

Smucker Chair for Education Sherra Babcock to retire following 2017 season

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On Bryant Day in August 2015, Sherra Babcock announces *Euphoria* by Lily King as one of the 2016 selections of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. (Ruby Wallau | *The Chautauquan Daily*)

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Chautauqua Institution today announced that Sherra Babcock, longtime vice president and Emily and Richard Smucker Chair for Education, will retire from her post in October 2017.

A familiar figure on the Chautauqua grounds, Babcock is probably best known for her frequent appearances onstage as moderator at lecture and literary arts programming throughout each summer season. Over more than a decade of visionary leadership, she has shepherded Chautauqua's signature and historic lecture and literary arts platforms to

new levels of excellence and renown. She joined the Institution in 2007 as director of education and was appointed to her current position, the first and currently only endowed chair on Chautauqua's staff, in 2011.

"Sherra's contributions to Chautauqua have been noteworthy and immense," said Michael Hill, president of Chautauqua Institution. "I was informed of Sherra's plans before assuming my role as President, and having these early weeks to work with her only saddens me more that I won't get many years with this brilliant and thoughtful mind. I've been so thankful to be able to draw upon Sherra's depth of knowledge and experience with this work and our community, and I'm excited that we'll have many more months working together until her retirement. We will miss her leadership and guidance greatly. What Sherra has done to advance the quality of this institution's work has set the stage for the next level of our participation in and shaping of the national discourse."

Babcock has shepherded initiatives, programs and investments that have enhanced Chautauqua's brand, particularly in the areas of lifelong learning and the literary arts. Under Babcock's direction, Chautauqua's lecture program continued its evolution as a diverse, contemporary platform exploring matters that shape our world, regularly attracting the most prominent, representative voices on all manner of timely topics. Her tenure saw the establishment of program partnerships with such renowned cultural and educational organizations as National Geographic Society, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Sesame Workshop and the National Museum of African American History and Culture, among many others, and new or renewed relationships with such revered figures as newsman Jim Lehrer, *Time* editor Nancy Gibbs, novelist and memoirist Roger Rosenblatt, former MI-5 director general Stella Rimington, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, poet Billy Collins and authors Margaret Atwood and Jon Krakauer.

Chautauqua's standing and impact in the literary world has grown markedly through Babcock's vision and efforts. This work ranges from fostering emerging poets and writers through the Chautauqua Writers' Center — housed in a recently established and renovated Literary Arts Center — to cultivating relationships with prominent authors and poets through a revitalized Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle.

Notably, Babcock also established and oversees The Chautauqua Prize, an annual, national literary award for books that provide a richly rewarding reading experience. Now entering its sixth year, the prize has attracted nearly a thousand entries from major and independent publishing houses, and its yearly winners and shortlists represent some of the best in recent American literature.

"Chautauqua has been such a blessing in my life and my family's life, and I'm so proud of

what we've accomplished during my tenure," Babcock said. "Though sad that I will no longer be shaping this work that is so meaningful to me, I'm excited for this next life step. I look forward to remaining an active member of this remarkable community, and supporting Michael's vision for Chautauqua's role in lifelong learning and the literary arts."

Hill said Babcock's retirement announcement is the last of a series of planned transitions within Chautauqua Institution's leadership. As part of an overall evaluation of Chautauqua's organizational structure, he is working to shape the role of Babcock's successor and said a search will commence shortly.



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