



LEGACY IN MOTION

Legacy isn’t static. It moves — through people, through places and through the choices a community makes to protect what it loves.

Every tradition that lasts must also evolve. Festival of Trees has done both — carried forward by a network of partners whose belief in culture extends far beyond a single season.

Together, The Cultural Trust’s six Legacy Partners — Quad City Arts, Common Chord, Quad City Botanical Center, Putnam Museum & Science Center, Figge Art Museum and the Quad City Symphony Orchestra — form the living architecture of this region’s creative identity.

Each amplifies a distinct voice in the cultural chorus: art, music, science, nature, performance and connection.

And together, they prove that culture isn’t a program — it’s a system. An essential one for a prosperous community. That system works because of leadership — real people who show up, stay late, set ego aside and keep collaboration at the center.

It’s a privilege to all who call them peers:



The Cultural Trust Legacy Partner EDs

Melissa Mohr, executive director, Figge Art Museum — a long-term collaborator inviting the entire ecosystem to the same table, asking how the region can create destination-worthy exhibitions. If you think you’ve seen amazing things from her already, just wait for Raven, an upcoming Figge Art Museum exhibit (and the theme of next year’s gala).

Ryan Wille, executive director, Quad City Botanical Center — the quiet architect of trust across this ecosystem. He’s the one who brought forward the Culture Bright concept and keeps proving how a lean team can transform 250,000 lights into connection between people and plants — even in the most dormant season of the year.

Tyson Danner, executive director, Common Chord — the glue in this village. “How can I help?” usually leaves his mouth first. He’s balancing preservation of Common Chord’s historic home with the reinvention of music education for a new generation. There’s no one better for the task.

Brian Baxter, executive director, Quad City Symphony Orchestra — steadfast and sophisticated. Under his leadership Iowa’s oldest symphony continues to reign right here in the Quad Cities.

Cindy Diehl Yang, president and CEO, Putnam Museum & Science Center — no longer “new,” she arrived ready to listen, collaborate and grow. Her eagerness to connect has made the Putnam a true partner in progress.

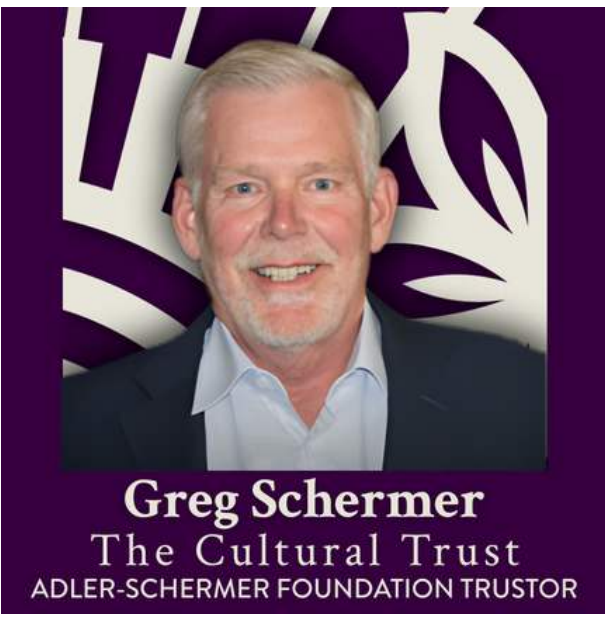
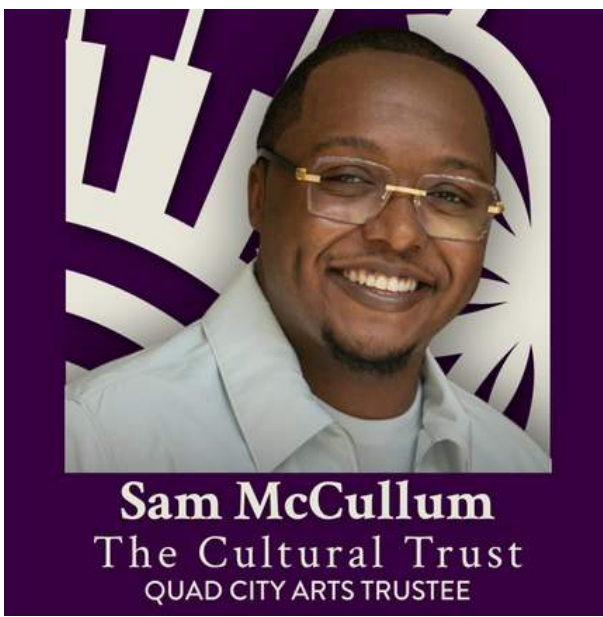
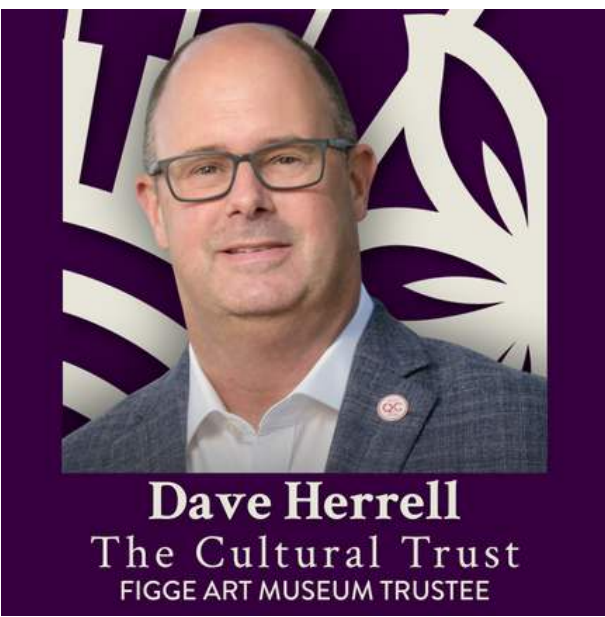
Brian Allen, executive director, Quad City Arts — the connective thread that binds the festival to its roots. He’s carrying forward a 40-year legacy while modernizing the systems that keep artists visible and valued. His calm steadiness and willingness to champion collaboration are a reminder that art isn’t just the product of culture — it’s the heartbeat.

