

# What next for Everson? Arts leaders offer their ideas

**By Melinda Johnson**  
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With Everson Museum of Art's announcement of the appointment of Elizabeth Dunbar as its new executive director on Thursday, arts leaders in Central New York were asked what advice they would offer her.

Dunbar comes from DiverseWorks in Houston, an "alternative art space." She says the outlook for the Everson is promising.

"I have the history of working in organizations involved in balancing budgets and raising money. I think, certainly, that's one of the skills they were looking for in the next executive director. And I intend to put those skills and that experience to work."

Dunbar's appointment is the beginning of the "rebirth of the

museum," said Gary Grossman, president of the Everson's board of trustees. "She is a stunningly perfect candidate," he said Thursday morning. "She has a strong desire to promote an artistic vision."

"The museum has a national reputation," she said. "It's got a very strong collection especially in the pioneering video art as well as the ceramics collection. The building itself is amazing. But, beyond that, I was so impressed with the board of trustees of the Everson in support of the organization especially over the last year, being without a director for as long as it's been. I could just feel in the community how much this is museum is loved and cherished."

What would you tell the new executive director? Here are several suggestions from local arts leaders:



**Jeffrey Hoone,**  
*executive director of the Coalition of Museum and Art Centers at Syracuse University and Light Work that collaborates with Everson on its Urban Video Project*

He would define the Everson's role in the Syracuse community and in the larger art community. Dunbar should consider, he said, how to build on the museum's past successes and chart a clear vision for the future.

"You have to have important programming. And if you have important and vital programming that people respond to then financial support will follow that. People want to give money to places that are doing important things," he said. "I think that the Everson really has to do programming that resonates more on national level so it can attract more support from sources outside of Central New York."

He pointed to the resources available from Syracuse University, especially the "wealth of artists." Hoone said included in developing the museum's vision is the importance of the artists' future participation.

"I think that vision is going to be successful if it's really based on contemporary artists and how you can really make it a place that artists are really going to be attracted to because of the space, because of the programming, because of its availability to do a lot of things that other places can't do."

Even with the many challenges — fiscal, staffing, programming — confronting the Everson, Hoone believes there is a great opportunity for museums in smaller markets like the Everson to do things that are difficult to do elsewhere.



Elizabeth Dunbar



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**Stephen Butler,**  
*executive director of CNY Arts*

“I would quickly as possible meet with members of the community at large.” It is important for Dunbar to introduce herself to community groups and stakeholders to get a sense of their expectations of the museum and of its immediate future. Butler encouraged Dunbar to join the Arts and Culture Leadership Alliance of Central New York and other cultural and heritage groups in the region and create partnerships with them.

Butler added Dunbar should take a deep breath and relax. “It’s going to be an exciting rollercoaster of a ride.”

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**Gregg Tripoli,**

*executive director, Onondaga Historical Association*

“I’d just like to say welcome.” Tripoli said he didn’t believe Dunbar was in need of advice at this point. “I pledge any assistance from the OHA, but I’m sure she knows what she’s doing.”

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**Anna Tobin D'Ambrosio,**

*director and chief curator at Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica*

Dunbar is fortunate to be joining the Central New York region that embraces arts across the board, fine arts and performing arts, and has a vibrant community that supports the arts. She looks forward to meeting Dunbar and continuing the Munson-Williams-Proctor and Everson partnerships.