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New president, CEO of Historic Deerfield takes reins



DAVIS

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Staff Report

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DEERFIELD — Historic Deerfield welcomed John Davis, the museum’s new president and CEO, earlier this month as he begins his job after being hired in May.

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Davis, the former provost and undersecretary for museums, education and research at the Smithsonian Institution, said in a press release that he is ready to help Historic Deerfield move forward in the 21st century.

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CEO of Historic Deerfield ()

“We have a living, breathing museum here in Deerfield,” Davis said. “These homes are largely standing where they stood in the 1700s. And just as they continue to weather the storms of Mother Nature, so our museum is adapting to changing times.”

Plans for the museum include partnering with the Witness Stone Project — a non-profit focused on examining the history of slavery — to honor the enslaved people who helped shape Deerfield and working on projects to tell the stories of women and girls throughout the town’s history.

In the past, Davis has called Deerfield a “cultural asset to the entire nation,” and said he hopes to make that a reality by expanding the reach of Historic Deerfield’s content and collections.

“The pandemic has taught us how much we can do virtually,” Davis said, “so we’ve got some projects in the works to help make our small town history available globally.”

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Davis was hired to replace Philip Zea, who retired in May after 18 years in the museum’s top spot.

“We are greatly excited for John to take the reins at Historic Deerfield,” Joe Gromacki, chair of Historic Deerfield’s board of trustees, said in the press release. “He has a passion for the town, our state and our mission. We couldn’t have asked for a better leader who will keep Deerfield relevant for centuries to come.”

Davis has most recently served as interim director of the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York City. Before that, he served as provost and undersecretary for museums, education and research at the Smithsonian from 2017 to 2020, according to the release.

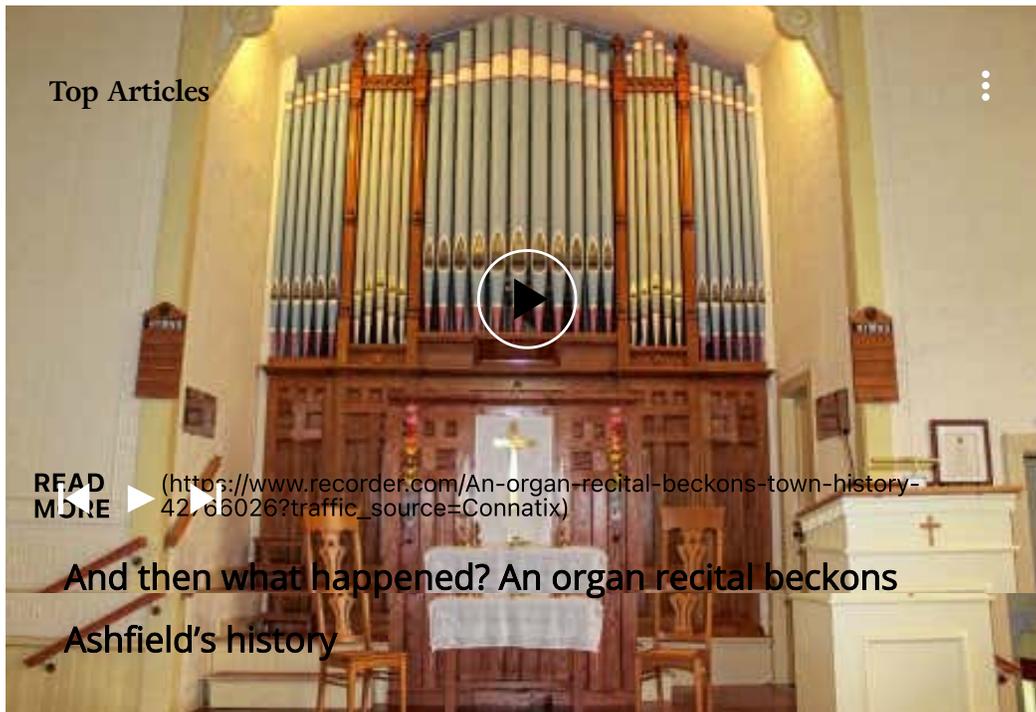
Prior to his time with the Smithsonian, Davis served as executive director of the Terra Foundation for American Art in Paris and executive director of global academic programs. He was also formerly a faculty member and administrator at Smith College in Northampton, serving for five years as associate provost and dean for academic development. Davis taught at Columbia and Princeton universities before joining the Smith College faculty in 1992.

In addition to authoring or co-authoring seven books and museum catalogs and contributing dozens of essays to other publications, the release states that Davis has lectured at more than 60 museums and universities and is an elected member of the American Antiquarian Society.

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