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OMAHA CHAMBER

## New head of Greater Omaha Chamber plans to work to keep young people in city

J. Cordes

2022

City officials approved 25 of 35 tax increment financing (TIF) applications in 2021, according to an annual TIF report approved by the Omaha City Council Tuesday.

The new CEO of the Greater Omaha Chamber said she sees great potential for Omaha to become an even better place for workers, businesses and families.

Veta Jeffery, an economic developer from the St. Louis area, said she

was attracted to Omaha by the proven ability of the city's civic and corporate sectors to work together to move the city forward. She wants to continue that.

“I think the clincher for me was seeing how well the public and private partnerships are developed and how much has been able to be accomplished,” the 53-year-old St. Louis native said Friday after being introduced as the new chamber leader. “It’s a big deal.”

Jeffery brings to the job the unique experience of helping rebuild Ferguson, Missouri, after civil unrest sparked in 2014 by the police shooting in Ferguson of an unarmed 18-year-old Black man.



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Jeffery

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She replaces David Brown, who announced last year that he was retiring after nearly 20 years in the job.

Jeffery's hiring also comes at a critical time in the city's history and development. Omaha, like all other cities across the country, is

competing for workers amid a severe nationwide labor shortage.

The city is in the process of remaking its downtown and urban core in an effort to attract more young workers. And the state has just appropriated more than \$300 million that's targeted for redevelopment of underserved communities, particularly North and South Omaha.

The hiring of an African American woman to lead the chamber also comes as Omaha business leaders have been emphasizing the need for the city to embrace diversity and inclusion to attract and retain the workers needed to spur future growth.

While Jeffery's hiring could be viewed as an example of business leaders' commitment to diversity, chamber officials also made it clear Jeffery was simply the best person for the job.

"Our committee was 100% unanimous that Veta was the right choice," said Mogens Bay, the retired CEO of Valmont. "She stood out from the other candidates, and we found her to be very thoughtful, very committed and just impressive during every step of the search process."

"She is a rock star," said Leslie Andersen, chair of the search committee and CEO of Omaha's i3 Bank. "So the fact that she's a diverse candidate didn't really matter."

But Jeffery said she hopes her hiring does matter to young people, who might be encouraged to aspire for something more. Historically, she said, chambers of commerce, not just in Omaha, but around the country, have not been particularly diverse.

"It says Omaha is bravely willing to change," she said. "It says Omaha values what all people bring to the table. And it gives us an opportunity to showcase that here."

Jeffery grew up in St. Louis before earning a degree from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She then embarked on a career in banking, rising through the ranks to senior vice president of community and economic development for Midwest BankCentre in St. Louis.

Then, following the Ferguson protests and unrest in 2014, she was appointed by Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon as manager of the Office of Community Economic Development for the state. In that position, she brought together public and private stakeholders to rebuild the business community in Ferguson and throughout the St. Louis region.

Jeffery also helped establish workforce development programs to assist underserved communities and helped form a state program that provided internships for disadvantaged college students in Missouri.

Most recently, Jeffery has served as chief diversity officer for St. Louis County. In that position, she helped coordinate the spending of the county's federal COVID-19 recovery dollars.

Andersen, the search committee chair, said Jeffery was first identified as a potential candidate by a national search firm, which reached out to her. But Andersen said she and Carmen Tapio, the CEO of North End Teleservices who also was on the search committee, already were familiar with Jeffery through their involvement with the Federal Reserve Bank.

An initial field of 15 national and local candidates was narrowed to eight, and then to two finalists. Jeffery was formally hired by the chamber's board of directors Friday morning.

Andersen said two "very unique skills" elevated Jeffery above the other candidates.

Jeffery has the ability to think strategically and is able to digest large amounts of data to help form strategic plans for action, Andersen said.

And through her work in Ferguson, she proved her ability to bring together people with disparate interests in a way that productively moved the community forward.

“She had to pull together people who didn’t want to be in the same room to work through things,” Andersen said.

Jeffery said she will work to make Omaha a place where young people will want to stay, as well as to make sure that Omaha’s businesses are well cared for and can thrive and grow for generations to come.

