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Kansas City Ballet Announces Retirement of Executive Director Jeffrey J. Bentley

Effective End of 2022 – 2023 Season

KANSAS CITY, MO (May 23, 2022) — CiCi Rojas, president of the Kansas City Ballet Board of Directors, announced today that Jeffrey J. Bentley, the Company’s executive director since 1998, will be retiring effective June 30, 2023. According to Ms. Rojas, Kansas City Ballet has formed a committee to conduct a national search for a new executive director.

“Under Jeff’s leadership, including managing the effort to build a permanent home that is the Todd Bolender Center, he has also built a strong leadership team and will leave a strong, financially healthy, and vibrant organization as his legacy for future generations,” Rojas said.

Reflecting on this announcement, Mr. Bentley shared: “For me to have been given the opportunity to be part of the leadership of this company for the past quarter century is a gift too sublime to describe. Dance has been a part of my life for nearly as long as I have been alive. To be able to have influenced the growth and maturation of this truly outstanding cultural treasure has been an adventure for which I will be forever grateful.”

Mr. Bentley joined Kansas City Ballet as its Executive Director in August 1998. During his tenure the company experienced dramatic growth in resources, national reputation, fiscal security and community awareness.

Chairman of the Ballet's Board of Directors Julia Irene Kauffman shared: "The Board of Directors and I would like to thank Jeff for his tremendous leadership and exceptional contributions to the arts in Kansas City. Under Jeff's leadership, Kansas City Ballet and Ballet School have transformed into premier institutions that are respected across the nation. His accomplishments have touched the lives of many and truly made a difference in the cultural vibrancy of Kansas City."

Kansas City Ballet Artistic Director Devon Carney had this to say: "Jeff Bentley has displayed such composure under what seemed like insurmountable challenges, especially in recent years. Throughout his extensive tenure, he has passionately led the way forward to a brighter future not only locally but also quite prominently amongst his peers and colleagues nationally. We have all been very fortunate to have had the privilege to work with him. He will be missed."

Career Highlights and Accomplishments

The company's operating budget grew from \$1.2 million in 1998 to \$10 million today. Having no accumulated debt and a substantial endowment, it is one of the more financially stable ballet companies in the country.

In his first year, Mr. Bentley committed the company to relocating from the Westport Allen Center, which he viewed as incompatible with the needs of a company with a growth agenda. He oversaw two temporary relocations with the third being the Ballet's award-winning permanent home, the Todd Bolender Center for Dance & Creativity which opened in 2011. Mr. Bentley spearheaded the site selection, renovation, design and \$35 million capital campaign to make the Bolender Center a reality. It is generally considered to be one of the finest centers for dance in America.

With the opening of the world class Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, Mr. Bentley was intimately involved with the establishment of the Ballet as a resident company at the Center, securing guaranteed weeks of use which expanded the Ballet's ability to produce larger scale, full length ballets and extend its performance season allowing artists to have more opportunity to develop their roles. Also, it made it possible for the Ballet to utilize live music for every performance as opposed to previous years when the Kansas City Symphony was utilized for only two out of three productions. Mr. Bentley states that "without the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts and our ability to secure sufficient weeks of use, productions such as Devon Carney's spectacularly successful *Swan Lake* or Septime Webre's *The Wizard of Oz* would never have seen the light of day in Kansas City."

He had worked closely with Artistic Director William Whitener and was instrumental in the Ballet's Search Committee identifying Devon Carney as its Artistic Director in 2013.

Mr. Bentley spearheaded the capital campaign to build a brand new \$2 million production of Mr. Carney's *The Nutcracker* which premiered in 2015 and has since then generated over \$13,000,000 in ticket revenue. He further led a three company consortia (Colorado Ballet & Royal Winnipeg Ballet) to develop the enormously successful *The Wizard of Oz*, thereby utilizing a template by which new, large scale productions could be created at a fraction of the cost while still generating 100% revenue for the company's benefit. This is an especially useful approach for mid-size companies across the nation.

Mr. Bentley negotiated the Company's first ever Union contract for its dancers (American Guild of Musical Artists - AGMA) and over the past decade has maintained a productive and trusting association with the labor union and has been candid about the positive benefits to management of such a relationship.

In 2017, Mr. Bentley successfully lobbied DanceUSA, the national service organization for professional dance, to host its national conference in Kansas City for the first time, thereby bringing the leadership of the entire field to Kansas City to see firsthand the cultural depth and excellence that was embedded in this community.

