

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**September 15, 2022**

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## **Starlight's President + C.E.O. Announces He Will Retire Effective March 31, 2023**



**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** – Rich Baker has announced plans to retire after more than nine years as President + C.E.O. of the Starlight Theatre Association of Kansas City, Inc., on March 31, 2023. He will continue as a programming consultant and assist in booking the Broadway Series for Starlight through 2025. This will ensure a seamless transition to the new President + C.E.O., Lindsey Rood-Clifford, effective April 1, 2023.

Since 2014, Baker has brought to the organization a strong commitment to top-quality Broadway and concert programming, expansion of educational and community engagement offerings, and continued enhancement of the Starlight venue. From the start, Baker's vision for Starlight was centered on expanding Starlight's programming to reach new audiences. Under his leadership, weekend specials became a part of Starlight's summer Broadway series, and he converted the enclosed stage house into a small theatre to launch Starlight's Indoor Series, which transformed Starlight into a year-round venue for the first time in its history. In addition, Baker brought the popular multi-sensory experience *Van Gogh Alive* to Starlight in 2021 in a first-time partnership with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

"On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend sincere appreciation for Rich's efforts in helping us garner several large-scale initiatives including venue improvements and expanded programming to make Starlight a year-round performance home," said Starlight Board Chair Mark Fortino.

Baker's impact on Starlight will be felt for generations to come. Under his leadership and encouragement, Starlight's educational and community engagement programs grew, and Starlight's

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historic outdoor rehearsal pavilion was renovated into a dedicated space for educational programs. He also led the charge on significant venue enhancements that have improved the audience experience, including the large-scale fans above the seats that dramatically mitigate summer heat, a new sound system for the theatre, and two new LED screens that bring the stage's action up-close for all visitors—no matter where they sit in the venue. Baker also worked closely on Starlight's recent ADA improvement project to ensure all guests can easily navigate the theatre, and through his expansion efforts, Starlight's staff grew by more than ten full time positions and the annual budget grew to more than \$20 million, ensuring Starlight as the largest arts organization in Kansas City. Care for his staff was always a priority and during the pandemic, while many theatres were forced to shutter and endured layoffs, Baker worked to keep every full-time staff member employed while simultaneously focusing on expense reductions and relief funding opportunities.

Beginning in April 2023 through 2025, Baker will remain a programming consultant, supporting the organization by assisting in booking top-quality Broadway shows.

"I feel so fortunate to have been able to do the work I truly love throughout my career," Baker said. "I'm proud of the accomplishments the organization has achieved over the past several years and it has been an honor to be a part of the growth at Starlight. I'm grateful to the incredible community of artists, audiences, donors, volunteers, students, and art lovers who have supported me and this historic theatre over the years."

Prior to joining Starlight, Baker worked with Fox Associates in St. Louis for more than 27 years, the last 14 of which he served as Fox's President + C.E.O. He is a member of the International Association of Venue Managers; the Independent Presenters Network, an international alliance of theatre presenters; and the Board of Governors of The Broadway League, for which he serves on the Intra-Industry and Governance Committees and the Legislative Council. A graduate of the University of Missouri-St. Louis with a bachelor's degree in business administration, Baker is also a member of the American Institute of CPAs and the Missouri Society of CPAs.

Starlight's Board of Directors has named Lindsey Rood-Clifford as Starlight's next President + C.E.O. Rood-Clifford has been with Starlight since 2007 and brings a wealth of historical knowledge of the organization, experience in philanthropy and external relations, and event management. She currently serves as the C.O.O + V.P. of Philanthropy of Starlight.

"I appreciate the work of Rich, the executive committee, and full board to ensure the best candidate was selected as his successor. In the 70+ year history, Lindsey's appointment marks a monumental first for Starlight as the first woman to step into the C.E.O. position in the history of the organization," said Board Chair Mark Fortino.

For nearly two decades, Rood-Clifford has been dedicated to making positive change through advancing nonprofit missions in her professional career. As Starlight's Vice President of Philanthropy, she grew Starlight's philanthropic revenue by more than 50%, tripled the size of Starlight's fundraising team, launched its first major multi-million dollar fundraising campaign in almost 20 years, and helped launch new initiatives to build and steward donor base and key civic and public stakeholder relationships. Previously, Rood-Clifford served in senior roles for Starlight's for-profit subsidiary as a consultant for nonprofit and corporate clients in Kansas City and across the country, using theatre and story-telling as the foundation to advance brands and missions.

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“Lindsey has demonstrated excellence at Starlight and understands the institution and has a long-standing commitment to Kansas City and the arts community,” said Starlight President + C.E.O. Rich Baker. “She will ensure that the future of Starlight remains focused on the needs of the community in providing outstanding programming, education and community programs leading Starlight into the next phase.”

**About Starlight:**

Opened as a theatre in 1950 and a nonprofit organization in 1951, Starlight is the largest and oldest performing arts institution in Kansas City and provides inspiring, one-of-a-kind experiences to its patrons. Starlight presents and produces Broadway musicals, concerts, and indoor shows in addition to offering extensive community engagement programming, including classes, scholarships, and Starlight’s Blue Star Awards, one of the largest high school musical theatre award programs in the nation.

Located on 16 acres in Swope Park, Starlight’s historic, city-owned venue is the second-largest outdoor producing theatre in the country and includes rehearsal halls, club area for dining, concessions, gardens, fountains, and a 10-story, climate-controlled stage. For more information, visit [kcstarlight.com](http://kcstarlight.com).

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