



NEWS RELEASE

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Skilled, experienced executive tapped to lead museum

An exciting and positive new era for the San Bernardino County Museum will begin on Oct. 19 when Melissa A. Russo takes the helm as museum director.

Russo, who will become the County Museum's first female director, has spent the past six years as Director of Institutional Advancement at the Chabot Space & Science Center in Oakland and previously served for 10 years as executive director of the Western Museums Association. She brings to San Bernardino County 23 years of experience as a high-achieving museum executive.

"Bringing Melissa Russo to San Bernardino County is a major step toward fulfilling the commitment made by the Board of Supervisors to put our museum system back on the right track," said Board of Supervisors Chairman James Ramos.

"This is one of many steps the Board of Supervisors has taken to provide our county community with a modern, fiscally healthy, and respected educational and cultural institution that will attract and engage visitors in record numbers, compete with all other Southern California museums, and responsibly preserve our county's heritage," Chairman Ramos said.

Russo, a Certified Fund Raising Executive, has a strong record of fiscal management, strategic planning, program planning and execution, fundraising, board development, and building good relationships with the public. She has a master's degree in art history from the University of Illinois and a bachelor's degree in economics from UCLA.

"I am thrilled and honored to have been chosen to lead the San Bernardino County Museum," Russo said. "I look forward to working with the Board of Supervisors, the staff and the Museum Association. Together, I am confident we will reinvigorate the museum and, through vibrant community engagement, keep this extraordinary institution a truly vital resource in the life of this region."

The San Bernardino County Museum includes a main facility in Redlands, the Victor Valley Museum in Apple Valley, and historic sites in Chino, Colton, Rancho Cucamonga, Redlands, and Yucaipa.

The museum has struggled in recent years with drops in attendance, revenue, and association membership, as well as economy-driven budget cuts and staff reductions. A 2014 county-commissioned study by San Francisco-based Museum Management Consultants concluded the museum has tremendous potential and could benefit greatly from business-minded



management and a greater focus on fundraising by the independent nonprofit San Bernardino County Museum Association.

The study pointed out that the nation's best museums survive not primarily on government support, as has been the case with the San Bernardino County Museum, but rather on robust and consistent fundraising by non-profit associations. The consultant advised the museum association to partner with a fundraising consultant, increase the size and scope of its board, and consider assisting the county in funding key staff positions.

In January, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to begin implementing a series of the consultant's recommendations, including filling the vacant director position with someone adept at business and management, and forging a more productive relationship with the museum association.

In May, the board adopted a short-term action plan to set the museum on a positive track until a long-range strategic plan could be developed under the leadership of a new director.

Museum attendance has increased during the past year.