

Dear Channing Murray members and friends,

After serving as Executive Director of the Channing-Murray Foundation since 1991, I have decided this year to step aside and pass the torch to a new director. At this point in its history, Channing-Murray is on firm footing and ready for the next generation of religious, cultural, and social justice programming. I plan to stay engaged with Channing-Murray and remain active in various spiritual and social justice programs in the community.

CMF is a campus-community center rooted in Unitarian-Universalist values that promote educational, spiritual, artistic, and cultural programs designed to be radically inclusive, social justice centered, and spiritually alive. Located in the heart of the University campus, we seek to contribute to a vibrant community life in Champaign-Urbana across diverse identities and experiences. Over the years, our programming focus has varied, but the mission has remained the same: to be a haven for those who dream of a better world and who need a place to share and discuss their ideas.

In my nearly 30 years as Executive Director, the Foundation has had many standout moments: the Million Moms March, Bill Taylor's storytelling during the Red Herring's 50th anniversary celebration, annual Tagore Festival events over the decades, Dances of Universal Peace on Sunday afternoons in the chapel, lunch hour sessions with international peace activist Kathy Kelly (that often went for hours longer than expected), the successful 11-day GEO strike in 2018, and the diversity of Sunday Service programs, topics, and local presenters over the years.

Our current programming includes organic food and live music in the Red Herring, numerous dance groups, several meditation groups, the young adult group, a tai-chi class, the fiction writers workshop, the Tagore Festival, and other interfaith and cross-cultural events, such as social justice documentaries and forums. Many labor and immigrant rights groups also call Channing-Murray home for regular meetings and outreach to the public, such as the CU Immigration Forum, the Graduate Employees Organization, and Central Illinois Jobs With Justice.

In the past 5 years, we have made substantial improvements to our historic building (built in 1908), including refurbishing the exterior, building a new roof, installing new gutters, selecting a new energy-efficient HVAC system, restoring the chapel floor, upgrading computer equipment, and expanding the stage through volunteer labor.

During this time, the Red Herring also made numerous improvements to its kitchen, dining, and work space, including new appliances and tools, new computer equipment, and energy-efficient lighting. Additional building improvements are currently in the planning stage.

We are fortunate to have an excellent staff: Lisa Haynes, Office Manager; Rohn Koester, Facilities Manager; and Holly Curia and Loren Kolb, Red Herring Managers. The paid staff is supported by a hard-working volunteer Board of Directors and a number of dedicated volunteers around the community. My thanks to all of these individuals for helping to make Channing-Murray a sustainable and evolving organization.

I have enjoyed being part of a vibrant UU campus center over the years and look forward to seeing Channing-Murray continue to flourish in the future. Now more than ever, social justice organizations like Channing-Murray are necessary, not just to welcome the next generation of campus and community organizers but also to affirm the UU values that we cherish. I'm grateful to the many people who have made my time with CMF so rich and rewarding – best wishes to you all.

Sincerely,
Claire Szoke