

Iowa Museum Association Leadership Award 2022 Thomas Moore

The Iowa Museum Association Leadership Award is intended to recognize outstanding contributions to the museum field through visionary leadership. Candidates should be employed (or formerly employed) in a top leadership role in a museum and must show how their leadership has impacted Iowa museums.



Thomas “Tom” Moore is perhaps best well-known as a co-founder, longtime board member, and two-time Executive Director of the African American Museum of Iowa (AAMI). A native of Ohio, Tom attended Franklin University (Columbus, OH) and graduated with a BS in Business Administration. He served in the US Air Force for 4 years before beginning employment with Quaker Oats and eventually moving to Iowa. After enjoying a 30-year career with Quaker Oats as an accounting manager, Tom devoted himself to the AAMI.

The African American Museum of Iowa (AAMI) was founded in 1993 by six members of the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church who felt that Iowans, especially black youth, were not learning enough about African American history. Among those six founders was Tom Moore. When the African American Heritage Foundation of Iowa was incorporated in 1994, Tom was the first vice president of the board. He held this position until March of 1997 when he became board president and served through 2000. He remained on the board until 2003, including a second term as vice president from 2002 to 2003. In 2003, the Museum’s first executive director moved on to a new position and Tom stepped in to volunteer as Interim Executive Director. “Interim” was dropped within the year as Tom served as Executive Director until 2013. During his 10 years at the AAMI, Tom guided the museum through the grand opening of its current facility, years of changing exhibits and educational programs, the Flood of 2008, the economic recession, and dozens of other challenges.

After a brief period of retirement from 2013 to 2014, Tom returned to serve as Executive Director in a volunteer capacity until February 2017, guiding the museum through a challenging transition period. In total, Tom spent 10 years as a board member and over 12 years as Executive Director of the AAMI. His dedication to the Museum has never wavered, and he remains an active supporter of the Museum, currently serving on the *Voices Inspiring Progress* Capital Campaign Steering Committee. Without a doubt, the AAMI would not exist as it does today without Tom Moore.

In addition to his tireless years of service to the AAMI, Tom has dedicated his time to other community organizations. He was a Boy Scout Master for 8 years and has devoted decades to being a trustee, choir member, and teacher at Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. Tom has served on the Board of Directors at United Way of East Central Iowa, the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation, First Light Christian Church, New Bohemia, Theatre Cedar Rapids, and His Hands Free Clinic, among others.

Tom has been the recipient of several awards including the Dr. Martin Luther King Outstanding Community Service Award (1997), the first AAMI Lifetime Achievement History Makers Award (2013), and the Robert Chadima Visionary Award (2021).

Tom served on the board of the Iowa Museum Association for three two-year terms from 2005-2010. He actively collaborated with other museums and arts/culture leaders to both seek and provide advice. Though he didn't consider himself a "museum person" when he began his work with the Museum, he grew into a trusted and well-respected figure in the field. As Executive Director of the AAMI, Tom was very supportive of hiring recent graduates, former AAMI interns, and young professionals. He helped launch and support the careers of many individuals that continue to work in the museum and nonprofit industry. Tom also regularly and actively engaged with other local museum leaders that served as sounding boards and examples of best practices for one another. This engagement often led to collaborative initiatives and opened the door to existing programs like historic walking tours, combined field trips, and additional opportunities that helped to increase the perceived value of arts and culture locally. He demonstrated that passion for the organization, mission, and the field were equally important to success as previous experience.



Tom Moore was instrumental in founding, growing, and establishing the AAMI as an organization that is financially stable and a trusted source of information on Iowa's African American heritage. In 1993, the museum's founders didn't envision that their idea would become a statewide museum that today reaches over 30,000 people annually. Tom was an integral part of that success. Tom once said in an interview, "I was not a museum person. My interest was in young people at our church knowing something about their history." He may not have started out as a "museum person," but his service to the AAMI certainly makes him one.

The AAMI is the only institution in the state of Iowa whose sole purpose is to preserve, exhibit, and teach Iowa's African American heritage. The Museum has filled a critical role in the community for nearly 30 years as a sought-after provider of educational resources, partner for community initiatives, and consistent source of relevant and inclusive content that engages all audiences. Access to arts and culture improves quality of life for all people, in particular often-underserved and underrepresented BIPOC communities. The Museum was founded out of a concern that Iowans were not being taught the state's African American history, stories that have been neglected in traditional narratives for far too long. By teaching people from all backgrounds about African American history, the Museum seeks to create a community that is better informed about its shared past and present to make more informed decisions about our future. As Tom once said in an interview, "Ignorance breeds fear, and fear breeds hatred. Knowledge is just the opposite. It opens people's eyes. It brings people together." The AAMI helps improve cultural connections, increase awareness, and promote diversity throughout the state.

Cynthia Sweet, Executive Director of the Iowa Museum Association, said, "Tom Moore demonstrated visionary leadership in helping to create, and then leading, the African American Museum of Iowa for twelve years. Coming to the museum field as a second career, he embraced museum work and dedicated his time and resources to implementing the promise of the AAMI, sharing African American history, and partnering and supporting the Iowa museum community for decades. His inclination toward partnership and collaboration lifted up both individuals and other nonprofits and museums. Tom Moore has truly been a visionary leader in the Iowa museum field."