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First Americans Museum Executive Director/CEO Steps Down

James Pepper Henry (Kaw/Muscogee), Executive Director and CEO of First Americans Museum (FAM) will step down from his current position on March 31, 2024. He will transition from his role overseeing daily operations of FAM to “Director Emeritus,” focusing on fundraising and special projects. Pepper Henry has been in the leadership role at FAM since 2017 and stewarded the completion of the long-delayed project. FAM opened to the public on September 18, 2021.

“Jim brought First Americans Museum to the finish line. We couldn’t have completed this project without his expertise and dedication. Not only has he helped to build an amazing facility to showcase the 39 tribal nations in Oklahoma, but he has also solidified its reputation as one of the premier cultural institutions in the state. FAM is now regarded as the bellwether museum for the representation of Indigenous peoples both nationally and internationally.”

--Blake Wade, Executive Director, Native American Cultural & Educational Authority

Under Pepper Henry’s leadership, FAM has been honored with over 30 local, regional, national, and international awards including:

- 2022 ENR (Engineering News Record) Award of Excellence for Best Public Facility in the United States
- 2022 Oklahoma RedBud Award for Outstanding New Attraction
- 2022 EPA Region 6 Award and National Phoenix Award for Best Brownfield Project
- 2022 Oklahoma Museums Association Outstanding Exhibit Award for “Okla Homma”
- 2022 Oklahoma Museums Association Outstanding Publication Award for “WINIKO: Life of an Object”
- 2022 Anthem Gold Award for the exhibition “Okla Homma”
- 2022 Winner of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Philanthropic Vision Award
- 2023 Winner of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) National Award for Best Public Facility
- 2023 ONE (Oklahoma Nonprofit Excellence) Award for Best Arts & Humanities Organization
- 2023 AASLH (American Association for State & Local History) Award of Excellence & History In Progress Award

Pepper Henry has also received individual honors including:

2022 Top 55 Over 55 Award for Oklahoma
2023 Journal Record Power List for Leaders in Workplace Diversity
2024 Journal Record Power List for Non-Profit Leaders

A citizen of the Kaw Nation and descendant of the Muscogee Nation, Pepper Henry brought an authentic and personal perspective to the development of FAM's exhibitions and storytelling:

"One of the things that I am most proud of at FAM is that the stories and histories presented in our exhibitions are told from the first-person perspective by members of the thirty-nine tribal Nations in Oklahoma. You will not find a more authentic experience in any other museum representing Native peoples."

--James Pepper Henry, Executive Director/CEO

Pepper Henry believes it is time to pass the mantle to the next generation of leadership at FAM. The First Americans Museum Foundation Board of Directors respects this decision and will soon engage in the effort to recruit a new Executive Director. Pepper Henry will continue to serve FAM in an advisory capacity as "Director Emeritus," a title bestowed upon him by the Foundation Board in recognition of his service and dedication to the organization.

"We will be forever grateful for the expertise and leadership that Jim has brought to FAM. The Board of Directors wants to express our deepest appreciation for all his contributions and accomplishments. We will miss his steadfast dedication and wish him success in his next endeavors."

--Gregg Wadley (Choctaw), Chairman, First Americans Museum Foundation Board of Directors

"We could not have made First Americans Museum a reality without the support of so many individuals, foundations, corporations, the public, and especially our Tribal Nations and Tribal Members. I am forever grateful for this incredible opportunity to help bring FAM to fruition."

--James Pepper Henry, Executive Director/CEO.

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About FAM

First Americans Museum celebrates our shared American history through the collective stories of 39 distinct tribal nations in Oklahoma today. The museum promotes awareness and educates the broader public about the unique cultures, diversity, history, contributions, and resilience of the First American nations. The 175,000 sq. ft. museum is located at 659 First Americans Blvd, Oklahoma City, OK 73129.