Wilson Center Names Executive Director

Brookfield, WI (May 3, 2018) Following a nationwide search, the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts (Wilson Center) has named Anna M. Thompson as its Executive Director. Thompson comes to the Wilson Center from the Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), where she served for two-and-a-half years as the Associate Vice President and Executive Director, overseeing a $4.8 million budget and producing and presenting more than 700 performances, residencies, and events annually.

The announcement came from Wilson Center Board Chair Fred Syrjanen following a national search conducted over the past four months by a 10-person search committee. Chaired by Syrjanen, the committee included members of the Wilson Center Board of Directors, staff, and consultants.

“The search committee reviewed several highly qualified candidates, and we are pleased to have Anna joining us as a visionary leader who will guide the Wilson Center to our next level of excellence,” said Syrjanen. “Anna’s passion for the arts is evident throughout her impressive career, and we look forward to the many ways that her arts management experience, her industry recognition as a presenter and producer, and her ability to build strong collaborations will grow our reputation as a national arts leader.”

Previously a music educator, Thompson has been an active leader of arts organizations for 34 years. Prior to her role at UAB, she served for eight years as Executive Director of the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center and the Judd and Mary Lou Leighton Director for the Performing Arts at University of Notre Dame. Thompson also spent 10 years in Minnesota at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University. Before that, she served as an arts administrator for 14 years at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Butler University.

Thompson will join the Wilson Center on May 21, 2018. Her appointment comes at a time of great momentum for the organization, which annually enhances more than 45,000 lives through world-class performances, arts education programs, classes and workshops, festivals, exhibitions, and special events. In June, the Wilson Center will welcome more than 600 business and community leaders to its premier arts education fundraiser, The Big Event, as Milwaukee philanthropists Allan H. (Bud) and Suzanne Selig are honored with the 2018 EDDY Award. Throughout the summer, more than 15,000 audiences will attend the annual Starry Nights free outdoor concert series, and hundreds of guitarists from all over the world will participate in the sixth annual international Wilson Center Guitar Festival this August. In the fall, the Wilson Center will celebrate its 17th anniversary season, featuring an Irish dance premiere, Grand Ole Opry icons, an NEA Jazz Master, and many more unique and engaging arts experiences.

“It is an honor to be named the Executive Director of the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts,” said Thompson. “I was drawn to the position for several reasons: the remarkable architecture, setting, venues, and programming, and the exceptional dedication of Don and Kate Wilson and the board. I look forward to leading the Center’s passionate team and joining the vibrant community of Milwaukee.”
Thompson received her bachelor’s degree from Albion College and her master’s from Western Michigan University, with additional studies in educational leadership at Butler University and a certificate in executive leadership from the University of Notre Dame. Thompson is a member of the International Society for the Performing Arts, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, Chamber Music America, and Dance/USA. She is also a frequent lecturer and presenter at performing arts conferences worldwide.

*(Anna M. Thompson photo by Chuck St. John.)*

**About the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts**

It is the mission of the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts to serve as the catalyst for lifelong discovery and exploration of the arts. The Wilson Center is a multidisciplinary, nonprofit cultural arts facility with a 16-year history of excellence. The Wilson Center’s programming is designed to transform both individual lives and whole communities through the power of the arts; situated in a 400-acre park in Brookfield, Wisconsin, the Wilson Center is recognized as a cultural anchor in the Greater Milwaukee community and focuses on three main disciplines: Performing Arts, Arts Education, and Visual Arts. Since opening in 2002, the Wilson Center has continued to celebrate its five core values of excellence, innovation, passion, stewardship, and collaboration, through an outstanding and diverse array of world-class performances, educational programs, classes, festivals, and special events. Currently in its 2017/2018 season, the Wilson Center now annually welcomes more than 45,000 people, including more than 10,000 students every year—many of whom are being introduced to the arts for the first time—and the Center is poised for growth and future success. For more information, please visit [www.wilson-center.com](http://www.wilson-center.com).

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