Most recently, Mr. Bentley's leadership during the pandemic provided a pivotal opportunity for KCB to identify and address the community's need for arts experiences during a time when live performance was not available. In order to insure Devon Carney's *New Moves: The Broadcast Series* was able to become a reality, Mr. Bentley called upon a couple of the Ballet's most reliable supporters with whom he had built personal relationships, to fund the \$100,000 project. "That money had to be raised literally overnight in order for Devon to get started on this brilliant concept he had devised," Mr. Bentley said. "I called upon donors who had traditionally been quite generous yet understated in their giving but with whom I had built a friendship. Their response was positive, immediate and generous."

A priority project currently on Mr. Bentley's radar is the complete renovation of the Kansas City Ballet School's South Campus facility. While the south campus has been operating for over 15 years, it had not undergone any upgrades that were in keeping with the growth of the school. When its lease came up for renewal, Mr. Bentley initiated a discussion with the new property owner about relocating the site to another area of the same facility with the goal of tripling its space and doubling its studios from two to four. The project is a \$1.8 million upgrade and is scheduled to open in January 2023. The fundraising is at the halfway mark.

"I have known and worked closely with Jeff for 25 years, ever since I participated in his recruitment and hiring as Kansas City Ballet's Executive Director," former Ballet Board President Tony Feiock said. "Jeff's greatest contribution to KCB has been his clear strategic vision for KCB regardless of the many and varied distractions that present themselves. KCB would not be what it is today, without Jeffrey Bentley's many contributions."

About Jeffrey Bentley

Jeffrey J. Bentley, Executive Director of Kansas City Ballet has been involved in dance and theater for over 40 years as a performer, administrator, festival director, dance presenter, teacher, and consultant. Mr. Bentley began his professional ballet training as a scholarship student with the American Ballet Center, at that time the official school of the Joffrey Ballet in New York City. He later trained at the School of American Ballet. In 1967 he enlisted in the US Army where he served as a military intelligence officer in the Republic of Vietnam.

Following his military service, he graduated from the University of Washington in Seattle and was selected to participate in the Arts Administration Fellowship Program funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. After a one-year intensive internship with the Washington State Arts Commission, he became administrative director for the Tony-award winning Seattle Repertory Theater. He then served as executive director for North Light Theater in Evanston, Illinois, and as general manager for the Dance Center of Columbia College in Chicago. He returned to the Pacific Northwest in 1985 to become the executive director of the Eugene Ballet Company in Oregon.

In 1987, he assumed the position of director of the DanceAspen Festival and School in Aspen, Colorado. During his seven-year tenure, the festival grew from a three-week residency dedicated to a single ballet company to an eight-week festival featuring an eclectic array of companies and artists from around the world. In 1993, Mr. Bentley became executive director of Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet, that country's oldest and highly respected ballet company. He was appointed executive director of Kansas City Ballet in 1998.

Mr. Bentley has served as a dance panelist and site visitor for the National Endowment for the Arts as well as the Illinois Arts Council, the Colorado Arts Commission, and the Missouri Arts Council where he also twice served as a committee member to select the recipients of the annual Governor's Arts Award. In the spring of 2018, Mr. Bentley was honored by as Nonprofit Professional of the Year. In 2022, Mr. Bentley was awarded the Missouri Arts Council Missouri Arts Award for Leadership in the Arts. Missouri Arts Awards celebrate people, organizations, and communities that have made profound and lasting contributions to the cultural and artistic climate of the state.

Media

Visit kcballet.org or kauffmancenter.org for a downloadable media kit about Kansas City Ballet and the Kauffman Center. Find high-resolution photos at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/67555847@N06/sets>,

About Kansas City Ballet

MISSION: To Inspire and Engage Through the Beauty, Power & Passion of Dance

VISION: Outstanding Dance Experiences Accessible to All

Founded in 1957, Kansas City Ballet is a professional ballet company led by Artistic Director Devon Carney and Executive Director Jeffrey J. Bentley. Kansas City Ballet is an indispensable community asset through exceptional performances, excellence in dance training and quality community education programs for all ages. Kansas City Ballet is home to Kansas City Ballet School which, with an enrollment of more than 2,000 children and adults, offers professional training for the career-minded student as well as for those simply seeking a healthy lifestyle.

Through the professional company, second company (KCB II & Trainees), and community engagement and education programs, Kansas City Ballet seeks to nurture and develop artists, audiences, and students in the values inherent in the creativity, diversity, and joy of dance. The company's home, the Todd Bolender Center for Dance & Creativity, in conjunction with our Resident Company status at the world-class Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, positions Kansas City as a destination for dance. Visit www.kcballet.org/kansas-city-ballet-press-releases/ for more info.

Kansas City Ballet's website is mobile and ticket-purchase friendly. Receive daily updates by joining the KCB Fan Page, www.facebook.com/kcballet, and following @kcballet on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/kcballet>. Follow our blog at www.kcballet.org/blog. Watch videos at www.youtube.com/kansascityballet, and view photos at <https://www.instagram.com/kcballet/>.

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