



Aug. 23, 2016

Wadsworth Welcome
Statement from Director and C.E.O. Tom Loughman

Good morning. Thank you all for coming. My name is Tom Loughman and I am the director and chief executive of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you in the company of the chairman of our board of trustees, Hank Martin, our mayor, the Honorable Luke Bronin, council president T. J. Clarke.

We are announcing today the details of an idea that has an origin and path worth explaining. Art museums like this one—urban in their context, encyclopedic in their collecting, global and regional in their impact and significance—have been experimenting with ways to connect cultural history and contemporary living for as long as art museums have existed. We bring together works of art—50,000 of them—a world of ideas—some of them quite provocative—and people—from far and wide—together. That is our enterprise. Today across the nation, art museums are seen as trusted places where the widest population has ready access to the visual arts and our world’s cultures, even as our collections grow, our perspectives change, and history evolves.

When Mayor Bronin and I met for the first time this spring, we talked about the role of this institution and its relationship to the residents of Hartford. I had learned in my first days on the job that we had made great strides in welcoming, increasing participation of Hartford residents through our Second Saturdays program—a monthly community day realized with help from Aetna and communicated through the Hartford Public Schools. But I’d also learned that participation was far greater on Second Saturdays than it was on the other 20 days a month we were open. We share a special relationship with the people living in the city of Hartford, and we talked about doing something that would make an impact.

This institution was founded over 170 years ago as a place for art in downtown Hartford, and each successive generation has affirmed that role and enriched this location. One year ago the institution completed its physical rebirth of major proportions. Simultaneously (and still in course) the urban fabric of our immediate neighborhood in downtown has been fundamentally reshaped in a thoughtful way that embraces our future while respecting the past. As a community anchor situated at the epicenter of downtown, we are refreshed and ready to welcome lovers of art from around the world and around the region.

By introducing the Wadsworth Welcome program, we begin offering admission to residents of Hartford free of charge every day we are open. Our objective is clear: a message of welcome to those who live in this city that the Atheneum belongs to you. While the museum matters to a global arts community, while it is the largest public art museum in Connecticut and welcomes everyone with an opportunity for enjoyment and learning and self-discovery, we want to honor this special relationship in a particular way that fits in with contemporary life here in Hartford.

In closing, we thank especially Mark Bertolini and the leadership at Aetna, not only for their long-time support of the museum and of the Second Saturdays program, but also for practical help in getting the word out to the people of Hartford through a top-flight advertising campaign.

We celebrate this initiative today shoulder to shoulder with the city of Hartford. Mayor Bronin and his team are invaluable partners, likeminded in their appreciation for the role this institution plays in the cultural fabric of our community and the urban fabric of downtown. We are neighbors, after all, here on Main Street, working together to enable a bright future for the city and for its people. And so I turn over the speaking to my friend, our Mayor, the Honorable Luke Bronin.