

Gamma Phi Beta Recognizes Kari Watkins With Carnation Award

August 12, 2026



Centennial, Colorado — Gamma Phi Beta presented Kari Watkins (Oklahoma) with the prestigious Carnation Award at the Sorority's 82nd Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. The award recognizes members whose outstanding achievements in fields outside the Sorority have brought them honor or great distinction.

Kari, a third-generation journalist, became the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum's first staff member in March 1996, serving as communications director. In 1999, she was named executive director. Today, she oversees operations as president and CEO and is the race director for the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon.

Kari oversaw the design competition of the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial and the construction of the Memorial Museum, working with board and staff to secure \$29 million in funding. She is currently leading Foreword, a major expansion that will grow the Museum's footprint and enrich its educational offerings.

In 2020, Kari guided the development of the signature educational, outreach and training program, Better Conversations, for the 25th Anniversary. Through virtual and in-person programs, visitors experience a safe space for candid conversations about tough subjects, such as collective memory and uniting to move a city forward.

Kari oversaw development of the Journey of Hope program in 2024, a traveling program bringing important lessons learned from the Oklahoma City bombing to students across Oklahoma, ensuring the story reaches the next generation. The program has expanded to high schools in all 77 Oklahoma counties.

In 2025, Kari earned a Women of the Year recognition from USA Today. Locally, she has received several awards, most recently including the 2025 President's Award from the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits, the



2025 President's Award from the Meinders School of Business at Oklahoma City University and the 2025 Service to the Profession Award from the Oklahoma Museum Association.

Kari leads a staff that has earned the highest national recognition, accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums. The Memorial Museum has won numerous awards including the Videographer Award of Excellence, a Gold American Alliance of Museums MUSE, the FBI Director's Community Leadership Award, multiple American Advertising Awards, Public Relations Society of America Awards and Oklahoma Tourism RedBud Awards.

Kari currently serves as chair of the board of directors for Visit OKC and on the Maps 4 Civil Rights Clara Luper Center Subcommittee. She has previously served on the Board of Visitors for the University of Oklahoma's Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communications and is an elder at Crossings Community Church.

She and her husband Hardy have two children, Ford and Caroline.

Since 1974, Gamma Phi Beta has presented the Carnation Award to members who excel in their careers and positively represent themselves and the Sorority. The award recognizes impressive personal accomplishments and identifies role models within the organization. This year's additional Carnation Award winners are Dr. Valerie Verge (McGill), Gina Schaefer (Wittenberg) and Jill Castilla (Oklahoma State).

About

Gamma Phi Beta was founded on November 11, 1874, at Syracuse University by four bold and courageous women. The Sorority's mission is to build confident women of character who celebrate sisterhood and make a difference in the world around us. Headquartered in Centennial, Colorado, the Sorority has chartered 190 collegiate chapters across the United States and Canada and has more than 265,000 initiated members.

