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HOLLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION DRYING OUT AND ON THE MOVE

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HOLLAND, MI – A week and a half after its collection storage area was ruptured by storm water, the assessment and recovery efforts at the Holland Museum are giving way to relocation and restoration.

While the whirring of fans and dehumidifiers continues throughout the Armory, much of the collection that had been spread out on the floor of its newly restored gymnasium now sits in boxes as it awaits a temporary relocation to an 18,000 SF climate-controlled storage facility in Holland. Other pieces of the Museum's collection have already made their way to Chicago under the care of Chicago Conservation Center, a private art restoration and conservation center. Museum collection records and paper goods that were affected are being handled by a document preservation firm that specializes in freeze-drying as part of a recovery process.

The crisis has spawned an outpouring of volunteerism, donations, and expert advice from the community, including two former Holland Museum staffers, Joel Lefever and Nathan Kemler.

Lefever, now a private museum consultant, has been involved with the Museum and Holland Historical Trust since 1986. Lefever was Curator from 1994, and President and Curator from 2005-2008. "I have a bit of a photographic memory for the museum's collections, which came in handy when the collections records were unavailable for consultation," Lefever noted.

Lefever added that his role in the recovery effort has included identifying and removing objects based on monetary, historic, and artistic importance; conveying to staff and volunteers how to handle and treat wet objects; and evaluating which objects were candidates for conservation. Kemler, now Art Gallery Collections Manager for Grand Valley State University, came with a team of GVSU interns and oversaw the inventory process, damage assessment, and assisted in preparations for the next stage of recovery.

Kemler and Lefever echoed similar sentiments with regards to the biggest challenge of the situation being the relocation of the Museum's estimated 15,000 collection pieces. "Moving that amount of objects safely is no easy task and will require a lot of preparation, care, and resources," Kemler said.

"The biggest bright spot (of the situation)," said Kemler, "was the fast action taken by HHT staff and

volunteers to move the collection and begin spreading it out to dry. Without that fast response time many more objects would have been in jeopardy.” Holland Museum Interim Director Daryl Fischer echoed this sentiment, and expanded her kudos to include the business and institutions that have offered the Museum assistance.

“We’ve seen our community expand in response to this disaster,” Fischer said. “In addition to unbelievable support from Holland businesses and volunteers we’ve been blessed by the generosity of colleagues and companies throughout West Michigan,” she noted. Fischer extended a special note of thanks to staff and interns at GVSU, the Public Museum of Grand Rapids, and the Gerald R. Ford Museum who “have volunteered countless hours in recovery efforts,” and Robert Grooters Development Company and EPS who have provided space and security for temporary off-site storage of the Museum’s collection. “There’s been an outpouring of generosity in response to our needs,” Fischer said, “and those needs have been great.”

PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD AT: <http://bit.ly/zXv4Z>

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