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Converse President Krista Newkirk to Become President of the University of Redlands

Provost Dr. Jeff Barker to serve as President while a nationwide search for Converse's next President is conducted

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (April 26, 2021) – Converse College is proud of the success and exciting changes we have experienced over the last five years. The Board of Trustees expresses its appreciation and thanks to Krista L. Newkirk as she announces her plans to step down as President of Converse College, effective July 5, 2021. She has served as the 10th President of Converse since July 1, 2016. Newkirk is leaving Converse to become the 12th President of the University of Redlands in Redlands, California. Her duties at Redlands will begin on July 19, 2021.

Newkirk originally requested that her tenure at Converse end on June 30, at the end of the 2020-2021 academic year. In their April 2021 board meeting, the Converse Board of Trustees unanimously requested and voted to accept her resignation effective July 5 to honor President Newkirk as the first President of Converse University. This vote by the Board of Trustees was in gratitude of President Newkirk's dynamic and visionary leadership during a period of transformational change for the institution, and in support of her career decision. Converse College will become Converse University effective July 1, 2021.

Converse Provost Dr. Jeff Barker will delay his previously announced retirement in order to serve as President of Converse during the 2021-2022 academic year while a nationwide search for the next President of Converse University is conducted.

“As I reflect on the past five years at Converse, I'm proud of what we've accomplished through our collective efforts,” said Newkirk. “I was drawn to Converse by the community, the focus on enhancing equity and women's leadership, and its ideal to educate students ‘to see clearly, decide wisely and act justly.’ I leave with the knowledge that our efforts have expanded our influence and mission and will provide greater opportunities for the future generations of Converse students and alumni. My family and I will miss Converse and the Spartanburg community.”

A dynamic and visionary leader, Newkirk and her executive team built upon Converse's history, mission, and reputation for academic excellence to enhance its financial, academic, and cultural strength. She expanded the vision of Converse to advance a culture of belonging and collaboration that ignites creativity, innovation, and transformation. Under Newkirk's leadership, Converse:

- Developed an innovative strategic plan;
- Became an accredited doctorate-granting institution;
- Launched its first doctoral degree program, surpassing expectations with an initial cohort 100% larger than projected;
- Expanded its master's degree offerings, building on 55 years of graduate programs;
- Added data analytics to its business, finance, and healthcare administration degree programs;

- Opened an extension campus at the University Center in Greenville, South Carolina;
- Developed degree completion programs in business and child and family studies;
- Added an autism certificate program for teachers, the first in South Carolina;
- Became just the 6th private institution of higher learning to add virtual reality tools to the classroom;
- Successfully completed Converse's ten-year reaffirmation of accreditation;
- Launched a Data Science program and developed a Data Analytics Laboratory through funding by Bank of America;
- Started the Converse Presidential Leadership Forum to celebrate International Women's Day;
- Welcomed its largest freshman class (2017) in more than three decades;
- Celebrated the 50th anniversary of Converse's enrollment of African-American students in a year-long celebration;
- Led the development of a campus Unity in Diversity Committee which conducted surveys and focus groups and developed a Strategic Plan to enhance diversity and inclusion;
- Launched Converse's Quality Enhancement Plan entitled, *Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences*, and devoted the Creative, Community, and Cultural Enrichment (C3) grants to support the plan;
- Expanded athletics to include teams for Field Hockey and Acrobatics and Tumbling, which competed at Nationals both of its first two seasons, won an individual National Title in 2019 and the Conference Carolinas Championship in 2021;
- Reached record levels of Annual Fund giving and other fundraising;
- Started the Valkyrie Middle College to provide a pipeline for high school students to begin coursework toward an education degree and a teaching position in Spartanburg County District 7 schools;
- Started the Office of Sponsored Programs;
- Added five new men's athletic teams: basketball, track, cross country, soccer, and tennis;
- Started Converse's first Esports program;
- Led a rebranding and marketing study for Converse and launched a new marketing campaign;
- Responded to a pandemic with an inclusive response team (faculty, staff, students, DEI Officer) to develop a high-flex model of operation and communication plan that minimized lost revenue and resulted in an infection rate of only two percent each semester;
- Replaced critical campus infrastructure systems to become safer and more energy-efficient; and
- Extensively renovated Twichell Auditorium in the newly-named Zimmerli Performance Center, one of the most iconic performance venues in the South.

In addition, Newkirk led Converse through the thoughtful, research-driven, and collaborative process that resulted in one of its most transformative decisions: to add a coeducational residential college in fall 2020, to change its name to Converse University on July 1, 2021 and establish the Converse College for Women in fall 2021.

“Krista Newkirk has led Converse through tough, but necessary decisions that have set Converse on a trajectory of success,” said Sandra Shearouse Morelli '78, Converse Board Chair. “Her leadership and innovation built a strong foundation for the academic advancement and organizational strength of Converse for both today and for future generations.”

Regionally, Newkirk served as Chair of the South Carolina Tuition and Grants Commission, as a representative of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities Board, as a member of the South Carolina Research Alliance Board, as a Member of the South Carolina Independent College and University Board, where she is Chair of the President's Council, an Executive Committee Member, and a Public Policy Committee Member. Locally, she is a member of the Spartanburg Chamber of Commerce's One Spartanburg Talent Action Team, a Member of the Chamber's Advisory Board; Co-

chair of the Education to Employment Committee; a Spartanburg Rotarian; a member of the Spartanburg Academic Movement Board; a member of the College Town Board; and a member of the globalbike Board.

Newkirk was honored as one of the 50 Most Influential and one of 25 Women of Influence in the Upstate of South Carolina in 2020 and 2021 and was named a Woman of Achievement by the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal* in 2018. In 2020 she was honored with the ‘Courage’ Mary L. Thomas Award for her exemplary civic participation and contribution to positive change in the Spartanburg community.

[This webpage](#) will provide updates on the search process and progress for Converse’s next President. Frequently Asked Questions about this announcement can be accessed at <https://www.converse.edu/presidential-search-faqs/>.

About Converse College

Converse empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly. Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC, who aimed to create an educational experience for women, and in fall 2020 it welcomed its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. Converse students experience deep scholarship, transformative mentorship, experiential learning, and wonderful support for and belief in each other. Through this unique formula, Converse is a creator of opportunity for its students through a personalized education that also includes the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers. Effective July 1, 2021, Converse will acknowledge its university status under the name Converse University.

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