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Chasing Progress for Tomorrow

BCRI Welcomes New Leadership and Retains Thompson's Presidency

BIRMINGHAM (May 4, 2022) – At the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, we aim to build a healthy, adaptive and sustainable institution that's both financially self-sufficient and nationally significant. We are building capacity in our galleries that will allow us to celebrate a major increase in annual visitors and investing in our innovation, allowing us to engage with more of the public than ever.

One year ago, we welcomed DeJuana Thompson, founder of Woke Voke and cofounder of Think Rubix, to serve as interim president and CEO. A political and social strategy consultant, Thompson has a reputation for providing innovative and sustainable engagement methods and models for candidates, campaigns, and community organizations. She kept her promise to leverage her significant experience to bring about the change necessary for the Institute to thrive in the future. Now BCRI is pleased to announce her leadership has been made permanent by the Board of Directors.

“Over the last year we’ve worked to address critical issues to ensure the Institute was able to recover from the effects of recent transitions and the impacts of national events. I knew that we needed to return to our investment in community; growth; academic and social programming,” said president and CEO, DeJuana Thompson. “We’ve raised \$2.4M and, on the heels of celebrating our 30th anniversary, I’m excited to welcome new leadership to our staff. We’re now uniquely positioned to continue in our mission to engage the community as thought leaders and prepare for the many international visitors who will join us here for the World Games in July.”

The Institute also welcomes new leadership to its staff. Dr. Kimberly Brown Pellow has joined the staff as curator-in-residency. Dr. Samantha Briggs joins the team as Vice President of Education. Katina Smith is the Institute’s Executive Assistant to the President and Carrie McGowan serves as Office Manager. In addition to this new leadership, BCRI is excited to welcome new members to our Board of Directors!

- Natalie Kelly is director of Corporate Responsibility at Brasfield & Gorrie, one of the nation’s largest construction firms. She previously owned her own environmental strategy and media agency company called Sustain.
- Arian Simone is co-founder, president, and CEO at the Fearless Fund, a venture capital fund investing in women of color LED startup companies. She’s a serial entrepreneur, philanthropist, angel investor, author, and marketing specialist.
- Mashonda Taylor is a community strategist and innovative thinker who leads as Executive Director of Woodlawn United. She’s also a member of the executive committee of Jones Valley Teaching Farm and chaired the Diversity & Inclusion Taskforce for the Junior League of Birmingham.
- Deontée Gordon is President and CEO of Tech Birmingham. He spent two years as Director of Business Development at REV, and led the launch of REVeal Kitchen in the Pizitz Food Hall, the nonprofit's restaurant incubator.

- Nick Willis is Greater Alabama Regional President at PNC Bank and plans to drive the financial institution's continued efforts to support local communities across the state. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Alabama Symphony Orchestra, the Business Council of Alabama, and the McWane Science Center.
- Alice Bowsher has helped spearhead efforts to protect structures and neighborhoods that give the Magic City much of its unique character and charm. Her books, advocacy, and consulting work have had a broad impact, illuminating the hidden history of architectural gems across Alabama.
- Dr. Anthony C. Hood serves as Executive Vice President and Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer for First Horizon Bank. In this role, he leads the development and execution of firm-wide strategies for embedding DEI into the DNA of the organization.

The Board met this spring for their annual retreat where they examined the future of BCRI; innovations in technology; and plans for fostering new partnerships that will increase our reach across the globe and further spotlight our great city as we continue to visualize the future of the Civil Rights District. "The language of our mission transcends generations, and we aspire to eliminate human rights injustices across the globe," said Board chair, Isaac Cooper. "We're going to keep chasing progress, allowing this mission to drive our efforts."

With the ever-increasing awareness of present-day challenges to human rights around the world, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute brings the world to our doorstep and allows us to imagine increased economic opportunities. We will continue preserving and telling the Birmingham story in the years to come. And, as the world continues to change around us, we will go on adapting and adjusting.

To stay updated on the great programs and exhibitions forthcoming at the Institute, visit our website to sign up for our e-newsletter; and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter - @bhamcivilrights.

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About BCRI: The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is a cultural and educational research center that promotes a comprehensive understanding for the significance of The Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham. For more than 28 years, we have enlightened each generation about civil and human rights. A part of the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument and an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, we stand strong as the cornerstone of the civil rights story, a living memorial with an ongoing mission.

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