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**Carol Lovelady to Retire as PPHM Director**

CANYON, Texas—West Texas A&M University announced today that Carol Lovelady, director of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum since 2017, will retire May 31.

A search committee will be announced soon, as will an interim director, said WT President Dr. Walter V. Wendler.

“We will work very carefully with the Panhandle-Plains Historical Society in this hiring process as we did last time, and I am confident that we will find a most qualified person,” Wendler said. “This is a very attractive position because of the importance of the museum to our state and to the region, so I know that we will attract a group of superior candidates as we did when Carol rose to the fore.”

Will Miller, president of PPHM’s board of directors, said Lovelady “is absolutely leaving the museum in better shape than she found it.”

“She has done so much for us in terms of visibility, profile and stature, and a lot of that is because she has such a passion for the museum,” Miller said. “We’re not ready to let her go.”

The museum works in partnership with WT. The Panhandle-Plains Historical Society retains the museum’s extensive archives; WT provides the building and employs its staff.

She joined the museum staff as interim director in May 2016 after the resignation of former director Guy “Cliff” Vanderpool, then was hired as the full-time director the following January. Previously, she joined the PPHM board of directors in the 1990s and served as president from 2010-12. As president, she spearheaded extensive renovations to Pioneer Town, one of the museum’s signature exhibitions.

She remembers traveling to the museum by train from Amarillo as a child, sparking a lifelong appreciation of PPHM that has only grown since she joined the staff, she said.

“I love the museum. I’ve always loved the museum, but not to the degree I love it now,” Lovelady said. “I realize more now what an incredible asset it is to our region.”

Her signature accomplishment at the museum was PPHM Unveiled: Roccoco, a black-tie event on the museum’s grounds that celebrated its extensive collection of French antiques donated by the family of the late Lucille Nance Jones, whose family bred Herefords. The April 2019 event raised more than $200,000.

“It was a remarkable event that was very well organized and drew a lot of attention from the region and beyond,” Wendler said. “Carol wanted a high-quality fundraiser that represented the best of Panhandle-Plains, and she succeeded. It’s a testament to the type of work she has done while she has been at the museum.”

Lovelady also said she is proud of creating strong relationships across the state with early Texas art collectors and the Texas State Historical Commission.

In addition, Lovelady oversaw the integration of the museum with the Center for the Study of the American West (CSAW), an academic center at WT that’s headquartered at PPHM.

“It’s a perfect integration of the academic programs on our campus with the resources of Panhandle-Plains,” Wendler said. “There’s a spirit to the American West that’s worth holding up and examining for insights about the future of the Panhandle and of the nation. I think marrying the museum with the academic programs of WT is important.”

Lovelady’s Panhandle-area roots are deep. She is the daughter of former Amarillo mayor L. Ray Vahue and community volunteer Helen Vahue, and the descendant of a pioneering Amarillo family that arrived on the High Plains in 1901.

Lovelady has a degree in journalism from Baylor University and a master’s degree in advertising from Syracuse University. A former journalist and public relations director, she has worked for the Amarillo Globe-News, the former High Plains Baptist Hospital and KACV-TV. She has volunteered for Llano Cemetery and Presbyterian Home for Children, among other organizations. She was named Globe-News Woman of the Year for 2014.

Lovelady and husband Sam, a partner at Amarillo accounting firm Lovelady, Christy + Associates and a member of the WTAMU Foundation, have two children — Patrick and wife Jennilee of Amarillo, and Elizabeth and husband Travis Elfers of Chicago — and two grandchildren.

Miller said Lovelady is leaving the museum on solid ground.

“We have a great staff at the museum, and a lot of that is to Carol’s credit because of how she worked to develop them and how she gave them freedom to grow,” Miller said. “She’s leaving us in really good hands.”

The museum, 2503 Fourth Ave. in Canyon on the WT campus, opened in 1933 thanks to the efforts of the Panhandle-Plains Historical Society, founded in 1921 by Hattie Anderson. The museum doubled in size in 1967 by opening a four-story addition that now houses the Research Center, Art Galleries, Pioneer Town and Special Exhibit Area.

In 1973, WT donated its former library on land adjacent to the museum, providing much-needed storage, support space and three galleries. A $6 million grant in 1986 from the Don and Sybil B. Harrington Foundation allowed the museum to construct a 75,000 square-foot structure to connect the existing museum and the former WT library. This gift and the resulting expansion made PPHM the largest history museum in Texas, with more than 285,000 square feet—and more than 2 million artifacts—dedicated to preserving this area’s past. It hosts between 55,000 and 60,000 visitors every year.

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