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Susan Howarth, WEDU PBS President and CEO, dies at 66 following battle with cancer



Tampa Bay, FL – Susan Howarth, longtime public media leader and **WEDU PBS** President and CEO, died on Wednesday morning following a courageous battle with cancer. She was 66.

Howarth was named WEDU President and CEO in April 2010 and was the fifth president and chief executive officer of WEDU, which will mark its 60th anniversary this October.

Upon joining the organization, Howarth prioritized connecting with the communities throughout the 16 counties that WEDU serves, saying, “It’s very important to me to listen to the people of the community and find what they are interested in and how they would like to see WEDU grow.”

Susan Howarth

Over her 8-year tenure, Howarth led the organization through a period of growth that included an expanded roster of local on-air programming, including original documentaries such as the Emmy® Award winning *Too Close To Home – Human Trafficking in Tampa Bay* and town hall meetings such as *Autism: Breakthrough to Hope*. WEDU also added three new local series including *WEDU Arts Plus*, *WEDU Quest*, and *That’s All I’m Saying with Ernest Hooper*.

While WEDU PBS has offered services throughout West Central Florida since going on-air in 1958, under Howarth’s tenure the station significantly expanded its community outreach efforts offering a robust collection of community film screenings and panel discussion events that have tackled topics ranging from youth homelessness and veterans’ issues to race relations and more. WEDU’s educational outreach efforts were also expanded with the addition of free teacher workshops utilizing Florida PBS Learning Media and PBS resources, kids’ events providing free educational resources to families and educators, and the donation of multimedia PBS resources to local libraries.

Like her many colleagues throughout the public broadcasting community, Howarth was passionate about sharing the story of public broadcasting and its value and commitment to serving communities. This was never more important than in 2011 when funding for public broadcasting stations in Florida was eliminated from the state budget. Howarth was instrumental in collaborating with each of the public television stations and public radio stations in Florida to make a case for the impact that public broadcasting provides the communities they serve in educational resources and lifelong learning. Funding for the Florida stations was restored the following fiscal year.

Howarth ushered WEDU through its most recent addition of two new channels, making WEDU one of the first public broadcasting stations in the nation to have six channels of programming in its coverage area. In October 2017, the expanded

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service included 24/7 programming dedicated to PBS Kids and Create[®] TV. Making use of new technology, WEDU added essentially all of WUSF-TV's programming when the area's secondary PBS station ceased broadcasting in October 2017 and WEDU became the only PBS station serving West Central Florida.

"Susan's talent, experience and leadership skills leveraged programming and technological change to better serve our community. She also strengthened our foundation to meet the funding challenges of public broadcasting. Most notably Susan recently led WEDU through a complex acquisition of WUSF's TV broadcast license which has significantly increased our viewership audience and donor base," said WEDU Board Chair Don DeFosset.

Howarth was a 45-year veteran of public broadcasting. Prior to her time at WEDU, Howarth served as president and chief executive officer of WCET in Cincinnati. During her tenure with WCET, Howarth worked to launch the nation's first public media website to feature on-demand video and the creation of "Common Ground," the area's multi-year effort to address race relations in Greater Cincinnati.

Howarth held executive positions with Arkansas Educational Television Network and AETN Foundation, where she launched several new services and established an endowment for the network. Howarth's public media tenure also included programming responsibilities at WNED/WNEQ-Western New York Public Broadcasting; WUFT-TV in Gainesville, Florida; KOZK-TV in Springfield, Mo. and Connecticut Public Television (CPTV). She served in leadership positions with numerous regional and national public broadcasting organizations including the PBS Board of Directors where she served as Vice Chair for three years.

"Susan had a remarkable set of skills. She was an innovative manager and pioneer when it came to new media," said Geoff Simon, WEDU Board member and member of the executive search committee that hired Howarth as President and CEO of WEDU PBS in 2010. "Her influence in the public broadcasting community and friendship will be missed."

Susan was preceded in death by her parents Josie and George Howarth. She is survived by her siblings Judy of Seymour, CT; John (Chris) of Canton, CT; Richard of Danbury, CT; Ellie Lewis of Southbury, CT; and nephews and cousins. Susan will be fondly remembered by her "Gal Posse," Dawn Bertsche of Cincinnati, OH; Mona Dixon of Conway, AR; Ann Hasselmo of Seabrook, TX; Rita Ray of Charleston, WV; Debbie Ricciardi of Raleigh, NC; and Sue Ellen Stuebing of Ft. Mitchell, KY – friendships that spanned decades and she held near and dear to her heart.

In honoring her wishes and dedication to public broadcasting, memorial donations in memory of Susan can be made to WEDU PBS at 1300 N Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33607 or to your local public broadcasting station.

The Executive Committee of WEDU's Board of Directors has named Jack Conely as the Interim President and CEO. With more than two decades at WEDU, Conely has served as Vice President of Content since 2008 and has worked in close partnership with every facet of WEDU – from engineering and production to community partnerships, development and finance.

ABOUT WEDU PBS

WEDU is West Central Florida's PBS station reaching 16 counties through media platforms including on-air programming and online experiences that broaden horizons, transport and transform and open gateways to new ideas and new worlds. Financially supported by the community, the organization offers a wealth of award-winning inspirational, educational and enlightening content over a variety of multi-media platforms including: television programming, station website, www.wedu.org and various social media platforms, monthly member magazine *Premiere*, educational outreach activities and a myriad of special events. WEDU's focus on the local community has resulted in the station being regarded as a beacon of trust for men, women and children of every walk of life no matter their age, ethnicity or socio-economic status. WEDU is a treasured community resource; a window to the world for the homebound and a vital educational source for the youngest members of society. WEDU prides itself on its position in the Tampa Bay community as a leader, partner, informed citizen and a member of PBS, the most trusted institution in America (Marketing & Research Resources, Inc. M&RR, January 2018). For more information, program schedules or to support WEDU visit www.wedu.org; WEDU Public Media on Facebook and Twitter (@wedupbs) or call (813) 254-9338.

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