These six leaders embody what partnership looks like when it’s built on respect and shared purpose.

Behind them stand the trustees and trustors of The Cultural Trust — the stewards who keep it balanced. They invest not for applause, but for endurance. Their decisions, often quiet and unseen, make the bright moments possible: the music cues that hit on time, the lights that rise on cue, the artists who are paid fairly, the students who glimpse what’s possible.



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The Cultural Trust Board Members

Dana Waterman, founding trustor — an anchor of wisdom and generosity, always on standby for any call related to the cause. This work stands taller because of his belief in it.

Hilary Stubben, John Deere Foundation trustor— her insight into nonprofit excellence allows The Cultural Trust to lead the pack in governance and accountability.

Greg Schermer, Adler-Schermer Foundation trustor — an innovator and visionary whose leadership is helping the cultural ecosystem prepare for a best-in-class 2026.

Linda Bowers, board chair — tireless in every sense. Generous with her time, talent and treasure, Bowers exemplifies what it means to be a Culture Champion. The Cultural Trust’s progress reflects her leadership.

Scott Van Vooren, past chair and QCSO representative trustee — a process-minded leader whose guidance shaped the trust’s data-driven application system used today.

Melissa Pepper, vice chair and marketing chair — a rising leader strengthening how the trust tells its story while lifting the entire ecosystem with it. Her collaborative mindset defines modern cultural leadership.

Sam McCullum, Quad City Arts representative trustee — the bridge-builder behind this “40 Days” partnership. His leadership embodies the collaboration that defines this milestone year.

Dave Herrell, Figge representative trustee — a tourism visionary whose expertise helps transform cultural assets into regional destinations.

Frank Klipsch, Putnam representative trustee — a mentor and early builder of the trust, carrying forward the legacy of Dick Bittner and the vision that started it all.

Jack Cullen, Common Chord representative trustee — a connector whose energy and communication expertise strengthen every collaboration he touches.

Mike Thoms, independent trustee — former Rock Island mayor and community advocate, he and his wife, Sara, have long modeled what civic and cultural investment looks like in action.

Tracy Pugh, independent trustee — negotiator by trade, bridge-builder by nature. He helps keep the trust’s mantra true: Art and culture are for all.

Together, these trustees represent every corner of our cultural ecosystem — proof that when leadership aligns, legacy strengthens.

What makes this board especially meaningful is its design. From the start, The Cultural Trust’s structure was built in partnership with its six Legacy Partners, each guaranteed a seat at the table.

This ensures that decision-making stays rooted in the real needs of the organizations the trust serves — and that every move forward reflects a shared commitment to cultural excellence.

As Festival of Trees celebrates 40 years, this alignment — between artistry, governance and generosity — has never mattered more.

The Cultural Trust was built to make sure that alignment lasts.

Because legacy isn’t something you inherit. It’s something you build — and keep building — in motion.

