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Arizona Historical Society Announces Search for New Executive Director

TUCSON, AZ (JULY 13, 2021) - The Arizona Historical Society (AHS) announces the departure of Executive Director W. James Burns after three years with the agency. Burns will assume the role of Executive Director of Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West in the fall of 2021. Burns' departure from AHS will be coordinated to ensure a smooth transition to new leadership. The AHS State Board of Directors will commence a public search for a new Executive Director.

Linda Whitaker, President of the AHS State Board of Directors shared, "It is with a mix of sadness and gratitude that we announce James' departure. We are grateful for James' leadership as he forged a new direction for the organization, delivering a new mission, vision and strategic plan to position AHS for success in the years ahead. We congratulate him on his new position with Western Spirit museum. Over the next few months, the AHS Board of Directors will begin the search for a dynamic executive director with a passion for connecting people through the power of Arizona's history."

During Burns' tenure, he led the organization through a transformative time in its history. By creating a foundation for major gifts fundraising, resolving past Sunset Review and performance audit findings, and shoring up finances to build in more sustainability, AHS is well-prepared for a thriving future. His achievements include steering the agency through the COVID-19 pandemic, obtaining nearly \$1 million in COVID-relief funding to support operations, and driving the development of virtual programming to expand AHS' reach and engage with new audiences.

Burns is also credited with an agency-wide effort to apply and qualify for full accreditation with the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the gold standard for arts and cultural institutions. AHS applied as a statewide organization for the Pioneer Museum in Flagstaff, the Arizona Heritage Center at Papago Park in Phoenix/Tempe, the Arizona History Museum in Tucson, and the Sanguinetti House Museum and Gardens in Yuma. A detailed announcement about being awarded accreditation will be coming at a later date.

Burns shared, "During the pandemic and recession, the creation of a digital history hub, virtual programming, and audience engagement through social media served more Arizonans virtually than our on-ground facilities were ever able to accommodate. The agency's new mission to connect people through the power of Arizona's history, and its vision to be the driving force strengthening Arizona's communities by promoting history through leadership, partnership and scholarship, demonstrate that history is essential

and that the agency is more relevant than ever to Arizonans. AHS has become a resilient organization, one that is poised for continued success.”

Burns came to the Arizona Historical Society from the University of Arizona, where he served as Director of the Center for Creative Photography and the University of Arizona Museum of Art. Previously, he served as Executive Director of the Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg. Burns previously worked for the Museum of Northern Arizona, the Louisiana State Museum, the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation and the Atlanta History Center, and the Tempe History Museum.

Future announcements about the AHS Executive Director search will be at azhs.org.

Arizona Historical Society

Mission: Connecting people through the power of Arizona’s history.

The Arizona Historical Society (AHS) is a nonprofit organization and state agency established in 1864. AHS collects, preserves, and tells the story of Arizona’s past through museum exhibitions, libraries and archives, historic sites, educational programs such as National History Day Arizona, and the *Journal of Arizona History*. AHS seeks to be the driving force strengthening Arizona’s communities by promoting history through leadership, partnership, and scholarship.

Flagstaff, Phoenix/Tempe, Tucson, Yuma

For additional information, visit azhs.org.

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