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. The award is not intended for volunteer leaders of museums such as trustees, board members, and donors.

Billie Bailey has served in the museum profession for 40 years, since graduating from the University of Northern Iowa with a B.A. in history in December 1979.

Billie began working at the Grout Museum District in Waterloo as a UNI intern in 1979 and loved it so much she never left. Beginning in the 1980s, she worked as volunteer coordinator, archivist, registrar, coordinator of educational programs, and assistant director. In 1990 she was named Grout Museum District Director.

Over the course of her long career she has worked in almost every job at the Grout Museum, so she has a keen understanding of the museum industry and how all positions work together to support and enhance a museum.

Early in her career Billie saw the need for cultural organizations to work together to strengthen the industry and thereby enhance all cultural organizations. In 1985, she was one of the founders of Resources Plus, a consortium of cultural agencies in Black Hawk County. In 1990, Billie oversaw a $1.5 million Grout Museum expansion that almost doubled its size and offered three new exhibition halls, an activity room, a 200-seat conference center, a gift shop, and an elevator.

In 1991, she served on the planning committee to bring a symposium and exhibition "The Legacy of Africa in the New World" to the Waterloo Art Center.

Billie Bailey was elected President of the Iowa Museum Association in 1991, using this platform to advocate for restoration of museum funding through REAP when Governor Branstad proposed cutting $5 million from REAP.
As an advocate for the museum industry, Billie has presented on a variety of topics for diverse organizations including many Iowa museums and historical societies, Iowa Humanities Board Cultural Heritage League workshops, Rotary and other service clubs, and the University of Northern Iowa. She has facilitated discussions on community cultural plans and opportunities and served on the boards of the Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, Waterloo Convention & Visitors Bureau, and Waterloo Planning and Zoning Design Review Board.

In 2001, Billie Bailey served on the Governor's Steering Committee for "Imagine Iowa 2010: A Cultural Vision." The goal of this committee was to energize Iowans to build a vision for arts, culture, and historic preservation in Iowa. One result of this committee’s work was the establishment of the Cultural Trust, which served an important role assisting cultural organizations to build endowments for many years.

In 2002, Bailey began a $9.5 million campaign to establish the Sullivan Brothers Veterans Museum in Waterloo, Iowa. This museum is of state and national importance, celebrating not only the five Sullivan brothers who lost their lives during World War II, but all who serve or have served in the United States military. The military service related oral histories collected by the Grout Museum are an irreplaceable archive.

Most recently, Billie Bailey led the Grout Museum District through a campaign to pass a Community Cultural and Scientific tax levy to provide ongoing support for the Grout Museum District. Always willing to mentor other museums, Bailey will present on this topic during the 2019 IMA Conference Director’s Retreat.

Candy Streed, Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area, said “Billie Bailey has been a visionary leader in Iowa’s museum industry. A constant advocate of preserving our cultural heritage - sharing who we are as Iowans, what happened to us and how our lives were affected. I’m grateful for her honesty, mentorship, and partnership.”

The Iowa Museum Association is honored to recognize the leadership Billie Bailey has provided the museum professional for forty years.

Billie Bailey, 1983.