

WISCONSIN STATE FAIR PARK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WISCONSIN STATE FAIR PARK ANNOUNCES INTERIM CEO/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WEST ALLIS, Wis. – Oct. 19, 2021 –Wisconsin State Fair Park Board Chairman John Yingling today announced Shari Black will serve as Interim CEO and Executive Director. As previously announced, Kathleen O’Leary, CEO and Executive Director of Wisconsin State Fair Park will retire from state service at the end of October after 24 years in various management roles.

Per Wis. Stats. 42.02 the State Fair Park Board appoints the State Fair Park Director. Per the State Fair Park Board policies and procedures, Yingling may appoint an Interim Director and is also tasked with selecting a committee of board members to conduct a search for the next CEO/Executive Director.

“On behalf of the entire State Fair Park Board of Directors I would like to thank Kathleen for her 24 years of service to the State of Wisconsin,” said Yingling. “Kathleen’s passion for the Wisconsin State Fair was infectious, and her hard work and dedication will never be forgotten.”

“Shari has a wealth of experience and knowledge that make her an excellent choice for Interim CEO and Executive Director,” Yingling added. “The board looks forward to working with her and the staff to continue the forward momentum we have seen at State Fair Park in recent years.”

Black has been involved in the fair industry for more than 20 years. She served as Executive Director for the Waukesha County Fair in Waukesha, Wis., for 15 years. In 2016 Black transitioned to Wisconsin State Fair Park as Senior Director of Event Services, which included managing year-round facility rentals as well as the Fair’s Amusement Ride and Game area, SpinCity. She was promoted to Chief Programs Officer in 2019, which included overseeing Agriculture, Vendor Services, Competitive Exhibits, Entertainment and all rides and attractions for the State Fair event.

“I am honored by this opportunity to lead the talented team at Wisconsin State Fair Park,” said Black. “Together, we will continue the progress made by the board, Kathleen and staff by remaining focused on financial stability, safety and continually improving the experience for all visitors to Wisconsin State Fair Park.”

Black is also active in the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE), is a Certified Fair Executive through the organization and serves as the current IAFE Convention Program Committee Chair. For many years Black and her children were active in 4-H, showing animals at both the county and state level. She has a bachelor’s degree from Carroll University and currently lives in Waukesha, Wis.

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“I’ve had the privilege of working with and mentoring Shari throughout her career, even prior to her joining the team at State Fair Park,” said O’Leary. “She brings extensive experience in both Fair and Non-Fair event management to the table. I wish her the best of luck and know she’ll do a great job leading the State Fair Park staff.”

O’Leary held several positions at State Fair Park, beginning in marketing, sponsorship, and communications before briefly serving as Chief Operations Officer before being appointed CEO in 2016. O’Leary was the first female in the history of State Fair Park to serve as CEO and Executive Director.

About Wisconsin State Fair Park

Wisconsin State Fair Park is a year-round entertainment venue hosting hundreds of events and meetings annually throughout the four seasons, including the annual Wisconsin State Fair, presented by UScellular. It is home to the Exposition Center, Tommy G. Thompson Youth Center, Milwaukee Mile Speedway, Wisconsin Products Pavilion, and many other facilities. The annual Wisconsin State Fair is considered one of the top 10 Fairs in the country and has garnered numerous industry awards in recent years.

The Wisconsin State Fair offers a unique experience to all who attend. Featuring Wisconsin’s largest agriculture showcase, dozens of FREE entertainment stages, exciting rides and games in SpinCity, countless family-friendly activities, and food galore, the Fair is a tradition that can’t be missed. The 2022 Fair will take place Thursday, Aug. 4 – Sunday, Aug. 14, For the most up-to-date information, visit [WiStateFair.com](https://www.wisstatefair.com) or join the conversation on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [TikTok](#).

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