



## YERKES OBSERVATORY

### **Yerkes Observatory Appoints New Executive Director**

*Yerkes Future Foundation Recruits Innovative Cultural Leader to Spearhead Growth, Fundraising & Expansion*

WILLIAMS BAY, Wis.—Yerkes Observatory, the birthplace of modern astrophysics and home of the world’s largest refracting telescope, today announced the appointment of its new executive director. **Dennis Kois**, an arts and sciences executive with more than two decades of experience transforming cultural organizations, will assume the position effective March 8, 2021. Mr. Kois’ appointment marks a milestone in realizing the Observatory’s ambitious expansion plan, which began when the Yerkes Future Foundation (YFF) secured ownership of the Observatory from the University of Chicago in 2020.

A Wisconsin native, Mr. Kois has a track record of transformational leadership at premier cultural institutions across the United States, including:

- design and digital media leadership positions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C.;
- president and CEO of the Milwaukee Public Museum, Wisconsin’s largest museum and one of the oldest natural history and science institutions in the nation;
- executive director of the prestigious deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Boston;
- and most recently, executive director of the renowned Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo, New York.

*“I’m elated and humbled to accept this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to chart a new course for Yerkes Observatory. Our community has the chance to build on the observatory’s 124-year legacy of groundbreaking scientific research, discoveries, and education—and to share one of the Midwest’s best-kept secrets with new generations of explorers across the globe,”* said Mr. Kois. *“I believe the dynamic YFF board and devoted community of supporters around Geneva Lake can secure Yerkes’ position as a platform for ongoing scientific research—even as we find new ways of growing public understanding of astronomy and build scientific literacy. If we want new generations of diverse scientists ready to address the big challenges of the future, enchanting beacons like Yerkes must thrive to attract and inspire them.”*

In a unanimous vote, the Yerkes Future Foundation Board of Directors appointed Mr. Kois to serve as the Observatory’s new executive director following an extensive national search led by Koya Leadership Partners, a national leader in executive placement for non-profit institutions. The appointment is YFF’s first significant step to advance a global campaign dedicated to re-envisioning, preserving, and expanding the Observatory. YFF, led by a board comprised of local volunteers, assumed ownership for the Observatory in May, 2020.

Dianna Colman, board president of YFF, said, “We are deeply committed to preserving the rich scientific history of Yerkes Observatory and unlocking its potential to contribute to research and education on a global scale. After conducting a comprehensive executive search process, we have absolutely found the right leader to carry this meaningful mission forward. Dennis’ years of success in elevating cultural and scientific institutions onto the national stage, along with his local roots and profound respect for the history of the Observatory will benefit our community and build support statewide, nationally and internationally for Yerkes’ future.”

Mr. Kois, a Wisconsin native, is an honors graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) with a bachelor’s degree in museum design. He earned a master’s degree in museum studies from New



York University and attended the prestigious Getty Leadership Institute for non-profit leaders, as well as executive education programs in data analytics at Harvard University. In 2016, Mr. Kois was honored as UWM’s “Alumni of the Year,” and in 2018, he was elected vice-chairman of the Association of Science Museum Directors, an organization comprised of the leaders of the largest public science institutions in North America. Mr. Kois and his fiancée, Kelly Gauthier, a project management leader for the University of Wisconsin system, have five children between them ranging in age from 3 to 15 years.

### **About Yerkes Observatory**

Yerkes Observatory is known globally as the birthplace of modern astrophysics and remains the home to the world’s largest refracting telescope. Since 1897, the Observatory has welcomed world-renowned astronomers, astronauts, Nobel prize winners, scientists, and educators. Located on Geneva Lake in Williams Bay, Wisconsin, the Observatory houses multiple telescopes still actively used for research in addition to the “Great Refractor,” a glass-plate library, and several laboratories surrounded by 50 acres of grounds designed by the legendary firm Olmsted and Olmsted. In 2020, the Yerkes Future Foundation assumed long-term stewardship for preserving and expanding the Observatory. The community-based Foundation is currently leading a campaign to restore the Observatory and maximize its potential to contribute to global research and educational initiatives.

### **About the Scientific Legacy of Yerkes**

Yerkes Observatory has a 124-year history of leading science, research, and astrophysics engineering initiatives that have transcended generations and been cited in the international scientific literature more than 10,000 times. Founded by renowned astronomer George Ellery Hale in 1892, the Observatory’s laboratories produced the High-resolution Airborne Wideband Camera (HAWC) for NASA in 2012. Renowned astronomers and scientists who have walked the observatory’s halls include Edwin Hubble, Otto Struve, Gerard Kuiper, Carl Sagan, NASA’s first Chief of Astronomy Nancy Grace Roman, and Nobel prize-winners Albert Einstein and Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar.

## Community & Industry Leader Quotes about Dennis Kois

"As a participant in the search process, which saw applicants from around the world, I'm pleased we've selected Dennis. Yerkes needs a commonsense leader who can multitask, an intuitive decision maker, and someone with "street moxie." Dennis brings those qualities to the table and more, and I'm confident he's the right person to lead Yerkes into the future."

- *Jim Gee, former Operations Director, Yerkes Observatory and former Director of Astrophysics Research Engineering, University of Chicago*

"Dennis is a dynamic and thoughtful leader who brought an extraordinary vision to the Milwaukee Public Museum that is still moving the museum forward to this day. I'm so pleased to see him return to the community... New York's loss is truly Wisconsin's gain"

- *Mary Read, community philanthropist and Milwaukee Public Museum major donor*

"Dennis has accomplished so much for the Burchfield—from visionary creative projects that have our community atwitter, to leading us safely through the pandemic with forethought and care for the staff and community. He's set a new bar for excellence for the Burchfield and has been a kind and wonderful leader."

- *Shelley Drake, Board Chair, Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo NY, and Western New York Regional President, M&T Bank*

"As a leader Dennis has been at the forefront in engaging local communities with dynamic art and science programming. His return is a win for the rich cultural community in Wisconsin."

- *Kaywin Feldman, Executive Director, The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC*

"When Dennis came to MPM we wondered if an art museum guy would "get" a science-based natural history museum. He not only "got it," but science research thrived under his direction."

- *Christine Rundblad, Trustee, Milwaukee Public Museum*

"Dennis is a warm and wonderful leader and fundraiser who took MPM to new heights. I'm one of many pleased to see him back in Wisconsin."

- *Patricia Yunk, Trustee, Milwaukee Public Museum*

Yerkes is extremely fortunate to have Dennis step in as the new Executive Director. His deep nonprofit leadership experience and distinct ability to balance innovation with pragmatism--allowing him to create a vision that is both exciting and attainable--is exciting to have back in Wisconsin"

- *Deanna Tillisch, retired Executive Director, United Performing Arts Fund, Milwaukee*