

Press Release

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JOHN WETENHALL NAMED PRESIDENT OF CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH

PITTSBURGH, Pa.—After a special meeting of its board of trustees, Carnegie Museums announced it has named John Wetenhall, Ph.D., M.B.A., the new president of Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, an organization comprised of four distinctive museums: Carnegie Museum of Art, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Carnegie Science Center, and The Andy Warhol Museum. Only the ninth person to lead the institution over its 116-year history, Wetenhall will succeed David M. Hillenbrand, Ph.D., who announced last year that he would be ending his tenure as president after five years in the post.

Wetenhall has more than 20 years of museum experience, including eight years as executive director of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida, which includes a museum of art, a circus museum, the Cá d’Zan mansion, the Historic Asolo Theater, and 66 acres of grounds and gardens. He also serves on the boards of the American Association of Museums (AAM) and the U.S. National Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-US). His appointment follows an extensive search led by a specially appointed committee.

“John immediately stood out to our committee, first on paper and then even more so in person,” said Lee Foster, chairman of L. B. Foster Company and chair of the Carnegie Museums board of trustees, who led the search. “He has devoted his career to museums and museum management—first as an art historian and curator, then as a museum director—and it’s obvious that he is passionate about his work. He also appreciates the complexities and the tremendous opportunities unique to an organization with multiple parts, and he led such an organization through significant growth and expansion.

“John truly represents the next-generation museum leader, with an equal passion for museum mission and responsible fiscal management,” Foster added. “And he has an energy and a confidence that makes for a great leader.”

Wetenhall began his museum career at the Birmingham Museum of Art, where he was curator of painting and sculpture and active in the museum's \$20 million building renovation and the creation of its sculpture garden. He then served as director of the Cheekwood Museum of Art in Nashville, Tennessee, where he initiated a series of regional art exhibitions, developed new educational programming, and led an \$18 million capital-improvement project that included a museum renovation, the establishment of a new contemporary art and education center, and the creation of a woodland sculpture trail.

He became executive director of the Ringling Museum in 2001, and over the next eight years led it through a \$95 million master plan that included the restoration of the Museum of Art and the Ringling mansion; the construction of a new circus museum, visitors pavilion, education/conservation complex, and temporary exhibitions wing; and the restoration of the Historic Asolo Theater, which hosts more than 250 performances, films, and lectures a year. Most recently, Wetenhall served as interim director of the Miami Art Museum, where he helped draft a new strategic plan and initiated new financial and board-governance procedures.

“The Carnegie Museums presidency is one of the most exciting museum opportunities in North America,” Wetenhall said. “Beyond the impressive collections, ambitious educational programs, and academic expertise of all four internationally acclaimed museums, the potential for collaboration among the arts and sciences sets this institution apart. I’m especially impressed by the recent reorganization of the Museum of Natural History into publicly relevant, mission-based study-centers. The Museum of Art is making its fine collections and savvy exhibitions more accessible to the general public. The Science Center is a real leader in science education and science literacy. And The Warhol Museum reaches out to the widest and most diverse possible audiences throughout the world.

“I look forward to encouraging collaboration across these four great museums—and even more, to opening our institution to partnerships with cultural, scientific, and educational institutions throughout Pittsburgh and beyond. My wife Tanya and I are thrilled to embrace Pittsburgh as our community, and will do our best to contribute to its already exceptional quality of life.

“And one more thought: Go Steelers!”

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Wetenhall was raised in New England, and he earned an undergraduate degree in English Literature at Dartmouth College, a master's degree in the History of Art at Williams College, master's and doctorate degrees in the History of Art at Stanford University, and an M.B.A. from Vanderbilt University. He was also a Smithsonian Institution Fellow and has taught undergraduate and graduate courses at a number of American universities. He is married to Tanya Williams Wetenhall, who for 10 years worked abroad at U.S. embassies in Russia and Italy and now teaches fashion and textile history in the graduate programs of New York University and New York's Fashion Institute of Technology.

In 2009 Wetenhall chaired the National Program Committee for the AAM's annual meeting and in 2010 served as a U.S. delegate at ICOM's Triennial in Shanghai. Last year, Wetenhall received the Museum Service Award from the Southeastern Museums Conference and the Florida Association of Museums' Lifetime Achievement Award.

"This is a great role for John," said Ford Bell, president and CEO of the American Association of Museums. "John is someone who always sees the big picture. He's a big thinker, he likes big ideas, and he's also a roll-up-your-sleeves kind of leader. And he brings not just the museum experience but a good business background, too. He led a very diverse organization in Florida, and what he accomplished there was amazing. He's also been a significant leader on our board."

Wetenhall will join Carnegie Museums on March 7.

Founded by Andrew Carnegie 116 years ago, Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh is a collection of four distinctive museums: Carnegie Museum of Art, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Carnegie Science Center, and The Andy Warhol Museum. The museums reach more than 1.2 million people annually through exhibitions, educational programs, outreach activities, and special events.

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