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**Ballet Memphis to Bid Farewell to President & CEO Gretchen Wollert McLennon**

*National Search Underway to Find Successor by Next Season*

**January 8, 2025 (Memphis, Tenn.)** — After five seasons of dynamic leadership, Ballet Memphis announces that President & CEO Gretchen Wollert McLennon will step down at the end of the current season. A national search, led by the Nashville-based executive search firm ThinkingAhead, is already underway to find the next visionary leader to guide Ballet Memphis into its milestone 40th season and beyond.

McLennon, only the second leader in the organization's history, took the reins following the retirement of Founding Artistic Director Dorothy Gunther Pugh. A former student of Ballet Memphis herself, McLennon steered Ballet Memphis through unprecedented challenges, including the global COVID-19 pandemic, and led with a steadfast commitment to the company's mission to reveal and celebrate the human experience through dance.

"Ballet Memphis holds a special place in my heart," McLennon shared. "I first became involved with this organization as a student when it was still Memphis Youth Concert Ballet. To see its transformation into a nationally recognized company and school while strengthening our commitment as Memphis' residential professional ballet company has been awe inspiring. It has been an honor and joy to serve as President & CEO during this pivotal time, and I am proud of what we've accomplished together. From growing our community partnerships to realigning our work around a shared purpose, I am confident Ballet Memphis is poised for even greater milestones and success in the years to come."

Under McLennon's leadership, Ballet Memphis experienced significant growth and achievement across all its programming, including:

- Leading year-over-year growth in mainstage ticket sales and new audience cultivation;
- Garnering new critical grant support from civic partners like the Memphis City Council and Shelby County Commission;
- Shepherding the creation of new professional company productions, including *Dracula* and the company's highly regarded new *Nutcracker*;

- Increasing school enrollment and surpassing growth projections in pilates +wellness and adult dance participation;
- Realigning the organization's programmatic model to drive deeper stakeholder engagement and increase strategic impact.

Shelley Shanaman, Chair of the Ballet Memphis Board of Directors, praised McLennon's contributions: "Gretchen stepped into this role with grace and determination during an incredibly challenging time. Her leadership has strengthened the foundation of Ballet Memphis and set the stage for the next chapter of growth and innovation. We are deeply grateful for her service and vision."

As Ballet Memphis prepares to announce its 39<sup>th</sup> season, the board of directors and staff are focused on finding a new leader to carry the organization into its 40th year and beyond.

For more information and updates, visit [balletmemphis.org](http://balletmemphis.org).

### **About Ballet Memphis**

Ballet Memphis is Memphis' resident professional ballet company. It was founded to create a ballet company reflective of the region and known for its global artistic excellence. Now in its 38<sup>th</sup> season, Ballet Memphis cultivates community, develops artists, and creates a creative and welcoming space where everyone can learn about and experience the joy of movement. In addition to the professional company, the Ballet Memphis family of programming includes the Ballet Memphis School, which is developing the next generation of dancers, and the Pilates + Wellness program, enhancing health and wellness of Memphis and the Mid-South. For more information, visit: [balletmemphis.org](http://balletmemphis.org)

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