

Willamette Heritage Center executive director resigns

Tom Mayhall Rastrelli, Statesman Journal 5:10 p.m. PDT July 31, 2014

After serving as executive director of the Willamette Heritage Center for 11 months, Sam Wegner has resigned.

Before he began work at the center on Sept. 3, 2013, Wegner served as executive director of the North Carolina Transportation Museum. He did not return messages, but the Statesman Journal acquired an email that he sent to his professional colleagues dated July 29th.

"For a variety of reasons, I am leaving WHC. My last day on the job will be Thursday, July 31st," Wegner said in the email.

"Sometime people just want to move on to a bigger challenge," the center's board president Ted Stang said. "He did a lot of good things. He brought financial stability to the organization. He had some very fine attributes that were beneficial to our overall performance. We're appreciative of that. He helped us run like a nonprofit business. We wish him the very best."

"I think he felt it wasn't as good a fit and that he'd done what he felt he could to for the organization within his talent," Janet Taylor, board vice president, said.

"It's not entirely unusual for someone to leave an organization after a year's time. Rather than continuing past the time that he thought would be valuable to himself and the organization, he chose another path," Ross Stout, past president of the board, said.

Stang will serve as unpaid interim executive director until the vacancy is filled.

"I will help the staff continue to do their good work and maintain the stability of the organization," Stang said. "The staff needs to have continued direction of their job responsibilities, and that's something I can do."

The board's executive committee will convene Aug. 6 to begin searching for a new executive director. Fundraising for the center's planned \$6 million visitor and exhibition center expansion will continue.

"It's not on hold at this point — that will be a board decision — but I don't see any reason why it wouldn't continue," Taylor said.

One staff member has changed her plans in response to Wegner's exit. Development Director Amy Vandegrift, who was scheduled to retire Aug. 31, will delay retirement indefinitely to assist the staff through the transition.

"It's hard to lose two people out of a very small staff so quickly," Vandegrift said. "I love this place. I really do. When Ted asked me (to stay on), I said, 'Sure, I can do that.' "

"Amy has been terrific to work with," board member Leslie Coleman Zeigen said. "That's a quality person in every respect and I'm delighted that she's going to delay retiring."

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