



NEWS

The Hear Foundation Appoints Cynthia Haines President and CEO Co-founder Leon Ford Named Director of External Affairs

Changes mark continued growth for first and only nonprofit in Pittsburgh dedicated to fostering positive relationships between Pittsburgh Police and residents; creating safe communities and bringing opportunities for healing and support to those impacted by trauma and violence

PITTSBURGH (January 29, 2024) – The Hear Foundation today announced the appointment of community leader and social entrepreneur Cynthia L. Haines as its new president and CEO, and the appointment of The Hear Foundation Co-founder Leon Ford to the position of director of external affairs.

The changes mark continued growth and deepening roots for the nonprofit, which was co-founded by Ford and former Pittsburgh Police Chief Scott Schubert in June 2022. The Hear Foundation’s mission is to foster positive relationships between Pittsburgh police and the communities they serve, with the goal of addressing trauma and mental health, and facilitating healing.

A native of Pittsburgh, Haines brings more than 25 years of experience leading community-centered programs that serve diverse, underserved populations, particularly in the areas of housing, early childhood development, food insecurity, mental health, substance use disorder and violence prevention initiatives. For the past eight years, Haines served as executive director of Focus on Renewal, a \$4.4 million, 40-person, not-for-profit serving the Sto-Rox community. In this capacity she also oversaw The Father Ryan Arts Center, The Sto-Rox Public Library and The Community Resource Center, including its food pantry and violence reduction workforce programs.

“Cindy brings a lifelong devotion and passion for working with under-resourced neighborhoods and communities, and her gift for building and leveraging diverse partnerships will be a tremendous asset to the organization,” says Eric Holmes, The Hear Foundation search committee board co-chair, Chief of Police and Assistant Vice President for Public Safety at Duquesne University. *“I am confident that Cindy will lead The Hear Foundation well as it continues to grow and pursue its mission of improving public safety and strengthening communities through collaboration, relationship building, authentic communication and trust.”*

Haines also served 17 years as community builder and senior management analyst with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In this capacity she coordinated Rapid Results Homeless Veteran Boot Camps, served as a liaison for homeless initiatives and programs, and chaired the Region 3 Interagency Council on Homelessness Operations and Communications Committee. While at HUD, Haines was widely acknowledged as a national subject matter expert on federal grant writing, traveling across the country to provide training workshops to under-resourced faith-based and community organizations. She has served as executive director of Bridge to Independence and Tempering the Valley of Steel; and held director positions with Abraxas, Glenbeigh Hospital, and Lake County Center on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. Haines holds a bachelor’s degree in law enforcement and juvenile justice from Mercyhurst University, a master’s degree in social science administration from Case Western Reserve University and completed an intensive executive certificate program in community organizing, contracts, and racial justice at Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.

"The issues and challenges between law enforcement and residents are complex and often rooted in systemic and institutional racism," says Haines. "I am honored to be selected to lead The Hear Foundation in its next chapter, recognizing that its work extends beyond public safety to creating a place where all Pittsburghers can thrive and realize their full economic and human potential, regardless of race or gender. Everyone wants the same thing – a safe place to live and work – and I am confident that by building trusted relationships and being trauma informed we can, and will, dismantle entrenched biases on both sides."

In addition to his work as co-founder of The Hear Foundation, Leon Ford is an international speaker, entrepreneur, impact investor and author. Ford is the survivor of a police shooting in a traffic stop in Pittsburgh in 2012. He was recently named to Gov. Josh Shapiro's Pennsylvania Citizen Law Enforcement Advisory and Review (CLEAR) Commission to bring state law enforcement experts and criminal justice reform advocates together to support public safety and ensure accountability for state law enforcement agencies.

Ford recently completed a year-long national and international book tour to launch "An Unspeakable Hope: Brutality, Forgiveness, and Building a Better Future for My Son," and in late 2023 was named recipient of the prestigious Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award. A respected mental health ambassador and influential figure in social justice, he takes on the new position of director of external affairs, giving him the opportunity to focus full-time on fostering safety through police and community collaboration in Pittsburgh.

"Cindy is a strong leader with longstanding connections to the City of Pittsburgh and a remarkable history of service, demonstrated impact and commitment to the people who live here," says Ford. "I look forward to working with her, and to having more time here in Pittsburgh. This is my home and the place I love the most. There is a lot of challenging work that needs to be done, but together we will continue the momentum that The Hear Foundation has created in building a more compassionate and just society for everyone."

Since launching, The Hear Foundation has distributed microgrants to 18 local grassroots nonprofits that are having deep and lasting impact on the community. Grantees include organizations that are leading children and youth summer camps; providing job training for those exiting incarceration and trauma-informed mentorship programs to coaches and youth leaders; leading teen programs and facilitating youth-led student safety programs; and bringing mental health support and wrap around services to those impacted by trauma and violence.

"On behalf of the Board of Directors, we are grateful to Kamal Nigam for supporting the launch of The Hear Foundation," says Diana Bucco, board treasurer and president of the Buhl Foundation. "Under Kamal's leadership, the Foundation became a fully operational organization with a Board, website, and the ability to disperse funds to advance our mission. We appreciate his work over the past two years ensuring the future success of the Foundation."

To learn more or to sign up for news and updates from The Hear Foundation visit hearfoundation.com.

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The Hear Foundation is supported by the Allegheny Foundation, The Buhl Foundation, the Elsie H. Hillman Foundation, The Forbes Funds, Heal America, Jones Day, Jones Day Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Richard King Mellon Foundation, Segal Family Foundation, and Staunton Farm Foundation.