

Riverfront visionary leaving Memphis River Parks Partnership

MEMPHIS, TN, UNITED STATES, August 26, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Carol Coletta, internationally recognized urban expert, Memphis native and visionary behind the new Tom Lee Park and reimagined riverfront, is leaving Memphis River Parks Partnership. The Partnership board will immediately begin a search for her successor.

In notifying the Partnership board of her decision, she said, "We have done amazing work together. It has been the greatest honor of my life to work with you, our fantastic team and our generous donors to begin the work of making a riverfront worthy of our magnificent river. We've completed four major projects on budget and on time. We did it in only six years. We have attracted more than one million people to the new Tom Lee Park in its first year. We have another major project, The Flyway, underway that will significantly increase that number. We set a minority participation milestone for public-private projects. We raised \$80 million for capital projects on the city's riverfront."

Looking ahead, Coletta said she would continue her career "helping cities make significant places – places that matter. That's what I've done throughout my career, that's what we've done on the riverfront and that's what I will continue to do. I am very excited about what's next for me and for our riverfront."

Memphis River Parks Partnership manages six miles of riverfront and 26 properties along the Mississippi River. Coletta has been CEO and president of the Partnership since 2018.

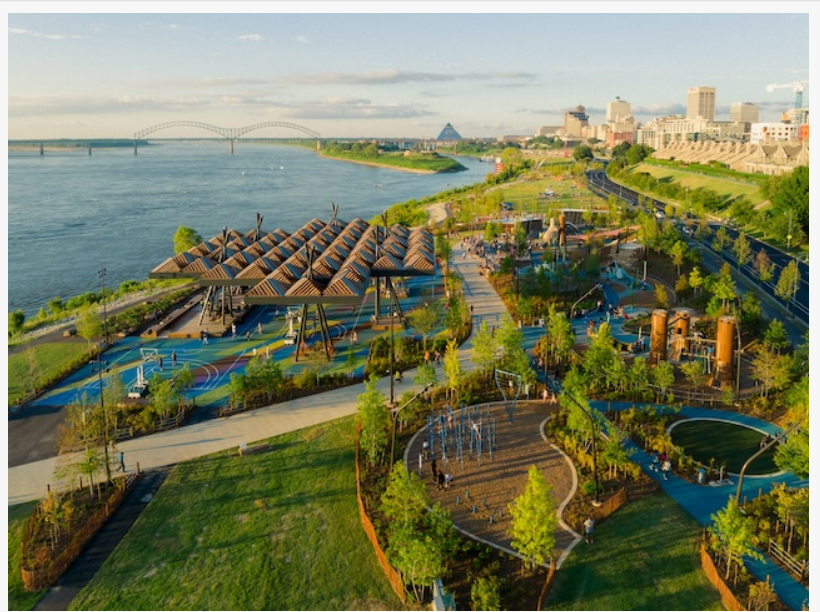
The Memphis River Parks Partnership board will conduct a national search for Coletta's successor to continue to elevate the city's riverfront as a beloved local landmark and



Carol Coletta, president and CEO of Memphis River Parks Partnership, is leaving the organization to begin a new stage in her career. The board will conduct a national search for her successor.

international destination. Tammy LoCascio, chief operating officer of First Horizon Corp. and vice chair of the Partnership board, will lead the board's search committee. The search will be conducted through Memphis firm Adams Keegan. The search will begin in September and is expected to be completed by year-end.

"There is exciting work ahead, and the Partnership is well-positioned and committed to getting it done," said Coletta. "To maximize the value of our riverfront, it must be better connected to downtown and nearby neighborhoods. We also have a big opportunity to activate our harbor, and Mud Island needs a successful, sustainable future.



The 31-acre, \$61 million Tom Lee Park opened on Labor Day 2023 and has welcomed one million visitors in its first year

"The next seven years of work will be just as tough as the last seven. But the results will have as much impact – maybe more – than anything we've done to date. This is an intense and rewarding job for someone who will start and finish this work and who will own it all the way to completion. I'm here to support the Partnership in any way I am needed until the board finds the right leader. We have a great team, and the next leader will be lucky to work alongside this dedicated board and staff."

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Carol is a revered figure in the world of parks and civic open space and an indefatigable advocate for a vibrant, connected and equitable public realm."

Kate Orff, one of TIME magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2023

Under Coletta's leadership, the Partnership has delivered major projects:

- Completion of River Garden and Fourth Bluff Park, both parks with former Confederate associations
- River Line, a bike-pedestrian trail connecting four miles of riverfront to Wolf River Greenway and Big River Crossing over the Mississippi.
- 21 capital projects on Mud Island and the popular Memphis sign that is featured in photos by visitors from around the world.
- Tom Lee Park, a new \$61 million wonderland at the front door of Memphis. Tom Lee Park transformed 31 acres of flat, barren riverfront into what has been called by national media the

nation's preeminent waterfront park. Downtown Memphis is surrounded by racially and economically stratified neighborhoods, presenting Tom Lee Park with the opportunity to create a true civic commons – a riverfront for everyone.

