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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 23, 2020

### **Christopher Kenney Receives Museum Professional of the Year Award from the Ohio Museums Association**

Canton, Ohio... At its annual conference, which was virtual this year, the Ohio Museums Association awarded the 2019 Museum Professional of the Year Award to Christopher Kenney, who served as Director of Education at the McKinley Presidential Library & Museum from November 2001 until his death on December 24, 2019.

His wife, Executive Director Kim Kenney, accepted the award on her late husband's behalf. "Chris passed away on Christmas Eve after his third battle with cancer," Kenney said in her acceptance speech. "We were given 6 months if treatment didn't work, and 2-3 years if it did. We got 4 weeks. When I got home from Hospice that night, I posted about his death on the Museum's Facebook page, saying, I loved him more than anyone, but I shared him with all of you."

Chris was instrumental in the development of several exhibitions at the McKinley Museum, the hallmark of which is the permanent, interactive history experience, *The Stark County Story*. This \$1 million project debuted in 2009, and tells a comprehensive story of Stark County, Ohio, using objects sourced mostly from the Museum's permanent collections. Working with a focus group of local teachers, he established the exhibition as a key educational attraction of the McKinley Museum.

Chris had a passion for sharing his knowledge of the McKinley Monument with schoolchildren, and he coordinated the field trips for over 10,000 students every year. His series of school programs "Ohio & You" was honored with a Commendation Award for History Outreach by the Ohio Association of Historical Societies and Museums.

Chris was an expert on McKinley's presidency and often spoke to the media on the topic, including interviews with WESA in Pittsburgh; KHSU, the National Public Radio station in Arcata, CA; Univision, the Hispanic News Network; and TIME Magazine. He also appeared on the PBS documentary *Nine Long Days: TR's Journey to the White House*. He published two books about the President: *The McKinley Monument: A Tribute to a Fallen President* and *The McKinley Years: The Life and Times of our 25th President*.

He received his Certification as an Interpretive Guide from the National Association for Interpretation on May 10, 2019. He was a first person interpreter of William McKinley, relaying personal and professional stories about the President.

"While he was alive, Chris had no idea the impact that he had," said Kenney. "You just don't know what happens after you give that tour to a class of wide-eyed fourth graders, or you present a program at the Woman's Club. Sometimes people take the time to let you know, but most of the time they do not. You have to take it on faith that you're having an impact, and it is easy to minimize it. This award is tangible proof that Chris DID have an impact. As are the hundreds of sympathy cards I received, some from people I had never met, who shared with me a story of how Chris touched their lives. I heard from teachers who brought their classes year after year; parents whose kids attended our annual Movie

Camp; people who saw him portray President McKinley or heard him present his program on the construction of the McKinley Monument; and people who remembered his smile, his dedication to his community, his generosity, and his incomparable work ethic. This is what I meant that night when I said, I shared him with all of you.”

### **Christopher J. Kenney Memorial Bus Fund**

In his honor, the McKinley Presidential Library & Museum has set up the Christopher J. Kenney Memorial Bus Fund, which was one of his dreams. He wanted to increase access to the museum by removing the barriers that exist in funding transportation for field trips. “His legacy will live on as we award bus scholarships each year to schools who would not normally be able to visit,” said Kenney. Donations to this fund are accepted on an ongoing basis.

### **ABOUT THE MUSEUM**

The McKinley Presidential Library & Museum is located at 800 McKinley Monument Dr NW in Canton. The Keller Gallery is the Museum’s temporary exhibition space and features a variety of topics each year. The Museum also includes the McKinley National Memorial, McKinley Gallery, Street of Shops, The Stark County Story, Discover World, and the Hoover-Price Planetarium. The Museum is open Tuesday – Saturday from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 1:00 to 4:00. The Museum is closed Sunday and Monday.



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