

University of Bridgeport picks Laura Trombley to succeed Neil Albert Salonen

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Laura Trombley

BRIDGEPORT -- Laura Skandera Trombley, 57, on Friday was named the tenth president of the University of Bridgeport.

She succeeds Neil Albert Salonen, who will officially step down June 30. Her salary has not yet been announced.

"Dr. Trombley emerged as the top choice from a diverse pool of nearly 200 highly qualified candidates in an extensive nationwide search," Robert Berchem, a Milford attorney and chairman of the search committee, said in an announcement to University of Bridgeport staff on Friday. "Dr. Trombley stood out for her leadership as an academic administrator and noted scholar."

Trombley is president emerita of Pitzer College in Claremont, Calif. She left in 2015 after 13 years and spent two years at The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens. Previously, she served as vice president for academic affairs at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

"I am thrilled to be a Purple Knight," Trombley said during a whirlwind visit to University of Bridgeport's shoreline campus on Friday.

Trombley said when she was contacted about University of Bridgeport, she learned it had a combination of what she loved: a diverse student population, excellent graduate programs and a campus that provides access to students who sometimes come from challenging backgrounds.

"All of these things had an immense appeal for me," Trombley said.

Plus, University of Bridgeport is in Connecticut, home to the Mark Twain House. Trombley is a Mark Twain Scholar who has written and edited several books on the famed author whose adult life was spent in Hartford.

Berchem said the initial field of applicants was whittled down to nine who were interviewed.

"She simply was the one," Berchem said.

Frank N. Zullo, chairman of the Board of Trustees, said Trombley's background ideally positions her to help the university take the next step in its development.

Trombley is charged with "leading the university's efforts to assert its value in uniquely combining career-oriented education with a strong tradition of local, regional and international recruiting," Zullo said.

In the past year, international enrollment at University of Bridgeport has slipped, largely due to uncertainty over U.S. policies regarding foreign visitors.



The school has been on a steady comeback since nearly closing in 1992. University of Bridgeport was saved when its board of trustees struck a deal with the Professors World Peace Academy, an organization founded by the controversial Rev. Sun Myung Moon, leader of the Unification Church. The PWPA can still name members to the Board of Trustees.

Trombley said what matters to her is University of Bridgeport's future.

"The future for this university, I think, and hopefully for this region, will be one people will be inspired by," Trombley said. "For presidents, it's not just about today. You have to think about the next five years, 10 years, 20 years and position the university to best serve the needs of current and future generation."

Already, Trombley has begun meeting students, faculty and even Mayor Joseph Ganim. She learned Ganim's son and hers both attend Union College in New York.

She pledged to forge a strong relationship with the city.

Trombley's parents were both educators in Los Angeles. She entered college at age 16, earning a bachelors and masters degree at Pepperdine University. Her PhD in English comes from the University of Southern California.

While at Pitzer College, she helped its endowment climb to \$134 million and oversaw a sizable physical transformation. Its status as a liberal arts college rose and in 2013, President Barack Obama appointed Trombley to the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. In 2017, she was appointed chair of the 12-member board.

When she announced she was leaving Pitzer, Board of Trustees Chair Shahan Soghikian said the college was fortunate to have benefited from Trombley's distinctive leadership. The faculty's parting gesture was a vote of no confidence in her. Some characterized it as a signal to Pitzer's next president that faculty wanted stronger shared governance.

Berchem said the 'no confidence' vote was fully vetted and dismissed.

"She was caught in a situation that was not of her making," Berchem said. "From my perspective, it was a petty effort by people trying to blame her for something she didn't do."

David M. Brady, vice president of Health Sciences at University of Bridgeport, said his first impression of Trombley on Friday is that she is very articulate and very intelligent.

"I think she will inject high energy into the university," Brady said