

The Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage has appointed Heidi Kühn as Chair of its U.S. 250 Council

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage has appointed Heidi Kühn as chairperson of its U.S. 250 Council. In 2026, the United States will commemorate its semiquincentennial: 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. To mark the occasion, the Smithsonian is planning a robust, engaging slate of activities that will take place across the country, and the Center will produce the institution's cornerstone public programming. In Washington, D.C., and beyond, this work will bring together people from all backgrounds to reflect on our nation's journey, contemplate its future, and celebrate its many achievements.



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Dr Clifford Murphy, dir Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage

A member of the Center's advisory council since 2023, Kühn will work to expand the Center's reach and resources while advancing Smithsonian efforts to mark this important occasion. As CEO and founder of Roots of Peace, an organization that transforms war-torn lands into vineyards and orchards, she brings decades of experience in humanitarian work to the role of U.S. 250 Council chairperson. She will champion the Center's endeavors to increase civic participation, intercultural understanding, and cross-generational connection through culture, art, and science. A visionary leader, Kühn will use her voice to advocate for a just future that recognizes and honors the

diverse contributions of all who call the United States home.

“As council chair, I’m committed to fostering respect, understanding, and belonging during this historic moment,” Kühn said. “In 1976, I graduated from San Rafael High School in California with a vision to make a difference as an American woman. If I were able to speak to my eighteen-year-old self and know that eventually I would play a role in the Smithsonian’s 250th celebration, I would be astounded. I am humbled by the opportunity to serve my country in this capacity. I look forward to adding my story to so many others as we look, with hope, to the future.”

Kühn’s enthusiasm for the role is matched by her impressive qualifications. In 1997, she launched a humanitarian nonprofit that restores farmland, food security, livelihoods, and resilience in post-conflict regions. Roots of Peace has served over one million farmers and their families across Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, Guatemala, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, and Vietnam. A graduate of the University of California—Berkeley and former CNN reporter, Kühn is the first American woman to receive India’s Mahatma Gandhi Global Family Seva Medal. She is also the 2023 World Food Prize Laureate, recipient of the Mother Teresa Award for Social Justice, and a Nobel Peace Prize nominee.

“Heidi offers the kind of catalytic leadership needed to support meaningful collaborative programming with communities across the nation’s states, regions, tribes, and territories,” said Dr. Clifford Murphy, director of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. “Her dedication to promoting peace and strengthening community wellbeing aligns perfectly both with the mission of the Center and the values of the Smithsonian. Suffice to say that I’m thrilled to work alongside her.”

A highlight of the institution’s 2026 celebrations will be an extended Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The event will reflect the nation’s cultural landscape, challenge assumptions, and illuminate the American promise. Representing every state in the union along with selected territories, activities will highlight a wide range of communities, cultural practices and occupations, and perspectives. Information about the 2026 Festival will be shared on our website and social media channels as plans unfold.

Adriana Aristizabal
iVoice Communications
+1 917-833-0103
adriana@ivoice.agency

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