

Fitchburg Art Museum's goal? Going digital

By Alana Melanson

amelanson@sentinelandenterprise.com

FITCHBURG — What if you could access all of the more than 4,000 pieces of the Fitchburg Art Museum's permanent collection — not just the ones on display — with the click of a button?

That's what museum Director Nick Capasso and Director of Marketing and Community Relations Eugene Finney hope will be the end result of a current push to digitally catalog every piece of artwork and historic artifact the museum owns.

Museum trustee Nadine Martel, a resident of Fitchburg and a major supporter of the Fitchburg Art Museum for decades, has offered to match up to \$10,000 in donations to help the museum reach its \$20,000 goal for the project, Capasso said, which will cover hiring a part-time museum professional for one year to finish the database.

"We need to know what we have in our collection, and the condition of it, so that when we work with our exhibitions based on our collection, we can easily access that information, and we don't have to go crawling through all of the storage areas to see what we do or don't have," Finney said.

In addition to making exhibits much easier to organize, having a complete and accurate database is necessary for the museum's reaccreditation by the American Alliance of Museums, which it will undergo in a few years, Capasso said.

More than a decade ago, under former Director Peter Timms, Capasso said, the museum received a grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services to begin documenting the entire collection, and about 75 percent of it has been digitally cataloged.

What the museum is hoping to do now, he said, is finish that project, which will include fact-checking



A sculpture from the Roman Empire, circa A.D. 117-138, can be seen in marble at the Fitchburg Art Museum and on Director Nick Capasso's phone. The museum is in the process of cataloging all of its items.

SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / JOHN LOVE

each piece in the collection to ensure accuracy and inputting visually accurate photographs and information for each in a sophisticated software system.

That system will allow very specific queries, Capasso said, adding, as examples, every piece given to the museum in a certain period of time or by a certain benefactor, and different combinations of criteria.

Once the museum can raise the amount needed, Capasso expects the database to be complete within a year. With additional funding and technology to be sought later, he said, the database will become available and free to the public on the museum website, which could take another year or two.

The museum could also make an app for cell phones and tablets, as well as online tours of exhibitions, Capasso said.

Capasso is not concerned that the easily accessible database would detract from any of the allure of visiting the museum. In fact, he's certain it will only stim-

"It gets the word out about the museum. It lets the city share its cultural resources with the world."

Fitchburg Art Museum Director Nick Capasso on plans to digitally catalog all of the museum's works

ulate interest and draw more people in.

"I think people genuinely understand there's something different about seeing a reproduction of an artwork and being in the presence of an actual work of art," he said.

"It gets the word out about the museum. It lets the city share its cultural resources with the world," he added of the database.

It's also a valuable service for people who can't get to the museum, as well as those conducting research on art history, Capasso said. He said he's looking forward to being able to more easily search through the museum's collection, and is especially eager to explore founder Eleanor Norcross' work, the museum's large collection of 19th- and 20th-century American prints, and many pieces that have never been displayed.

"Any amount is deeply appreciated," Capasso said. "Every little bit helps us get closer and closer to our goal."

All donations are tax-deductible, Finney said.

To donate, send a check made out to the Fitchburg Art Museum, with "Collection" in the subject line, to the Fitchburg Art Museum, 25 Merriam Parkway, Fitchburg, MA 01420. For more information, call the museum at 978-345-4207.

Follow Alana Melanson at [facebook.com/alanasentinel](https://www.facebook.com/alanasentinel) or on Twitter @alanamelanson.