



Please Touch Museum President & CEO Patricia D. Wellenbach to Transition from Leadership Role in 2025

Philadelphia's nationally recognized children's museum begins search for new leader while Wellenbach remains focused on continued growth for Museum through her term

PHILADELPHIA (February 22, 2024) - [Please Touch Museum](#) ("the Museum") President & CEO Patricia "Trish" D. Wellenbach today announced her decision to transition from leadership following more than nine years of service to Philadelphia's beloved, nationally recognized children's museum. While the Museum's Board of Trustees begins the search for a new President & CEO, Wellenbach will continue in her role until new leadership is in place, ensuring seamless continuity of the Museum's initiatives and mission to change a child's life as they discover the power of learning through play. [Isaacson, Miller](#) has been retained by the Board to lead the national search for the Museum's new leader.

"When I arrived at the Please Touch Museum in 2015, I was focused on stabilizing this treasured Philadelphia institution and reinvigorating the Museum's reputation of innovation, boldness, and excellence in our community," said Wellenbach. "Please Touch Museum is stronger now than it has ever been with a proven team who can execute on that vision and support the next chapter of growth for this magical institution. As my current contract concludes next year, I feel as though the time is right for a leadership transition. Serving as President and CEO has been an honor; I have immense gratitude for the children, families, donors, partners, community members, board, and staff – past and present – who have brought joy and laughter to the Museum and shared their creativity, compassion, confidence, and curiosity. But the job is not done yet! I remain fully committed to serving this iconic institution until the Board appoints a new leader and will support the transition with the same passion and enthusiasm as when I joined the Museum."

"Prior to Trish Wellenbach's arrival, Please Touch Museum was at a crossroads, experiencing financial challenges that demanded courageous leadership," said Shawn Tuli, Chair of the Board of Trustees, Please Touch Museum. "Trish has been a transformative leader for the Please Touch Museum, and who would have known how important that would be, especially when the Museum experienced a never-to-be-imagined 56-week closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under Trish's leadership, this Museum has proven its resilience and reimaged its purpose. She has ignited our imaginations, and inspired us to think bigger, curating high impact experiences relevant to the children and families of Philadelphia who trust Please Touch Museum as their third place of learning. We are deeply grateful to Trish for her stewardship of the Please Touch Museum over these past nine years and know she has set us on the path towards future growth and success."

With an incredible reputation as a change agent and a gift for reimagining institutions, Wellenbach came to the Please Touch Museum in 2015 during a time of great peril for the institution as it exited Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Wellenbach led the organization towards recovery, as the Museum produced a comprehensive five-year strategic plan titled, "Please Touch Museum 2020: Reimagining Play to Empower 21st Century Learners," which served as the foundation for the Museum's transformation. A perennial Top 10 Children's Museum as recognized by USA Today 10Best Reader's Choice Awards, the Museum routinely draws nearly 500,000 visitors per year with 30% of visitors attending for free or reduced admission.

Since Wellenbach took the reins, the Museum has also not only become a place to learn through play, but also a welcoming space for children in the community to share their hopes and dreams for themselves, their families, and for Philadelphia. Most notably in 2023, the Please Touch Museum was awarded reaccreditation from the American Alliance of Museums through 2033, signifying excellence in the museum field and commitment to the highest professional standards. Of the nation's estimated 33,000 museums, 1,103 are currently accredited and less than 1% are children's or youth museums. In its reaccreditation, Please Touch Museum was uniquely recognized for:

- its expanded and strengthened Parkside Community Advisory Council, which meets with Museum leaders monthly for substantive conversations designed to increase understanding of what the community needs from the Museum;
- outside-the-box strategies, including recruitment of local and national university research partners and utilizing research results to direct program planning;
- and showing ample evidence of serving diverse populations and committing substantial resources to Museum access and inclusion, including many free and reduced admission programs and special exhibits aimed at cultural understanding.

The Museum also launched several post-pandemic programs, recognizing the gaps in children's social and emotional skills necessary for learning in kindergarten. Its Kindergarten Readiness Experience, which was initially funded by Vanguard, has been able to accelerate due to a \$1 million grant in the federal budget through the advocacy of U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA). It has also welcomed discussion surrounding children and their families' hopes and dreams for Philadelphia by creating a collaborative "I Have a Dream" mural inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., now on display and celebrated by visitors. The 500 submissions received for the mural also spurred inspiration for a Children's Mayoral Conversation supported by The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, where Mayoral candidates Cherelle Parker and David Oh were welcomed to the Museum's home in historic Memorial Hall for an intimate Q&A with 100 students from second, third, and fourth grade classrooms in the Museum's surrounding community.

While the Museum has enhanced its efforts to reach its communities, it has also welcomed ground-breaking traveling exhibits under Wellenbach's leadership including, "America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far" in 2019, and reimaged its lower level. Children and families now can now experience Centennial Innovations, the Albert M. Greenfield Makerspace, a Creative Arts Studio, Cents & Sensibility, and Food & Family presented by GIANT all on the lower level of the Museum.

In addition to her work at the Museum, Wellenbach has long shown her service to the Philadelphia community. She is the first woman to serve as the Chair of Thomas Jefferson University Board of Trustees, a role which she will continue through 2025. She is also supporting City of Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle L. Parker as a member of her Mayoral Transition Steering Committee. Prior to her role with the Museum, she served as President & CEO of Green Tree School and Services (2013-2015), an organization dedicated to children aged 5-21 with autism and emotional support needs.

"As we begin this search for a new leader of the Please Touch Museum, we do so with a firm commitment to build on the strong foundation that Trish has created during her tenure," said Tracey Santilli, Chair of the Search Committee, Please Touch Museum. "The Museum has audacious plans to recognize children as changemakers during Philadelphia's upcoming Semiquincentennial Celebration in addition to commemorating its 50th anniversary in 2026. By engaging the highly-respected Isaacson, Miller, the Board will focus on identifying outstanding, innovative candidates from across the country for this important civic role in the City of Philadelphia."

Isaacson, Miller will begin its search with the Board of Trustees immediately. Additional details regarding the search will be made available in Spring 2024. It is anticipated that a new President & CEO will be identified and in place by the close of the calendar year.

About Please Touch Museum

Please Touch Museum’s mission is to change a child’s life as they discover the power of learning through play. Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and recognized locally and nationally as one of the best children’s museums in the United States, Please Touch Museum is open Mondays and Wednesdays through Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, visit [PleaseTouchMuseum.org](https://www.PleasureTouchMuseum.org).

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