



Marilynn Kelly Gardner

A visionary, strategist and passionate advocate of our city – that's how Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Governor Bruce Rauner and many others describe Marilynn Gardner. As President and CEO of Navy Pier, Inc., one of Chicago's most visible non-profits and the Midwest's leading leisure destination, Gardner has built a strong reputation as one of Chicago's most respected female leaders.

Since being appointed to her current role in 2011, Gardner has been the driving force behind the Navy Pier redevelopment project, a \$115 million, multi-year effort to update and transform 50 acres of Chicago's premier urban waterfront space into a spectacular, global destination. Since construction began in fall 2013, Gardner has overseen every facet of the effort from architecture and development to programming and fundraising. To Gardner, each endeavor is an essential part in redeveloping Navy Pier for its Centennial celebration in 2016 and beyond, with a goal of attracting more guests to experience the Pier in a reimagined way.

Gardner has spent more than two decades establishing Navy Pier as the top destination in the Midwest, which welcomes nearly nine million visitors annually. To ensure the future vitality and growth of the "People's Pier," Gardner led efforts in securing several multi-million dollar gifts from prominent private and corporate donors. In 2014, a historic \$20 million legacy gift was granted by the Polk family, the single largest private gift to Navy Pier in its nearly 100-year history. The funds are essential in revitalizing Navy Pier's entrance, providing it with an inviting "green front door" to the attraction, an interactive new fountain, and two magnificent performance lawns that will enable the Pier to become one of the most highly sought-after venues for enjoying arts and culture in Chicago. In 2015, under her leadership, Navy Pier secured a multi-year, multi-million gift from Aon Corporation to underwrite the Pier's summer firework series and grand ballroom which reinforces Navy Pier as a world-class entertainment destination. Gardner has been one of many community leaders committed to reaching Mayor Emanuel's city-wide goal of attracting 55 million visitors to Chicago by the year 2020.

For most of her career, Gardner has been proudly telling the Navy Pier story to millions of visitors and Chicagoans alike. She began her first role at the Pier in 1994 as the Assistant Director of Public Relations, during its first redevelopment effort, and has held a variety of positions over the years, including Director of Public Relations, Senior Director of Marketing and Communications, Executive



Director of Marketing and finally General Manager of Navy Pier in 2006. During her nearly 20 year tenure, Gardner's impact has been significant in the Pier's continued growth and evolution.

A prominent and revered member of the civic community, Gardner has been featured as a guest speaker at high profile events hosted by the City Club of Chicago and Choose Chicago. A lifelong Chicagoan, Gardner is a member of the Chicago Sports Commission Advisory Board and is a member of the Regional Board of the American Ireland Fund.

She attended St. Ignatius College Prep on the near west side of Chicago, where she sits on the school's prestigious Board of Regents and serves on the Building and Grounds Committee. Gardner received her Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis. and currently serves on the school's alumni mentorship program with other high-profile alumni. In November 2015, Gardner received the Business Leadership Award from St. Ignatius recognizing her many contributions at the Pier and was also presented a 2016 Achievement Award from Streeterville Chamber of Commerce.

When she's not found strolling her six-city-block Pier to ensure Chicagoans and visiting families are enjoying their time, Marilyn is spending quality time in the Lincoln Square neighborhood with her own busy family including children Madeline, Katherine and Patrick.