

After Three Decades of Service, Kravis Center CEO to Retire

Judith Mitchell first and only person to hold CEO title for nonprofit performing arts center

WEST PALM BEACH, FL, UNITED STATES, March 20, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Judith Mitchell was hired as development director for the [Kravis Center for the Performing Arts](#) in 1989, when the 10.5-acre parcel at the corner of Okeechobee Blvd. and Tamarind Ave. in downtown West Palm Beach was merely an under-construction dream of local philanthropists. Just over 30 years later at the same parcel – on the heels of one of the best performance seasons in the Center’s history – Mitchell announced her retirement yesterday, effective at the end of the calendar year.

At the helm of the \$160 million Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, Mitchell has been no ordinary Chief Executive Officer. Her role has included supervising the Center’s overall operations, planning and implementing all corporate policies, overseeing 200 employees and more than 700 volunteers, and generating and managing a \$31 million annual operating budget. With Mitchell’s direction, the Kravis Center has served as an economic catalyst to the region, contributing an estimated \$750 million to the local economy since its doors opened in 1992. Since that time, it has provided over 15,000 performances, sold over 9.5 million tickets, provided free performances and arts education opportunities to nearly 3 million students, and drawn over 10 million visitors to the area.

“To have had a front-row seat to the growth and success of the Kravis Center over the last 30 years has been so rewarding,” said



Judith Mitchell, CEO of the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts



The Kravis Center for the Performing Arts

Mitchell. "It has been a privilege to be a part of the creation of what is now not only one of Palm Beach County's most recognized structures, but a cultural landmark as well. The Center is in an extremely strong financial position, with stellar programming in place and a strong, competent staff executing our thoughtful and strategic plans. I made this decision months ago and have been working with our Board Chair and several other board members to choose the right time to announce it. As we entered into March, we agreed that we needed to go public so that a search could be completed with enough time for the new CEO to be in place for the new season. I intend to continue to steer the Kravis Center through the current health crisis, and of course will always be available for the Kravis Center to make this the most seamless transition possible. I am confident I am leaving this beautiful Center in an enviable place for its next CEO."

Today, the performing arts center is a thriving cultural complex and has become an economic catalyst that boosts travel and tourism. The Kravis Center serves as the gateway to downtown, which now includes the Palm Beach County Convention Center, Rosemary Square and a new Hilton Hotel. Because of the Kravis Center and the other organizations it inspired, Palm Beach County is now designated as Florida's Cultural Capital®.

In the past 28 years since opening, the number of overall events hosted at the Kravis Center has grown to more than 1,400 each year, with attendance of more than 500,000 guests. Many regionally-based arts organizations call the Kravis Center their home including Miami City Ballet and the Palm Beach Opera. Civic organizations and other not-for-profits utilize the Kravis Center and its varied facilities to advance their missions. Established as a leading force in the social fabric of the community, its many outreach programs are as broad and varied as the community itself.

"During my tenure here, I am extremely proud of building the organization and the Kravis Center team," said Mitchell. "I'm proud of the longevity of our employees and their commitment to our mission. This outstanding team keeps our 24/7 operation running smoothly. And our outstanding board members typically serve the full limit of 12 years (four, 3-year terms) outlined in our bylaws. Most continue to serve in other capacities even after their board term limits have been met and they continue to show wonderful dedication to the Kravis Center mission. It has been an honor to have worked with and been mentored by some of our community's most successful business and social leaders."

According to Jeff Stoops, Chairman of the Kravis Center's Board of Trustees, a national search will be conducted to fill the Kravis Center's CEO role. The CEO search committee will be chaired by Michael Bracci, immediate past Board Chair of the Center, with a goal for the committee to conduct a thorough nationwide search for Mitchell's successor, to include both internal and external candidates.

"While we would all like Judy to serve as our CEO forever, everyone is entitled to their next chapter," said Stoops. "No one deserves it more than Judy, as her contributions to the Kravis Center and our community over her 30 years of service have truly been extraordinary. Today the Kravis Center is a nationally top-ranked performing arts center with facilities, programming, operational excellence, educational outreach and financial strength that are second to none, all of which have been gained under Judy's leadership. She will leave the Kravis Center in fantastic shape for her successor. Given the tremendous attractiveness of the Kravis Center and all it represents, we are confident that we will choose from the highest quality pool of interested candidates to succeed Judy, although there will only ever be one Judy Mitchell. The Kravis Center and our community are fortunate to have had Judy serve for as long as she has and, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I express our greatest appreciation for her service and wish her the happiest and healthiest retirement."□

The Kravis Center opened with its first full season in 1992 – fully funded, with the majority of the construction costs donated from private funders. That same year, after only three years on the job, Judith Shepherd (now Mitchell) was offered a promotion from her original role as

development director to serve as the Kravis Center's CEO.

