

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **New Burns & McDonnell CEO Leslie Duke Aims to Safely and Successfully Build the Future of Critical Infrastructure**

*New Leadership Positions and Focus Areas Will Demonstrate Investment in Clients, Communities and Employees*

KANSAS CITY, Missouri — [Leslie Duke](#), the new CEO of [Burns & McDonnell](#), is taking on the role during a time of tremendous importance and opportunity, as the United States is experiencing a construction renaissance fueled by a massive investment in infrastructure at levels not seen since the New Deal nearly 90 years ago.

“We have the opportunity to progress the world’s industrialization and move the needle for humankind,” Duke says. “Our work is thrilling; it will take investment and collaboration across our entire industry for a greater cause. At Burns & McDonnell, we will be intentional — prioritizing our initiatives throughout the organization, adopting technology, systems and processes to align and fortify our future, and most importantly continuing to go above and beyond for our clients.”

Duke is announcing several new leadership roles and offices to accomplish her vision during this transformative period.

#### **The Road Ahead: Duke’s Vision**

“I’m excited about growing our business responsibly and aligning our priorities to be accountable to each other, our clients and our communities,” Duke says. “People are the most critical resource to accomplish what is laid out in front of us — to safely and successfully build the future of critical infrastructure.”

#### **Safety**

[Joe Podrebarac](#) is the firm’s first chief safety officer, as Duke creates a corporate safety office to build a culture to transform safety for the firm. Podrebarac will report to Duke.

“Safety is the most critical part of our firm’s success,” Duke says. “It is paramount to me, both personally and professionally. While we have always understood the importance of safety, I believe we have an opportunity to align our daily mindsets and behaviors to create a culture of feedback, learning and coaching.”

Podrebarac most recently served as vice president and construction director of the firm's Oil, Gas & Chemical Group. He joined Burns & McDonnell in 2001 and spent a decade working in the field on projects for major oil and gas producers before returning to world headquarters to broaden his work on engineer-procure-construct (EPC) projects.

"Throughout my career, I've prioritized the safety of the firm's people and projects, and now I will use my experience to focus on elevating our corporate safety culture," Podrebarac says. "Our goal is to build each of our personal commitments to safety and well-being."

### **Innovation**

[Matt Olson](#) is the firm's first chief innovation officer, developing an innovation office to further a culture around innovation as a collaborative process to create, refine and implement.

"Our world is constantly changing and, right now, I believe we are in the middle of a technology revolution," Duke says. "We must embrace, not fear, the changes coming. Matt demonstrates a commitment to innovation and ability to creatively solving our clients' toughest challenges. I can't wait to see all he'll accomplish in his new role."

Most recently, Olson served as vice president and managing director of the firm's Telecom Group, helping utility clients develop networks supporting their entire organization. This includes helping them understand how to manage information; design systems in 3D models; and design multimillion-dollar, utilitywide fiber networks. His 20 years of experience includes development of industry-leading documentation systems allowing for fast, cost-effective and holistic document management.

"We know not every idea will work the first time," Olson says. "But we believe in a culture of innovation where failure can move us forward. Burns & McDonnell is full of problem-solvers and futuristic thinkers who can identify what is next to help our clients."

### **Value Creation**

[Chris Baxter](#) is the firm's first chief risk officer, focusing on acquiring the right projects to add the most value to clients and communities.

"When I think about Burns & Mac and really simplify it, we do one thing — projects — and through those we make an immense impact on the world," Duke says. "Chris plays a crucial role in helping protect our firm, and this elevation of risk management shows it is a priority for me and our organization, now and moving forward."

Baxter is a licensed attorney and professional mechanical engineer. He recently served as the firm's vice president of risk management, overseeing the project risk management evaluation process and insurance program. In addition, he serves as general counsel for the firm's international subsidiaries and operations. Previously, he worked as a design engineer, construction manager, project manager and program manager on various design and construction projects for industrial, government, municipal and commercial clients.

“We need to drive long-lasting value by working on quality projects to drive success for our clients and the communities we serve,” Baxter says. “It is our responsibility to focus on minimizing our risks and to take accountability for our work and the projects we do.”

### **Duke’s Career and Background**

Duke grew up in El Paso, Texas, and joined Burns & McDonnell in 1999 as a structural engineer in Houston. Throughout her 24 years with Burns & McDonnell, Duke served in multiple leadership roles, including opening and growing several new offices. She is the firm’s eighth CEO, succeeding Ray Kowalik, who retired at the end of 2023 after 36 years with the firm.

Prior to being named as CEO, Duke served as regional president and general manager of the South Central Region. Over the past two decades, she helped expand the firm’s customer base from one local Houston client to more than 650 local, regional and national clients in the industrial, refining, chemical, manufacturing and power utility markets. During her tenure, the business delivered over \$5 billion in engineering, procurement, construction, environmental and consulting services in the region.

Duke played an integral role in launching the firm’s EPC delivery method in its South Central Region, with her efforts leading to the development and successful execution of many projects and programs, as well as the firm earning recognition by numerous industry and community organizations.

Duke earned a bachelor’s degree in civil/structural engineering from Texas Tech University and was named a Texas Tech Distinguished Engineer in 2018. She is an emeritus member of the Dean’s Council for the university’s School of Engineering.

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### **About Burns & McDonnell**

Burns & McDonnell is a family of companies bringing together an unmatched team of more than 13,500 engineers, construction and craft professionals, architects, planners, technologists, and scientists to design and build our critical infrastructure. With an integrated construction and design mindset, we offer full-service capabilities. Founded in 1898 and working from 70 offices globally, Burns & McDonnell is 100% employee-owned. Learn how we are [designed to build](#).