

The Dallas Morning News

Dallas Museum of Art has upgraded security in response to June break-in

Members of the DMA management team discussed the changes in an exclusive interview with The Dallas Morning News.



A Dallas police car sits outside of the Dallas Museum of Art after a burglary on June 2. Museum officials announced a series of sweeping changes in response to the incident. (Elias Valverde II / Staff Photographer)

By [Michael Granberry](#) and [Dan Singer](#)

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Since an intruder broke into the Dallas Museum of Art in June, museum leadership, working with a group of high-profile security consultants, says it has pinpointed and moved forward on a sweeping series of changes.

In a recent exclusive interview with The Dallas Morning News, DMA management outlined what the changes will be after a burglar broke through the museum's front door, according to police, and seriously damaged four artifacts, going undetected until he picked up a museum phone and turned himself in to 911.

Agustín Arteaga, who became the DMA's director in 2016, called it "a critical moment of transformation" for the 120-year-old museum. Joining Arteaga in the interview was deputy director Tamara Wootton Forsyth; new board president Gowri Sharma, who previously spent a decade with Dallas-based HKS Architects; Aschelle Morgan, external affairs director; and Jeremy Halbreich, a former trustee who previously served on the DMA board for more than 28 years.

Forsyth said Chameleon Associates, the California-based security firm hired by the museum to review its measures, completed a site visit in early November. The team delivered a preliminary report on Nov. 28 and a final report in mid-December that cited a trio of priorities, covering, Forsyth said, "the procedural and strategic," in addition to personnel issues and "our system and our facilities."

"We have taken this incident very seriously. We very much consider it our duty to be responsible stewards of the art in our collection and to ensure the safety of our visitors and staff."

Within hours of the incident, Forsyth said, the museum "made changes to the way we increased our security presence in the building, as well as changing our patrol procedures."

"We also immediately installed additional alarms and security cameras," she said. "We installed glass-break sensors and more motion detectors."

By the end of June, Forsyth said, the museum had identified six security consultants it was considering engaging. It received proposals from four by the end of July and reviewed them through August, hiring Chameleon before the end of the month.

The DMA, she said, is "also working with the city of Dallas" — which owns the building and the land beneath it — to, in her words, "harden the perimeter."

Forsyth declined to disclose the overall cost of such improvements or what Chameleon is charging, saying of the latter, "It's in the high five figures."

Some changes occurred before Chameleon was hired. Halbreich said the company came in to review, "soup to nuts, everything that has to do with security." Founded by Israeli military veterans, the firm provides security consulting and training to a range of groups and venues including art museums, the DMA said.

"It wasn't even just security," Forsyth said. "It was a full-scale overview of our institution and to assess any potential threat. It was not just a simple box to check, saying, 'We did this.' It was meant to assess any potential threat and provide recommendations as to how to fix them."

Asked why the DMA chose Chameleon over other candidates, Forsyth said, "Honestly, it was the reference checks. Also, the interviews. They were very clear in the process that they were looking at us holistically. They were focused on everything."

Museums operating in a very different world

Like another city-owned, privately run enterprise — the Dallas Zoo shares parallel traumas around safety and security. As two of the city's oldest institutions, the DMA, which opened in 1903, and the zoo, founded in 1888, both have encountered major security lapses and problems.

They share another bond, as well. Both are owned by the City of Dallas but operated by private nonprofit corporations that are undergoing the kind of scrutiny they have never had in endure in their histories that go back more than a century.

DMA officials said the assessment took into account that museums are now living in a very different world, in which "the threats we face are quite different from past." The new frontier involves everything from "climate-change vandalism to health-related incidents to active shooters to bomb threats, which we had recently."

In the past, she noted, security has consumed 12% of the DMA's overall annual budget of \$29 million. The figure for security will increase, she said, though she declined to say by how much.

Part of the immediate changes have already involved on-site personnel.

In an effort to prevent such events from occurring in the future, the DMA is reorganizing its current security force. Ken Bennett, the DMA's former director of facility operations and security, has been promoted to chief of security and operations officer, a new role that reports directly to Arteaga.

In his new position, Bennett will oversee both the museum's operations team and its security team. The security team will be led by a new director of security, for which the museum is currently interviewing candidates.

Morgan, the museum spokeswoman, called Bennett "a new key addition to the [DMA] director's team, ensuring security is consistently considered at the highest levels in our organization." Bennett is one of nine top museum officials reporting to Arteaga.

As for the new security director, Morgan said, "We are looking for a leader who can join our team and help adopt an institutionwide focus on mitigating any possible incident." She said whoever is hired will lead efforts "at integrating new processes, expectations and best practices."

The museum has declined to say whether any security staff lost their jobs after the break-in.

"With a building as large and complicated as ours, as well as noting our complex relationship with the city as it pertains to managing our facility," Morgan said, "Chameleon Associates pointed out that it is critical to retain existing, experienced staff who are familiar with the intricacies of our building."

However, she added, "It is critical that we better train and equip our staff to do their jobs well in the modern-day landscape."

As Forsyth said, what Chameleon has already done is help redefine the museum's philosophy when it comes to security.

"We were thinking like an art museum [in the past], and we're a large public institution. So, we have to think broader than an art museum protecting the works of art inside the museum," she said. "That was one of the biggest takeaways. And because of that, many art museums are having to rethink how they do, well, everything."

Halbreich said he attended the meeting as “a volunteer, obviously,” who wished to assure The News and those in the public at large that the DMA remains “the right repository” for works of art contributed by major financial donors.

As for any suspicion otherwise, “That struck home with me,” Halbreich said, “principally because I was serving as chairman when Robert and Marguerite Hoffman made their pledge originally,” referring to the Fast Forward bequest promised to the DMA in 2005 by the Hoffmans, Deedie and Rusty Rose and Howard and Cindy Rachofsky. At the time the bequest was made, Fast Forward carried an estimated value of \$215 million.

“I was concerned, if that were the case,” Halbreich said, in regard to donors. “I’ve spoken to most of them. There is no concern. But that got me involved and a little bit engaged in this process.”

Contacted in November by The News, DMA board members Catherine Marcus Rose and Cindy Rachofsky did not respond to requests for comment. Through a spokesman, Mayor Eric Johnson, another board member, referred questions to the DMA.

As a former executive with The News, who now works in newspaper management elsewhere, Halbreich said he wanted “to make sure that the DMA was as forthcoming as possible, in view of the obvious sensitivity of dealing with security protocols.”

Asked why a donor would be unfazed by the break-in, Halbreich said, “They see it as a random act. It happens in other institutions all the time.” He voiced support for current leadership, adding, “They’re going to do the right thing. No one that I’ve spoken to has expressed any concern or any hesitation. Should acts like these continue here, then that’s a different situation.”

Read more about the DMA break-in

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- [What happened minute-by-minute in the Dallas Museum of Art as an intruder called 911](#)
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