



## **Marilee Jennings** **Executive Director**

**Areas of expertise:** museum leadership for ethnic and socioeconomic diversity; children's museums as educational centers; fundraising and board development; pragmatic growth for nonprofits

Marilee Jennings is responsible for fulfilling the Museum's mission of bringing innovative and life-changing learning to the more than 400,000 children, families and teachers that visit each year. Under her leadership since 2008, the museum/science center hybrid has become renowned for its groundbreaking work with the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of San Jose, resulting in the organization's world-wide reputation as a leading children's museum.

Ms. Jennings' strategic vision and direction has launched trailblazing initiatives, including *Common Ground* and *Breaking Ground*, funded by The Institute of Museum and Library Services to work with immigrant populations, the *Cultural Competency Learning Institute (CCLI)*, and the *Vietnamese and Latino Audience Development Initiatives*. She spearheaded the museum's participation in launching *Cambio*, in partnership with CCLI and the Exploratorium. With a \$2.8 million grant from the National Science Foundation, the project will help organizations create culturally relevant STEM experiences for Latinx communities.

Under her tenure, the museum has formed advisory committees that co-create programming for the LGBTQ, Autism and Disability communities and launched childhood obesity prevention programs. As an outgrowth of these programs, Ms. Jennings led a three-year research and design project to reimagine the role of the museum's food service. The result is FoodShed, a wildly successful café that is aligned with audience, mission and business goals and serves as an educational space supporting healthy eating and active living.

Ms. Jennings has supported partnerships with Stanford University, Santa Clara University and the University of California at Santa Cruz on early learning research with museum visitors. These partnerships yield innovative approaches to exhibits and programs informed by the latest educational research specific to the museum.

Ms. Jennings most significant undertaking to-date is the \$3.5 million raised to create the innovative outdoor learning environment, *Bill's Backyard: Bridge to Nature*. The space opened in October 2017, nearly doubling the museum's exhibit space and connecting kids to nature. Exploration Portal, adjacent to Bill's Backyard, is set to open June 2024. With eight interactive exhibits, this new outdoor space will provide endless opportunities of STEM-based learning at the intersection of math, science and nature. Inside, the museum has embarked on a planning project to develop and build an exhibition and celebration on Nowruz, the Persian New Year.

Ms. Jennings continues to secure national resources and recognition including major federal grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the prestigious National Science Foundation. Numerous awards include the coveted *National Award for Museum Service* bestowed by First Lady Laura Bush, and the *Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion Award* from the American Alliance of Museums, which represents over 5,000 museums. She has published articles on serving multilingual audiences and mission alignment around healthy eating and sustainability, and presented at conferences across the country on audience development for diversity, healthy eating initiatives, science education, sponsorships and fundraising.

Ms. Jennings first joined the museum in 1987 and held the Director of Development and Marketing and Associate Executive Director positions before taking the helm in 2008. She has a B.A. degree from Newcomb College and is credentialed faculty for San Jose State University's Certificate Program in Nonprofit Management. She currently serves on the board of the Association of Science and Technology Centers and served as Board President for the Association of Children's Museums from 2014 – 2016. Ms. Jennings is a Noyce Leadership Fellow and was awarded the High 5 Partner Appreciation Award from FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and is recognized as a Silicon Valley Business Journal Women of Influence.