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Franklin Vagnone Named President of Old Salem Following National Search

New President to Begin his Tenure with a "One-night Stand" in the Historic Tavern Museum

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (NOVEMBER 18, 2016) – Following an in-depth national search, Old Salem Museums & Gardens' Board of Trustees voted earlier today to name Franklin Vagnone as the 11th president of the 66-year-old institution, which includes the Historic Town of Salem, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, and the Gardens at Old Salem. Earlier this year, Old Salem announced the retirement of Ragan Folan, who has served as president and Chief Executive Officer since February 1, 2012. Vagnone will officially start full-time on March 1, 2017 but will work with Folan and Old Salem Chief Operating Officer Anthony Slater during a transition period beginning immediately.

"Last spring our board determined that its vision for the next president of Old Salem was to find a thoughtful, innovative leader in the museum field who could collaborate with us in elevating Old Salem to a national stage," Old Salem Museums & Gardens board chair Chris Minter-Dowd said. "We believe Frank is the ideal candidate to push us as we work to make our museums more relevant to 21st-century audiences. You can expect that he will bring creative and unconventional ideas and approaches to our programming and operations."

"One of my favorite stories about Frank speaks to his longtime passion for history," Minter-Dowd added. "He tells the story of being a teen growing up in the public school system in Charlotte and being a 'Tar Heel Junior Historian' who frequently visited Old Salem. Our board members and the search committee loved that Frank's incredible passion for history was sparked in part by his early visits to Old Salem."

An internationally renowned thinker, writer, and consultant in the fields of historic preservation and museums, Vagnone is best known as the co-author of *The Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, a best-selling, influential book on creative approaches to presenting the past. Vagnone also is the founder and president of Twisted Preservation Cultural Consulting in New York City, which he started in 2000.

One of Vagnone's signature projects is a series of events he calls, "[One-night Stand](#)." He spends overnights in historic house museums and heritage sites, using them as they were originally intended, and then writes about how these fragile places can have meaning in current 21st-century lives. His blog posts can be found on his website [Twisted Preservation](#), which is read in more than 85 countries.

As a nod to his creative and immersive leadership style, Vagnone will bring his "One-night Stand" experience to Old Salem. On December 1, 2016, he will stay overnight in the historic Tavern Museum (circa 1784, location of George Washington's overnight visit to Salem in 1791), which is normally only open to visitors during regular museum hours. Soon after his stay in the Tavern Museum, Vagnone will blog about this experience and initial impressions of Old Salem.

"There are so many reasons why this move is right for both Old Salem as well as me. Old Salem has set a clear, new path toward innovation and immersive experiences for heritage sites, and it perfectly aligns with my professional efforts," Vagnone said. "We will be a national model for creative ways that heritage sites can remain central to our

everyday lives. What I really like about Old Salem is that it is not simply a dead historic site, it is an active village. It has a bakery, tavern, cafe, people actually live here, and best of all, our dog Yogi will have new friends to play with.”

In addition to his international Twisted Preservation Cultural Consulting work, Vagnone served as executive director of the Historic House Trust in New York City from 2009–2016, overseeing the operations of 23 house museums. During his tenure, he expanded audiences through innovative program initiatives and dramatically improved the Trust’s finances through successful fundraising events, new grants, and by cultivating support from individuals and corporate sponsors.

He moved to New York from Philadelphia, where he served as executive director of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks from 2006–2009. The Society received numerous awards under Vagnone’s leadership for its educational programs and extensive walking tours. From 1998 to 2006, he was the executive director of Historic Preservation and Operations at the Bryn Athyn Cathedral Complex in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. During his tenure, Vagnone oversaw the conservation and care of religious buildings and an extensive landscape. Through effective programs and marketing, Vagnone built the complex’s audience from 13,000 to 45,000 annual visitors.

Vagnone received a master’s of architecture degree from Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, New York City. He holds a bachelor in arts and sciences in architecture and anthropology from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. A native of Columbus, Ohio, Vagnone spent his teen years in Charlotte and has family there. He will relocate to Winston-Salem in early 2017. In life imitating art as well as living what he advocates for in his “One-night Stand” series, his residence will be in the oldest standing house in Old Salem, The Fourth House (circa 1768), with his partner Johnny Yeagley and dog Yogi.

“The Old Salem Board of Trustees also is deeply grateful for Ragan Folan’s service as president for nearly five years. Under her leadership, Old Salem’s visitor attendance and revenue have been significantly increased, and in 2013 Old Salem retired its long-term debt,” Minter-Dowd said. “We also have enjoyed a wonderful celebration of the 250th anniversary of Salem all year long during 2016. Ragan has helped lay the groundwork for many good things to happen at Old Salem and leaves our beloved landmark in good hands for Frank to take it to the next level.”

The announcement of Vagnone is the culmination of an eight-month national search conducted by a five-member search committee made up of members of the Old Salem Board of Trustees. The search committee was chaired by Ann Johnston of Winston-Salem and included four additional trustees including Betsey Annese of Winston-Salem; Chris Minter-Dowd of Potomac, Maryland; Hayes Wauford of Winston-Salem; and Philip Zea of Deerfield, Massachusetts. Old Salem also retained Marilyn Hoffman and Scott Stevens of Museum Search and Reference, an executive search firm based in Manchester, NH, and Boston, MA, to assist with the national search.

In order to ensure continuity and consistency in leadership, Minter-Dowd said that Folan has agreed to return to Old Salem’s board of trustees. Folan has been actively involved with Old Salem as a member of the board since 2005. She served as chair of Old Salem’s board of trustees from May 2010 until January 2012.

About Old Salem

Old Salem Museums & Gardens is one of America’s most comprehensive and authentic history attractions. Its museums—the Historic Town of Salem, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), and the Gardens at Old Salem—engage visitors in an educational and memorable historical experience about those who lived and worked in the early South. Old Salem Museums & Gardens is located at 600 South Main Street in Winston-Salem. For more information call 336-721-7300 or visit oldsalem.org.

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