is approaching this transition, and we are confident that the Museum and Memorial is poised for an equally remarkable next chapter."

Naylor has led an unprecedented period of transformation at the Museum and Memorial. Under his stewardship, the institution completed a comprehensive renovation of the Main Gallery, addressed long-standing deferred maintenance needs, opened the Wylie Gallery, developed the new Lower Level and Bergman Family Open Storage Center, and established new administrative office spaces, fundamentally reshaping the visitor experience and the institution's long-term operational foundation. Two successful capital campaigns totaling over \$100 million in philanthropic support also placed the Museum and Memorial on sound financial footing, reflecting Naylor's commitment to stewardship and the generosity of the institution's donors.

Naylor's tenure also encompassed some of the most consequential moments in the institution's history. In 2014, the Museum and Memorial received a second congressional designation, formally cementing its role as America's National WWI Museum and Memorial. During the commemorative centennial of the Great War, the institution saw significant growth in visitation and programming, bringing the history of World War I to new and broader audiences. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of museum doors, Naylor led the organization without a single staff layoff, redirecting the team toward digitization projects that expanded the institution's online reach to a global audience, a legacy that



continues today in record digital engagement numbers. Under his leadership, the Museum and Memorial also grew into one of Kansas City's most beloved civic gathering spaces, hosting the 2023 NFL Draft, Kansas City's official Independence Day Celebration, the Stars and Stripes Picnic, and now preparing to welcome the world as host of the FIFA World Cup Fan Festival.

"Few people have the privilege of helping shape an institution that means so much to a community and a nation," said Naylor. "Kansas City welcomed my family and me with extraordinary generosity, and I will always be proud of what we built together, from new galleries and programs to a deeper connection between this historic site and the public it serves. My focus now is ensuring the strongest possible transition for the Museum and Memorial's next chapter."

This announcement comes as the National WWI Museum and Memorial marks its centennial and stands at the threshold of its second century. The incoming President and CEO will assume leadership of an institution at the height of its civic and national prominence.

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About the National WWI Museum and Memorial

The National WWI Museum and Memorial is America's leading institution dedicated to remembering, interpreting and understanding the Great War and its enduring impact on the global community. The Museum and Memorial holds the most comprehensive collection of World War I objects and documents in the world and is the second-oldest public museum dedicated to preserving the objects, history and experiences of the war. The Museum and Memorial takes visitors of all ages on an epic journey through a transformative period and shares deeply personal stories of courage, honor, patriotism and sacrifice. Designated by Congress as America's official World War I Museum and Memorial and located in downtown Kansas City, Mo., the National WWI Museum and Memorial inspires thought, dialogue and learning to make the experiences of the Great War era meaningful and relevant for present and future generations. To learn more, visit theworldwar.org.