



MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM - MERIDIAN

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Executive Director of the Mississippi Children's Museum – Meridian Transitions from Liz Wilson to Barbara Zeller

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Meridian, Miss. (June 23, 2022) – The Mississippi Children's Museum – Meridian (MCM-Meridian) is pleased to announce the appointment of Barbara Zeller as the incoming Executive Director of MCM-Meridian.

Barbara will succeed Elizabeth "Liz" Wilson and assume responsibilities of Executive Director on July 1, 2022. Liz, who has been involved with the museum since its inception, will be relocating to Chattanooga, Tennessee with her husband, Rod, and three children, Mailande, Trent, and Lillie.

"Liz's unique gifts of creativity, commitment, and leadership provided the perfect recipe to accomplish an extraordinary new museum and programs for East Mississippi. She has been not only a driving force for this new physical space, but a valued member of the statewide team in creating new experiences and programs for all of Mississippi's children," said Susan Garrard, President/CEO, Mississippi Children's Museum.

The vision of opening MCM-Meridian, a satellite campus of the statewide Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM), all began through the dedicated work of community volunteers, Kim Bowers, Kimberly Denison, and Liz Wilson in 2014. Over the years, Liz's unwavering diligence to improve the quality of life of East Mississippi's children brought the vision of a state-of-the-art early educational resource to Meridian.

Despite the obstacles of a worldwide pandemic and heavy Spring storms, the museum opened safely to the public on March 27, 2021. Since then, the museum has welcomed over 80,000 children and families through its doors from forty-three states, seventy-three Mississippi counties, and two foreign countries. This figure far exceeds initial projections of 51,500 estimated yearly guests calculated by Dr. Alan Barefield of Mississippi State University.

Just eight months after opening, the museum received statewide recognition for its tourism draw and took home the title of 2021 Travel Attraction of the Year at the annual Mississippi Governor's Conference for Tourism. The museum also received first place in four local award categories through the Meridian Star 2021 Readers' Choice Awards.

Liz's enthusiasm for the museum's mission has established a solid foundation for MCM-Meridian and has prepared the museum for future success as she passes the torch to Barbara Zeller, incoming Executive Director of MCM-Meridian.

It's through Barbara's shared passion and advocacy for early childhood education and mission-driven work that makes her an excellent fit as MCM-Meridian's next Executive Director. Barbara brings a background in grant writing, program development, volunteer coordination, and marketing from her recent work at local nonprofits, The Montgomery Institute and The Free Clinic of Meridian. As the 2021-2022 President of the Junior Auxiliary of Meridian, Barbara has demonstrated a commitment and drive to serving others, especially children, and making a positive impact in the local community. Barbara also holds a Master of Public Health and Bachelor of Science in Health Promotion and Behavior from the University of Georgia.

"We are excited to welcome Barbara to the MCM team and look forward to her leadership as the museum continues to grow and inspire children and families in East Mississippi and beyond. Her background in public health will enhance the museum's statewide efforts to champion holistic health programs and exhibits for all children," said Garrard, President/CEO, MCM.

About the Mississippi Children's Museum - Meridian

The Mississippi Children's Museum - Meridian (MCM – Meridian) is the East Mississippi satellite campus of the statewide Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM)—a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that creates unparalleled experiences to inspire excellence and a lifelong joy of learning. MCM-Meridian is a 25,000-square-foot facility with exhibit space designed around five primary initiatives: Literacy, STEAM, Health and Nutrition, Cultural Arts, and Mississippi History woven throughout all galleries. Outdoors is a 25,000-square-foot exhibit gallery that allows children a safe and magical space to explore and enrich the learning experience. The museum's exhibits, programs, and outreach opportunities provide engaging, hands-on activities for children of all ages. MCM – Meridian is a strategic part of the statewide Mississippi Children's Museum which is dedicated to inspiring all of Mississippi's children from all backgrounds to discover and achieve their potential. To learn more about MCM – Meridian, visit www.mcmmeridian.org.

About the Mississippi Children's Museum

The Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission of creating unparalleled experiences to inspire excellence and a lifelong joy of learning in all children. The 40,000-square foot museum is designed around five primary initiatives, with correlating exhibits, programs, and outreach efforts. These initiatives include: Literacy, STEAM, Health and Nutrition, Cultural Arts, and Mississippi Heritage – the keys to helping our children mature into healthy and productive adult learners. In response to community needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MCM shifted operating and programming priorities to best serve Mississippi's children and combat learning loss through facilitating virtual schooling and creating online educational enrichment – services that continue today through a robust, daily afterschool program and an online platform for teacher professional development.

In 2021, MCM celebrated a monumental year by receiving an Institute of Museum and Library Services National Medal, the nation's highest honor for museums, and through opening its first satellite museum, MCM-Meridian, which received the 2021 Governor's Award for Travel Attraction of the Year. To learn more about MCM, visit www.mschildrensmuseum.org.

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