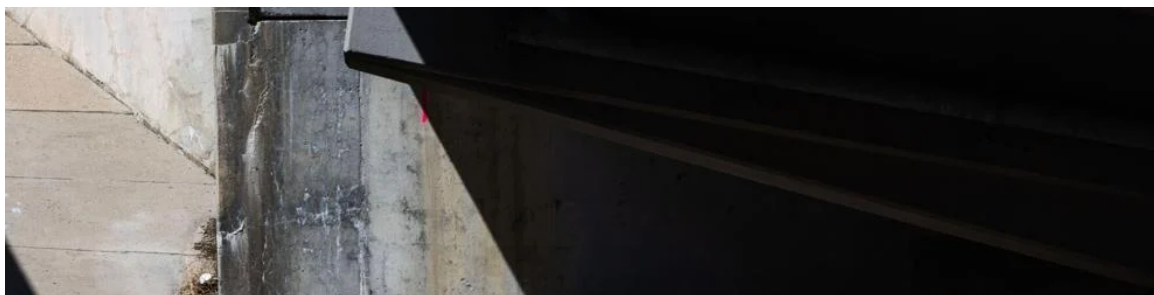
Jeffery will start work next month. She said she’s looking forward to moving her family — including husband Tony and 12-year-old daughter Toni — to Omaha and to getting to know the community better. The couple also have a 21-year-old daughter.

She noted Forbes magazine already ranks Omaha among the nation’s great places to raise a family.

“Families want to be part of something that they feel is growing and thriving,” she said. “Omaha has all of the right combination of ingredients to continue that.”

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## **Our best Omaha staff photos & videos of April 2022**





A pedestrian finds a moment in the sun while walking underneath Interstate 480 in downtown Omaha this week.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

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A four-alarm fire burns at a senior living center under construction on Applied Parkway near 144th and Pacific Streets on Sunday. The four-alarm was the first in Omaha since the Bitternut Coffee building fire in 2004.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

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A four-alarm fire burns at a senior living center under construction on Applied Parkway near 144th and Pacific Streets on Sunday.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

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Creighton's Tommy Lamb pitches against Arizona at Charles Schwab Field in Omaha on Monday.

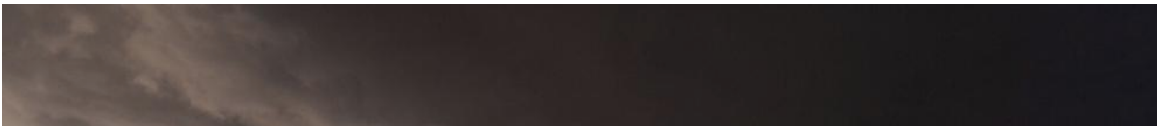
LILY SMITH/THE WORLD-HERALD

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Storms approach Blair, Nebraska, looking west on State Highway 91 as the sun starts to set on Tuesday.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD







Storms approach Blair, Nebraska, looking north on County Road 25, just north of State Highway 91 on Tuesday.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

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This squirrel stopped to nibble on flowers outside Andrews Hall on the campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln earlier this month. Squirrels, being primarily herbivores, mainly eat nuts, seeds, fungi and fruit, as well as a wide variety of plants.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

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Chris Jambor, left, and his son Dexter Jambor, 8, enjoy the Nebraska's 2022 spring game from the sound end of the Memorial Stadium on Saturday.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD



UNO's Eduardo Rosario tags out Nebraska's Max Anderson at home at Tal Anderson Field in Omaha on Wednesday.

LILY SMITH/THE WORLD-HERALD





Nebraska takes the field for the start of the Nebraska football spring game in Lincoln on Saturday.

ANNA REED/THE WORLD-HERALD

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The Union For Contemporary Art announced that they are going to turn the F.J. Carey Block building into the Shirley Tyree Theater. The project also plans to preserve the historic architecture of the building.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

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Nebraska's Trent Hixson talks to the media on Wednesday.  
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD





Millard West's Drew Borner (4) celebrates his run in the fourth inning with his teammates in the dugout during the Millard West vs. Elkhorn South baseball game at Elkhorn South High School on Friday. Millard West won the game 16-0 in five innings.

ANNA REED/THE WORLD-HERALD

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