



## Kim Bednarek Named Executive Director of Okefenokee Swamp Park

(Waycross, Georgia) The Okefenokee Swamp Park (OSP) Board of Trustees has named Kim Bednarek as the organization's first, full-time Executive Director in over 50 years. The announcement was made this week by Dr. William Clark, III Chair of the Board. The Chason Group was retained by the OSP to lead the executive search.

Bednarek currently serves as the Head of School for The Discovery School in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, a nationally recognized Montessori – International Baccalaureate academic program. During her 13-year tenure, The Discovery School experienced phenomenal growth. Under her leadership, Bednarek's team doubled the campus size and enrollment through land acquisitions and multiple building projects, while initiating key community partnerships with the Rainforest Alliance and White Oak Conservation Center.

Bednarek joins the OSP community during an auspicious time of expansion and revisioning. "Bringing Kim on board to serve as the Executive Director is a key component of our plan," according to Dr. Clark. "Kim has a successful track record of working with organizations to improve their visibility with the philanthropic community and building strong internal teams. This is a very strategic move to secure the future vitality of the Park and surrounding communities."

The OSP is a member of the Okefenokee Partnership, whose mission is to enhance appreciation for the Okefenokee Swamp through education and marketing, increasing visitation at each entrance, and growing the economic impact to South Georgia. This public/private partnership between the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Okefenokee Swamp Park, Stephen C. Foster State Park, and the cities of Folkston, Waycross, and Fargo, Georgia is a unified effort to serve and benefit the counties, cities, businesses and other organizations in the Okefenokee region.

"My family and I have a deep love and appreciation for places where wilderness prevails. I am passionate about the conservation of our natural world and eager to expand my impact on environmental conservation and education to the Okefenokee Swamp Park and National Wildlife Refuge," Bednarek said. "We have paddled and camped in the refuge many times. I have great respect for the natural beauty and ecological importance of the Okefenokee. I look forward to becoming a part of the team that protects this natural wonder for a long-time to come."



*Kim Bednarek*

### **New Contact Information**

Kim Bednarek  
Executive Director  
Okefenokee Swamp Park  
700 Okefenokee Swamp Park Road  
Waycross, GA 31503  
Email Address:  
kim.bednarek@gmail.com  
912.283.0583 (office)  
904.207.8057 (cell)

“Martin Bell, a long-time asset to the park operations, will continue in his role as General Manager to oversee day-to-day operations,” Dr. Clark said. “Kim will complement the existing staff and long-term goals of OSP with her expertise in management, marketing and development. She will also be responsible for planning, coordinating and implementing a strategic master plan for our Board of Trustees.”

The Swamp Park is home to a team of University of Georgia (UGA) scientists aiming to fill in critical knowledge gaps with an in-depth study of American alligators in the Okefenokee Swamp. The park has already employed a nationally recognized nature center architect to design a new museum, focused on the American alligator from dinosaur days to the present. The new master plan will include extensive renovation of all current exhibits and structures, with an emphasis on increasing educational opportunities. This will require significant work in advancing the research and education concepts with presentations to foundations in Atlanta, Jacksonville and beyond.

Other positions Bednarek has held include Director of Marketing for Southlight Publishing, St. Simons Island, GA; Information Specialist & Editor, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL; Sous Chef & Horse Care, Ranch Hand, Portland, ME; Fishing Boat Charter and Set-Net Crew for private fishing companies in Juneau and Kenai, AK; Residential Counselor and Volunteer Coordinator, Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Boston, MA; and Program Instructor, Close- Up Foundation, Washington, D.C.

Bednarek earned her Bachelor of Arts in English, with a Minor in Marine Biology, from the University of New Hampshire and her Master of Business Administration with Honors, Leadership Development from Jacksonville University. Bednarek also holds a Montessori Administrator’s credential.

Bednarek and her husband, Gene, have two sons, Jackson and Clay. She will join the OSP team on July 1.

In addition to Dr. Clark, other members of the OSP Board of Trustees include Dr. Jim Barber, Douglas; Russell Bates, Waycross; Chip Beal, Waycross; Alex Cornelius, Manor; Mark Gibson, Waycross; Dr. Wendy Good, Waycross; Dr. Greg Jacobs, Nahunta; Bobby McCollough, Blackshear; Jeff McCutcheon, Jacksonville, FL; Joe Montgomery, Rome; Peggy Stovall, Blackshear; and Forrest Sweat, Blackshear.

**About the Okefenokee Swamp Park.** Founded in 1946, the Okefenokee Swamp Park is a 501.c.3 non-profit that has welcomed millions of visitors to the Waycross area with a mission to promote ecological tourism and education by providing a convenient point of entry into the Okefenokee—an authentic opportunity for the public to develop an appreciation for the wildlife, culture and natural beauty of the “Land of the Trembling Earth. In July of 2019 alone, visitors from 46 of 50 states—including Alaska and Hawaii—joined international visitors from 12 countries at the OSP in learning more about the Okefenokee.

**About The Chason Group.** Randy Cardoza and Tim Chason of The Chason Group assisted the Board with the executive search. The Chason Group is an executive search firm specializing in economic development, chambers of commerce, tourism, foundations and other non-profit organizations. The firm also led the executive search for Jana Dyke, President of the Waycross-Ware County Development Authority in Waycross, Georgia.