"Judy has been, not only professionally but personally, one of the most important people in my life over the last 30 years," said Alexander W. Dreyfoos, Jr. "When, in 1980, we were in the early stages of exploring the possibility of a performing arts center for Palm Beach County, there were many initial disappointments and many naysayers in the community. We forged ahead, but the real turn around began when Judy came onboard. Judy is one of the top and finest executives I have ever worked with. She is the person I always counted on to be smart, thoughtful and methodical about our goals and challenges and she has done a remarkable job. She leaves the Kravis Center in the best of shape and with an incredible staff in place.

"For all the accolades I have received with the success of the Kravis Center, so much of the credit goes to her," continued Dreyfoos. "Hers is a well-deserved retirement, and I wish my treasured friend the happiest of days ahead."

Mitchell says that watching the Kravis Center truly embody its mission as a community gathering place heads a long list of accomplishments in which she takes great pride. Others include overseeing an increasing annual budget which has provided more opportunities for higher quality programming and consistently placing the Kravis Center in the top 10 venues in the world for ticket sales. Building an organization that has served as a catalyst for the community's arts and culture sector – including growing the initial line-up of two education programs to a year-round spectrum of over 150 education and outreach initiatives that provide over 600 activities for the community -- ranks high, along with expanding the footprint of the campus while elevating the guest experience.

She has also been recognized with numerous awards including: the "Breaking the Glass Ceiling Award" presented by the National Association of Women Business Owners, Palm Beach Chapter; and a Lifetime Achievement in the Arts Award from the Palm Beach County Cultural Council. On behalf of the Kravis Center, she accepted the Cultural Council's Muse Award for Arts Education and accepted the Providencia Award from the Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau, recognizing the Kravis Center for "outstanding contributions to Palm Beach County tourism." She has received the Women In Leadership Award (WILA) from Executive Women of the Palm Beaches. She has also been inducted into the Junior Achievement Hall of Fame and was recognized by Palm Beach Atlantic University on American Free Enterprise Day with a Companion Medal.

A resident of Stuart, Mitchell says her retirement plans include more time focused on special projects in the community along with time for family and her dogs. Boating, snorkeling, hosting dinner parties for family and friends, and traveling are high on her retirement "to do" list. Husband Jim Mitchell will remain in place in his role as COO for the Kravis Center, as he continues to oversee operations for the Kravis Center and shepherd the [Kravis 2020 project](#) to completion this year.

"Jim and I met as colleagues at the Kravis Center 28 years ago and discovered our mutual love of the water, fishing and boating," said Mitchell. The two will celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary with a trip to Africa later this summer.

"I look forward to welcoming this great Center's next CEO," said Mitchell. "Starting with working with the very best team on the planet, the gifts I have received from working here and being part of this amazing community gathering place are too numerous to count."

The Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts is a not-for-profit performing arts center located at 701 Okeechobee Blvd. in West Palm Beach, FL. The Center's mission is to enhance the quality of life in Palm Beach County by presenting a diverse schedule of national and international artists and companies of the highest quality, by offering comprehensive arts education programs - serving nearly 3 million students since its inception; by providing a Palm

Beach County home for local and regional arts organizations to showcase their work; and by providing an economic catalyst and community leadership in West Palm Beach, supporting efforts to increase travel and tourism to Palm Beach County. To enhance and elevate the customer experience, the Center embarked upon a \$40 million capital project to support a campus redesign and facility expansion that will create a more accessible, comfortable and pedestrian-friendly venue for the community. Aptly named Kravis 2020: The Future is Now, this project is at the heart of the Kravis Center's vision for the future. For general information about the Kravis Center, please visit kravis.org or call the Box Office at 561.832.7469. For more information about the Kravis 2020: The Future is Now project, visit kravis.org/kravis2020.

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