In June the Partnership broke ground on the Memphis Flyway, the one-of-a-kind attraction that will be the only free and ADA-accessible observation deck on the Mississippi River. It will open in 2026 and is expected to draw more than one million new visitors a year.

The new Tom Lee Park opened to rave local and national reviews on Labor Day 2023. At the opening ceremony, Pitt Hyde, founder of AutoZone and the Hyde Family Foundation, said, “We could not have created this world-class park without Carol’s incredible leadership.” The construction of Tom Lee Park set a milestone with 42 percent MWBE participation, significantly exceeding the City of Memphis goal of 25 percent for the project and setting the standard for public/private projects.

Fast Company magazine lauded the remarkable change on the Memphis riverfront, naming Tom Lee Park one of the top three urban design [World Changing Ideas](#). The Life on the River playground in Tom Lee Park was named one of the 11 Most Unique Playgrounds in the U.S. by Mental Floss. The London Times included Tom Lee Park among the must-do activities during 48 hours in Memphis in its article [This is America’s Most Fun City Right Now — Here’s Why](#). Bilbao Metropoli 30 named the park one of the best 100 projects in the world for 2023. Construction of Tom Lee Park is the subject of [Tom Lee Park: A Riverfront for Everyone](#), a documentary that first aired in Memphis on PBS in June.

Coletta ranks number 12 among women on Planetizen’s list of Most Influential Urbanists. On



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Planetizen's list of Most Influential Urbanists, Past and Present, Coletta ranked 62nd. Planetizen also ranked Coletta number 32 on its list of Most Influential Contemporary Urbanists.

The American Society of Landscape Architects named Coletta a 2024 recipient of the prestigious LaGasse Medal, the highest award for a non-landscape professional directly responsible for managing natural resources or public landscapes. In announcing the LaGasse Medal honors, the ASLA called Coletta "a national figure in the revitalization of cities and public spaces." Coletta will be awarded the LaGasse Medal at an ASLA ceremony in Washington, D.C., in October.

Charles Landry, author of the book *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, which sparked a movement to rethink the planning, development and management of cities, called Tom Lee Park "a truly special and complex project."

Internationally recognized architect and Tom Lee Park designer Jeanne Gang said, "Every city should have a Carol Coletta." Gang's design partner on the project Kate Orff, FASLA and one of TIME magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2023, said, "Carol is a revered figure in the world of parks and civic open space and an indefatigable advocate for a vibrant, connected and equitable public realm. Her vision, character, grit and generous spirit have lifted dialogue around urban parks and open space to be more civic-minded and participatory, while always foregrounding the power of design in place making."

Before relaunching the nonprofit public-private Memphis River Parks Partnership, Coletta was a senior fellow in The Kresge Foundation's American Cities Practice. She led a \$50+ million collaboration of national and local foundations, local nonprofits and governments to Reimagine the Civic Commons in five cities. Memphis received a \$5 million grant that led to the process to reimagine the riverfront. It was the first comprehensive demonstration of how a connected set of civic assets – a civic commons – can yield increased and more widely shared prosperity for cities and neighborhoods.

Coletta previously served as vice president of community and national initiatives for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, where she managed a portfolio of more than \$60 million in annual grants and a team of 18 in 26 communities focused on driving success in cities.

She led the two-year start-up of ArtPlace, a unique public-private collaboration to accelerate



Tom Lee Park has fast become a top destination on the Memphis riverfront

creative placemaking in communities across the U.S. and was president and CEO of CEOs for Cities for seven years.

Coletta served as executive director of the Mayors' Institute on City Design, a partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts, U.S. Conference of Mayors and American Architectural Foundation. She also ran a Memphis-based public affairs consulting firm, Coletta & Company, where she served businesses, foundations, nonprofits and government on the broadest range of civic issues.

About Memphis River Parks Partnership

Memphis River Parks Partnership is a nonprofit public-private partnership that works with and for the people of Memphis to trigger the transformative power of their river. The Partnership has raised \$80 million for public parks and assets along the Memphis riverfront over the past seven years.

The Partnership's properties include Tom Lee Park, a 31-acre park named in honor of Memphian Tom Lee, who couldn't swim but saved 32 people when a sternwheeler capsized in the Mississippi River in 1925. Tom Lee Park is surrounded by racially and economically stratified neighborhoods, presenting Tom Lee Park with the rare opportunity to create public space that brings together people from all walks of life. Tom Lee Park was named one of the top three urban design World Changing Ideas by Fast Company magazine. Since its opening Labor Day weekend 2023, Tom Lee Park has drawn one million visitors.

More information about Memphis River Parks Partnership is available at memphisriverpark.org.

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