



Historic St. Mary's City Appoints David S. O'Donnell as Executive Director

St. Mary's City, Md. – Historic St. Mary's City (HSMC), Maryland's first capital and a cornerstone of the state's heritage and archaeological research, announced today the appointment of David S. O'Donnell as its new Executive Director. O'Donnell will assume the role in early 2026.

A mission-driven nonprofit executive with more than two decades of leadership experience, O'Donnell brings a proven record of advancing complex public-facing institutions through strategic fundraising, board partnership, and inclusive organizational leadership. Over the course of his career, he has secured more than \$100 million in philanthropic, corporate, and government support while leading organizations through periods of growth, transition, and renewal.

O'Donnell most recently served as Director of Development for the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry, where he led a national fundraising strategy supporting healthcare education institutions across the country. Previously, he held senior leadership roles at Baltimore Public Markets Corporation and Lexington Market, Citizens for Tax Justice, and several national policy and education organizations. His work has consistently focused on aligning mission, impact, and sustainability while strengthening public trust and stakeholder engagement.

"Historic St. Mary's City stands at a pivotal moment," said RADM (Ret.) Tim Heely, Historic St. Mary's City Commission Chairman. "David brings the strategic vision, leadership experience, and collaborative approach needed to guide this institution forward. His background in complex organizations, capital projects, and public mission-driven work makes him exceptionally well-suited to lead HSMC into its next chapter, including preparations for Maryland's 400th anniversary."

O'Donnell succeeds a period of interim leadership during which the organization maintained operational momentum while advancing its core research, education, and visitor experience priorities.

Travis Parno, PhD, Director of Research and Collections and Acting Executive Director, emphasized the importance of continuity and stewardship during the transition. "Historic St. Mary's City is a place where rigorous scholarship, public history, and living landscapes come together," Parno said. "David understands the responsibility that comes with stewarding a site of this significance. I am confident he will value the integrity of the research, the expertise of the staff, and the trust our audiences place in us."

As Executive Director, O'Donnell will oversee all aspects of Historic St. Mary's City's operations, including archaeological research, education programs, museum interpretation, fundraising, marketing, and partnerships with the State of Maryland and St. Mary's College of Maryland. His appointment comes as HSMC continues to expand its role as a regional tourism driver, educational resource, and center for understanding the many histories that shaped Maryland.

"I am honored to join Historic St. Mary's City," O'Donnell said. "This is a place of extraordinary historical importance with a powerful opportunity to connect the past to the present in meaningful ways. I look forward to working alongside the dedicated staff, commission, foundation, and community partners to strengthen HSMC's impact for generations to come."

ABOUT HISTORIC ST. MARY'S CITY

Historic St. Mary's City is located on the St. Mary's River, in a beautiful tidewater landscape of water, rolling hills, farmland, and forest. The 835-acre living history and archaeology museum is on the site of Maryland's first capital (1634-1695). Building upon decades of cutting-edge research, the museum features recreated structures in the historic town center, a Woodland Indian hamlet, a tall ship, and a tobacco plantation – all staffed by costumed or uniformed interpreters who help visitors understand the stories of Maryland's history. Ongoing archaeological excavations continue to reveal new information about life in the past, and a new visitors center will come online in 2026. Since its inception, the world-renowned Research and Collections department has identified more than 300 archaeological sites within the St. Mary's City National Historic Landmark (NHL) and curates more than 6.5 million artifacts representing millennia of human history.

The museum is one of Southern Maryland's leading tourism attractions and hosts an active school tour program. Its collections are a resource for professional archaeologists, scholars, and college students. The HSMCC Field School in Historical Archaeology, one of the longest-running field schools in the nation, attracts students from all over the United States, as well as from other countries. The museum is overseen by the Historic St. Mary's City Commission (HSMCC), which is an independent agency of the State of Maryland, under the Office of the Governor.