

## **Introducing Kelli Strickland Executive and Artistic Director of the Weidner Center and Envision Foresight and Consultation Graduate**

**Tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be the Executive and Artistic Director of the Weidner Center.**

I have worked in the arts for over thirty years, beginning my career as an actor, then a teaching artist, then a producer and finally moving into organizational leadership. About nine years ago, my husband and I decided that we wanted to find a place where we had easier access to *more trees, water and sky*, so we began looking for professional opportunities (myself as an arts administrator and he as a theatre professor and actor) outside of Chicago but still in the Great Lakes region in order to remain close to our family. I was looking for a multi-disciplinary center that exhibited a willingness to try new things and had a university affiliation, with proximity to the aforementioned trees, water and sky. The Weidner checked all of the boxes.

**How has the Weidner Center changed under your tutelage as Executive Director?  
I would call out four things:**

- Probably the most notable change is our willingness to produce, rather than exclusively present. If you are restricted to presenting, you are limited by what is available that others have made. When you produce, your imagination is the only limitation.
- Second, our principle of partnership. We do nothing without a partner.
- Third, we get out of our building. A lot.
- And finally, we take seriously our charge to make the arts accessible to every individual who raises their hand in interest. We strive every day to find new ways of removing barriers to the performing arts. We don't take for granted our current audience or audiences of the future. We build those audiences every day.

**What led you to become involved with Strategic Foresight Analysis and the work of Envision Greater Green Bay?**

I had been invited to a World Future's Day by a board member and thought the mission of Envision was interesting. I was also attracted to the inherent optimism of using the framework - "*preferred future*." It highlights how active we can be in building our own future, rather than a strict trend analysis. Our principle of partnership means that I am constantly on the lookout for resources to plug our work into the work of others. If there was already a group that had spent a lot of time thinking about what our community could look like in 20 or 30 years, I wanted the Weidner to benefit from that work. I conferred with other organizations that had applied the Strategic Foresight practice to their work and found value.

**The Weidner Center went through further consultation with Envision Greater Green Bay following an introduction into the process. What did the consultation do for your organization?**

We built a work group of 10 staff, board and community members that participated in a six session Strategic Foresight process, led by Randy Lawton and Dave Wegge. We took the report and output of that group and used it as the foundation of a Strategic Planning process that began with a new work group immediately afterward. That took the Strategic Foresight work out of the theoretical and made it practical. We applied the learnings immediately. How do we use the next three years to lay the foundation for the next 15 or 20? It also allowed the Strategic Planning group to remain laser focused on a plan to execute upon, building upon the work of the Foresight Project.

**What do you see as the future of the Weidner Center in 10-15 years?**

I will share what was written in the final report of our Strategic Foresight Project:

By 2035, The Weidner will stand as the vibrant epicenter of arts and culture in the greater Green Bay area. It will be celebrated for its dynamic, inclusive programming that spans a wide spectrum—from symphony orchestras and Broadway productions to genre defying music and dance, as well as festivals and pop-ups. The Weidner will embrace cutting-edge trends, seamlessly blending live performances with innovative technology to create immersive experiences that captivate diverse audiences. The facility itself will offer a blend of classic elegance and modern upgrades, allowing The Weidner to serve as a hub for both traditional and experimental art forms. The lobby will serve as a lively social space, hosting pre-show dining and networking opportunities, enhancing the overall patron experience. The Weidner will also be deeply integrated into the educational landscape, providing enriching programs that complement the university's curriculum and engage the broader K-12 school systems. Its commitment to accessibility and quality will make it a welcoming, judgment-free space for all, offering something for everyone, making it an indispensable part of Green Bay's cultural and social fabric.

**If there is one piece of advice that you could give to another non-profit or for profit business leader when it comes to planning for the future, what would that be?**

Be disciplined about pulling back to take a look at the forest. There are so many challenges that we are all trying to solve, that it is easy to get stuck in the rut of being reactive and allowing operations to consume every waking thought. The discipline to inform and refine vision allows a full team to work more efficiently and with purpose. And in addition to keeping up on the vanguard work in your industry, look for ideas, solutions and inspiration from organizations and businesses that are nothing like yours - think creatively about the application of a great idea. That was two!