

Rotary
Club of
Charlotte



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

January 14, 2025

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ARTS MAKE A COMMUNITY GREAT ~ ESPECIALLY IN THE HANDS OF THE SUPERB TODD SMITH

by **Marilynn Bowler**

The Executive Director of the renown Bechtler Museum of Modern Art arrived at Charlotte Rotary's meeting well in advance of President **Kim Brattain's** Call to Order. Todd Smith clearly knew the importance of networking before stepping to the podium to speak about one of Charlotte's great treasures for which he has reason to boast. His gracious manner and electric smile only added to the message he came to deliver, and that message is that anyone who lives in Charlotte and has not yet visited the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art is missing the proverbial boat. And deliver that message, he did ... accompanied by photos of awe-inspiring works of art magnified for our audience of Rotary members and guests on two huge video screens.

Todd was introduced by his close friend and cohort of many years, **Todd Herman**, President and CEO of the Mint Museum of Art. During his introduction, **Todd Herman** shared Todd Smith's impressive career background ranging from leadership roles in art museums including those in Tampa, FL; Fargo, NO DAK; Knoxville, TN; Orange County, CA; Charleston, SC; and now back in Charlotte, NC for his second stint ... the first was with the Mint and his now-current stint at The Bechtler. Todd has spearheaded every facet of art museums during his twenty-plus years

career, from curator to executive director to leading fundraising and capital campaigns and new construction and as President & CEO. He's a master innovator with a passion for modern art.

When Todd Smith stepped to the mic, he began his address by reminding us of "The Firebird," the mirrored mosaic which has stood on Bechtler Plaza welcoming visitors for 15 years. Todd then shared the history of The Bechtler Museum, tracing its roots to the Bechtler family whose incredible collecting of modern art stretches back over seventy-five years. They gifted their priceless collection in order to allow people from all over the world to see and admire it and this "gift" of over two thousand paintings and sculptures became the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art.

Residents of Charlotte and visitors from far-away may now enjoy the imagination, creativity and beauty as depicted through the talented eyes of artists such as Pablo Picasso, Teresa Hubbard, Alexander Birchler, Hildur Asgeirsdottir Jonsson, Clare Roja, and Virginia Jaramillo. And so many more. In 2026, David McGee ... and his *The Griot and the Nightingale* ...will be part of that tremendous collection.

We, who attended Charlotte Rotary, were treated to the most magnificent up-close viewing experience of those who've made beauty and strength come to life from pop art to surrealism to NOW.

Sighs of awe were heard frequently throughout Todd's presentation. And even more-so when Todd spoke of ways in which he and his staff are inviting us to participate with The Bechtler, which include Music (Jazz on the first Friday evenings of every month ~ *just ask Jim Rogers and Ed Driggs*); Pre-K and school tours, Family Days, and MORE.

Wanting to learn more about the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, the following were just a sample of what our members and guests asked of Todd, including his responses. Thanks to those members who shared their Q&A for this report:

Dumont Clarke's question: Why do you think displaying, learning about and experiencing visual art is important in an era that celebrates STEM over any course of study or life pursuit? Todd's answer: Visual art is important for many reasons but most notably because works of art remind us that we are human; and visual art has had a tremendous influence on the development and design of technology. Todd gave examples of the iPhone and other Apple products.

Jim Rogers' question: Tell us more about Friday Night Jazz at The Bechtler. It has such appeal and interest and is so successful. Todd's answer: Bechtler Jazz, on the first Friday of every month, is in its 15th year, drawing a crowd of 250 people at both the 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. concerts. Typically, it is sold out for every concert so advance ticket purchase is suggested. It's a good draw to get people to The Bechtler and introduce them to other events.

Susie Masotti asked: Since funding for art in public schools has been reduced at the state and federal levels, how is the Bechtler Museum working with CMS and the surrounding communities to encourage young people to get involved in the arts? Todd's response: The Bechtler works with school systems to provide free admission to visit the exhibits as well as provide hands-on activities while the students are there.

Chris Thomas' question: If we were to be able to bring another arts museum to Charlotte, what should that be? Todd replied: Our existing museums are capable of addressing/taking advantage of new opportunities and bringing them to their audiences. I don't see another museum in our future at this point.

In **Todd Herman's** introduction he made a superb remark about Todd Smith. He said that in 2021 when the Bechtler presented a nine-screen film exhibition by Isaac Julien, telling the story of Lina-Bo Bardi, it was a departure for the Bechtler, and it thereby announced that the new director - only the second one in the museum's history - "was unafraid to push boundaries." We are thrilled and excited that this is the new road we'll be able to travel.

Todd Smith, YOU are a masterful art museum leader, and YOU will bring new and outstanding art experiences to all of us. We eagerly await that.

*Regrettably, due to technical difficulties with the audio, the video recording is not viable for use.