

RELEASE IN  
PART B5,B6

**From:** Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 27, 2009 10:18 PM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** FW: Daniel Yohannes is from Ethiopia

B5  
B6

**From:** Carpenter, Margaret V.W.  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 27, 2009 7:38 PM  
**To:** 'Cheryl Mills'; Mills, Cheryl D  
**Cc:** Toiv, Nora F  
**Subject:** Daniel Yohannes is from Ethiopia

**The Uncommon Trustee  
 FROM ETHIOPIA TO L.A. WITH \$150 IN HIS POCKET,  
 DANIEL YOHANNES BRINGS A  
 QUIET DETERMINATION TO HIS TRUSTEE ROLE.**

By Leah Arroyo

This article was published in *Museum*, July/August 2008.

**Trustee.** The word brings to mind a venerable patrician of senior years, "trusted" to guide the interests of an organization or individual with wisdom and perspective. Someone with old-boy or -girl connections, decades of expertise and, especially, big bucks—not to mention the ability to pry others away from theirs. Ascot not required, but it couldn't hurt.

In certain ways, Daniel Yohannes of Denver is not your typical museum trustee. At 17, with \$150, he moved from Ethiopia to Los Angeles as an exchange student without knowing a soul. He immediately got a part-time job as a stock boy in a clothing store and went on to support himself through high school, Claremont McKenna College and the MBA program at Pepperdine. He began his banking career as a teller at Security Pacific Bank.

But in other ways, Yohannes is the very portrait of a board member. At 55, the president and CEO of M&R Investments, a firm specializing in real estate, financial institutions and energy. A former vice chairman of U.S. Bancorp. A few years ago he started a bank in San Francisco on the side. His board membership extends from the financial (a Fortune 100 company) and educational (U.C. Denver Business School) to community organizations (the chamber of commerce, the National Jewish Hospital and Research Center, the Boy Scouts Council)—not to mention political service (chairing the transition team of Gov. Bill Ritter, Democrat of Colorado).

And museums, a priority among the board invitations he has accepted. He served on the Smithsonian Institution's national board for six years and is now a trustee of the Denver Art Museum (DAM), where he established the Daniel Yohannes Family African Gallery. "I get a lot of my inspirations intellectually and culturally through art and history, primarily through museums," he says. "So when I was asked to sit on the [DAM] board, it was just a natural fit for me."

For all his success, though, Yohannes hardly gives the impression of a Type-A personality. Courty, soft-spoken, with a melodious accent paying homage to his Ethiopian roots despite his decades in the U.S., he is generous and unhurried with his time in interviews. On the phone, he asks how you are, what you've been up to lately; told that an interviewer just bought her first house, he chats for a few moments about how delightful and meaningful that purchase is. In person, for a conversation at the AAM Annual Meeting in Denver last spring, he walked into a rather dreary underground room in the convention center, suave in a conservative navy suit and warm in his greetings, politely oblivious to the tables cluttered with the conference staff's walkie-talkies, office supplies and assortment of snacks. The photographer got sent to the wrong room and his interviewer had to scurry the length of several football fields to find her? No problem; he'd reserved plenty of time to talk. "Take your time."

And yet you can at times glimpse the calm determination of a man who gets things done and, moreover, fully expects to. Vicki Sterling, the Denver Art Museum's assistant director, says that "what was truly unique about working with [Yohannes] on the African gallery was his ability to bring together people from outside the regular museum donor community and get them interested in the Denver Art Museum." When you ask him how he did this, who these new museophiles were, you can almost hear him shrug over the phone. "Friends of mine, people I knew," he says. "They contributed because I asked them to." He also shrugs off the question of how he fits all his commitments into his schedule: "I think as long as there's a desire to get everything done, it gets done." Asked what he does for fun, he has to think for a moment. "That's a good one. . . . I walk, I play a little golf, do a little bicycling, sightseeing." He also collects art, particularly African works, inspired years ago by his travels, though "only as a hobby." Last but not least, he cherishes spending time with his three children, two of whom live in the area, and was overjoyed to become a grandfather in May ("She's beautiful," he beams).

You walk away from him with an impression of a quietly dynamic man who has more priorities than most of us but can somehow bring extraordinary focus to each in turn. He says he was driven from the very beginning. "It was my decision to come here, not my family's. I've always been a very adventurous person, ever since I was a child, so I made a decision early on that I wanted to make it on my own. I wanted to go to a place that provided that opportunity for someone like myself, an immigrant. I could not find any other place but here in the United States that provided all of that opportunity." Perhaps later generations of his family will be more jaded about the American dream, but Yohannes speaks of it with unembarrassed directness. "For someone like myself, it's much easier to give to the community that has given you so much."

Fortunately, he sees museum leadership as part of that obligation.



PS:   
Margaret

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