



News Release

ASC President Robert E. Bush, Jr. Retires June 30, 2019

Bush's leadership focused on stabilizing the arts and cultural sector and responding to community needs

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (September 5, 2018) – Robert E. Bush, Jr., president of the Arts & Science Council (ASC) that serves as the chief advocate, resource hub and steward for the arts and cultural community in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region, announced his plan to retire June 30, 2019. Bush, a nationally known and highly regarded leader in the arts, served as interim president in 2013 and became president in 2014. He joined ASC in 2000 and served as ASC senior vice president and chief innovation officer.

“It has been a high point in my career to lead ASC,” said Bush. “I am proud of what I’ve been able to accomplish. But, I did not accomplish any of this alone but through the partnerships I’ve had with ASC’s board, staff, cultural organizations, artists and the broader community. There is still much work to do before I begin a new adventure.”

Bush became president as ASC’s evolution intensified to advocate for the arts and cultural community, serve as a resource hub for strategy and capacity building and focus on continued support for major arts and cultural institutions. A significant change during his tenure was ASC amending its grant-making policy in 2015 to expand unrestricted operating support to emerging grassroots organizations that more fully reflect the region’s diversity and provide them with resources to innovate and strengthen their operations. The shift in ASC’s grant-making strategy connected to issues studied by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force and other regional efforts to build social capital and broaden access to enrichment experiences for everyone.

Paula Vincent, ASC board chair, and Valecia McDowell, chair-elect, will lead a national search for a new president and co-chair a search committee comprised of business, civic and cultural leaders.

“I, along with current and past ASC board members, deeply appreciate Robert’s tireless leadership of ASC over the past 5 years,” said Vincent. “His strategic vision, passion and leadership has guided ASC to ensure that the arts and cultural community is accessible, vibrant and thriving. From expanding capacity building opportunities for creative individuals and promoting inclusion and cultural equity to responding to the needs of the community and helping stabilize the operations of small and large organizations, the arts and cultural community has benefitted greatly thanks to his work.”

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Bush, a native of Hickory, N.C., has 40 years of experience in arts administration and began working in Charlotte's arts and cultural sector in 1984 as the first director of development for The Mint Museum of Art. His work as project coordinator for the museum's "Ramesses the Great" exhibition, the largest ever art event in the state of N.C., earned Bush the Outstanding Tourism award from the Charlotte Convention and Visitors Bureau in 1989. He was the architect of many critical efforts to grow and support Charlotte-Mecklenburg's arts and cultural community, including gaining approval of the public art ordinances in 2002 and 2003, respectively, for Mecklenburg County and the city of Charlotte, and the 25-year Cultural Facilities Master Plan (the first phase of which included Levine Center for the Arts and Discovery Place renovations and new exhibit platform). He also led the creation of ASC's Cultural Leadership Training program that has prepared more than 400 cultural advocates over the past 14 years that serve on the boards of local arts and cultural organizations. He also led the development of the Cultural Action Plans for the six suburban communities in Mecklenburg County that addressed their cultural needs. For arts and cultural education, he led the merger of ArtsTeach, a nonprofit arts education organization, into ASC and created a full support system for programming that aligns with the curriculum for public, private and charter schools across the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and established Studio 345, an out-of-school time program that uses the arts to encourage high school students in Mecklenburg County to stay in school, graduate and pursue opportunities beyond high school. More than 600 students have graduated from high school since program's inception in 2008.

"Robert has been a passionate and inspiring leader while expanding awareness and participation in our arts and culture community," said Marcus D. Jones, Charlotte city manager. "It has been an absolute pleasure working with Robert for the past two years and witnessing his enthusiasm for Charlotte and our marvelous creative community."

Under his leadership, Bush guided ASC to implement new initiatives to serve residents and the cultural community in new ways, including:

- Culture Blocks, funded by Mecklenburg County, which increases access to cultural programming in parts of the county where residents have not traditionally engaged in or with the larger cultural community by utilizing local libraries, parks and recreation centers;
- Community Supported Art program, which commissions local artists to create works sold as "shares" to patrons and helps build relationships between the two;
- Catalyst for Cultural Equity, which supports individual leaders and organizations by building awareness, tools, resources and skills required for the sector to become more equitable in its operation and engagement;
- Creative Renewal Fellowships, which provides \$10,000 awards to artists for research, instruction, conferences, apprenticeships, travel or other experiences that help them explore their creative journey to renew their creativity;
- Culture Feast, which brings nearly 700 members of the community together to build bridges across difference through arts and cultural experiences and sharing a community table dinner; and
- Connect with Culture Days, which serves more than 11,000 residents and visitors with free access to arts and cultural experiences.

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“The vibrant advancement of the Arts & Science Council’s work under Robert’s stewardship continues to have a significant and positive effect on the overall economic vitality of our region,” said Ronnie Bryant, president and CEO of Charlotte Regional Partnership. “As we’ve long known at the Partnership, investing in the arts and cultural community helps attract business and retain top talent in a competitive job market. We are incredibly grateful for all Robert has done while at the helm of the ASC to improve the quality of life across Charlotte USA and make our community a beacon of artistic inspiration for residents and visitors from around the world.”

Prior to joining ASC, Bush served as president and CEO of the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County and Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne in Fort Wayne, Indiana, as Director of Development with The Mint Museum of Art and as Executive Director of the Catawba County Council for the Arts.

He received the Governor’s Award for meritorious service to the People of North Carolina from Governor James B. Hunt in 1984, the Legacy Award from the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture in 2011 and Americans for the Arts’ Selena Roberts Ottum award in 2014 that recognizes an individual working in arts management who has made a meaningful contribution to his or her local community and who exemplifies extraordinary leadership qualities.

“Robert has been a passionate advocate for the central role the arts play in community life throughout his career,” said Wayne Martin, executive director of the North Carolina Arts Council. “His leadership has made a tremendous impact on the state’s arts industry and the North Carolina Arts Council staff and board wish him all the best in his retirement.”

Bush earned a B.S. and M.A. in Education Administration and Supervision with a concentration in Community Education from Appalachian State University and is a graduate of Managing the Arts, a professional management seminar of the School of Business, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has also served on the faculty of the Master of Arts in Arts Administration program at Goucher College in Baltimore, Md. He currently serves on the faculty of the Master of Public Administration program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

For a headshot of Robert Bush, [click here](#).

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ASC’s mission is to ensure access to an excellent, relevant and sustainable cultural community for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Region.

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