

A portrait of Dr. Karen A. Holbrook, a woman with short white hair, wearing a black blazer over a white top. She is smiling and standing outdoors in front of trees. In the background, several people are sitting at tables on a lawn.

Dr. Karen A. Holbrook

Regional
Chancellor
at USFSM

She became Regional Chancellor at USFSM on January 2, 2018. She has Bachelor's and Master's degrees in zoology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her Ph.D. is in biological structure from the University of Washington School of Medicine.

After 25 years of research, Karen transitioned to vice president for research and dean of the graduate school at the University of Florida in 1993. She was president of The Ohio State University from 2002-07 and formerly was the senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at the University of Georgia.

Leaving the USF system after serving as senior vice president for global affairs and international research and subsequently serving as interim president of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Dr. Holbrook was asked by USF System President Dr. Judy Genshaft to assume a vacant position as executive vice president of USFSM and assist the interim regional chancellor on a national search.

During the search process she was asked to talk to the search advisory committee about her interest in the position. The result: she signed a three-year contract and was named regional chancellor.



Occasionally the successor of a leader of an organization is someone who is serving in an interim or acting position, on the board, or in another position within the organization. Leaving the University of South Florida system after serving as senior vice president for global affairs and international research and subsequently serving as interim president of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Dr. Karen A. Holbrook was asked by USF System President Dr. Judy Genshaft to assume a vacant position as executive vice president of USF Sarasota-Manatee and assist the interim regional chancellor as a national search was conducted for the position.

With the responsibility for research, development, and community engagement at USFSM, she also served as senior advisor to Judy Genshaft. During the search process she was asked to talk to the search advisory committee about her possible interest in the position. She signed a three-year contract and assumed the title of regional chancellor on January 2, 2018.

Karen's Bachelor's and Master's degrees are in zoology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her Ph.D. is in biological structure from the University of Washington School of Medicine where she was a dermatology post-doctoral fellow and associate dean for research and professor of biological structure and medicine. Her first position in research was to last six months; she stayed for six years.

After 25 years of research, she transitioned from research-focused positions when she became the vice president for research and dean of the graduate school at the University of Florida in 1993. She was president of The Ohio State University from 2002-07 and formerly was the senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at the University of Georgia. She has served on many academic, science, and medical association boards and advisory panels and councils for the National Institutes of Health. She currently serves on the board of the Institute of International Education, RDF Global, Bio-Techne, and until recently was on the Board of Trustees of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.

Byron Shinn, partner in charge, Carr, Riggs & Ingram, LLC, Sarasota and Bradenton offices, and chair of the USFSM Campus board, says, "Dr. Holbrook is a very dynamic positive leader who builds consensus well and has incredible expertise that will guide our institution to a new level. Her experience leading research and large global institutions will provide our community to a new level of higher education resources. What a perfect time for the west coast of Florida to have such a powerful caring leader to provide a genuine positive feel to helping everyone grow. We are blessed to have her leading our future together."

"My number one primary goal is student success by offering appropriate programs and experiential learning opportunities, connecting with the community, and evaluating facilities. We must have funds, talent, and buildings to meet the needs of the students," Karen says. "My highest priority is the construction of a STEM building for science, mathematics, information technology, and entrepreneurship programs. This building will have a sizzle factor and is exciting for K-12 education and the community. As fundraising begins for the STEM building, watch for a sign above the trees on 41. In fact, so many people are still unfamiliar with USFSM because the campus is hid-

den behind trees that I title my talks to community members 'Behind the Trees.' A second priority is to build a 200-person residence hall through a public-private partnership that will enable the school to recruit out-of-state and international students, offer summer camps, and assist in economic development efforts."

What excites Karen about her position at USFSM? Since many positions were filled with interim staff, she is pleased that the staff is stable with only one vacant leadership position. As a problem solver who enjoys challenges, Karen doesn't shy away from issues that arise as the leader of a campus with 1,040 fulltime undergraduate students and 66 fulltime graduate students, 900 parttime undergraduate students and 116 parttime graduate students, and 85 fulltime faculty members and 66 parttime faculty members.

Colleges include Business, Hospitality and Tourism Leadership, Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Science and Mathematics, and the School of Education. She's also excited about working with the Cross College Alliance which includes USFSM, New College of Florida, Ringling College of Art and Design, State College of Florida, and FSU/The Ringling.

Karen says, "Higher education had such great respect and people appreciated it. Now it doesn't have the respect it deserves. Criticism is justified if fiscal responsibility is lacking. But the politics and budget cuts are hurting the image and what higher ed can accomplish. We are good stewards when we have adequate funding and use it where it is most needed. I want the community to recognize what a gem USFSM is with its outstanding faculty who publish academic articles and are committed to the students. The future is wide open with the goal of USFSM becoming a destination university. I intend to work as hard as I did when I was president of Ohio State."

Some of the misunderstanding of USFSM is its relationship to the Tampa-based USF System with over 49,000 students and a \$1.8 billion operating budget overseen by CEO Judy Genshaft. In 2001 the legislature approved more autonomy for USF campuses in Sarasota-Manatee, St. Petersburg, and Lakeland (now Florida Polytechnic University).

Independence brought with it its own institutional accreditation, more college-age students, distinctive programs, and in the case of St. Petersburg campus student residence halls. Despite some calls to remain independent of the USF System, both campuses are being consolidated under USF effective July 2020. Karen is confident that the consolidation has only advantages since students will have access to all academic programs at three sites, have connections for experiential learning opportunities, and will receive their degrees from USF, not USFSM. About disadvantages, Karen says there are still unknowns that will have to be addressed.

Karen was born in Des Moines and raised in Madison, Wisconsin, to parents who worked for the National Recreation and Parks Association. Karen and husband Jim Holbrook, a retired physical oceanographer who worked for NOAA in Seattle and Washington, DC, and is now a volunteer with Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium studying dolphin voices, have one son James who is the senior art director and producer for ABC World News in New York City. When not attending job-related events, Karen enjoys knitting, crocheting, jigsaw puzzles, and renovating rental condos and houses with her husband. 🍷

STORY: Carol Darling
IMAGES: Evelyn England