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Castor vows to continue fight to save Barnes

By Cheryl Allison

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Meanwhile, above the fray for the moment, the foundation announced a major appointment that is fundamental to its success in a new location in Philadelphia. It named Diana Duncan, a museum professional with a long record of building support for institutions, most recently the Dallas Museum of Art, to a newly created position as senior vice president of external affairs.

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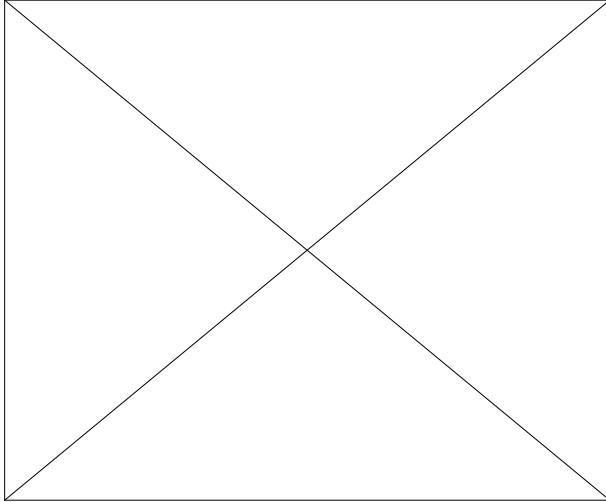
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Although the group has not announced its own decision on an appeal, the Friends group clearly has pinned its hopes for a challenge on the county, which Carluccio still believes made a good case for having a special interest in keeping one of its most important cultural and historic assets within its borders.

On Tuesday, however, Montgomery Commissioner Bruce Castor said commission Chairman James Matthews had apparently made and conveyed that decision on his own. "He never discussed it with me," he said of Matthews, a fellow Republican, with whom he has clashed several times in the five months he has served on the board.

Castor said he had e-mailed Matthews and Commissioner Joseph Hoeffel after reading a newspaper headline about the decision. Hoeffel "said he would discuss it," Castor said. "I have yet to hear from [Matthews]."

Matthews could not immediately be reached for comment Tuesday.

Castor said that, although the recent court action had commenced before he was elected - the county and the Friends filed petitions last fall - he and his fellow commissioners had promised citizens they would fight to keep the Barnes Foundation in Merion.

The former district attorney said he thinks there are legal avenues open to the county and he favors an appeal. "I think there are options. The issue was standing. Judge Ott decided Montgomery County did not have enough of a [special] interest to challenge" the move.

"This is one judge's interpretation of one phrase. Other judges might have a different interpretation," Castor said. He said there are actually "two opportunities" open to the county right now. "I think we should ask [Ott] for a reconsideration, and, failing that, we should appeal."

Time is running out on those options, however. In Orphan's Court, parties have 20 days to file an exception, that is, ask for the judge to reconsider. That deadline timed out this Wednesday, June 4. The time period to file a motion for an appeal is 30 days, which runs out June 14.

In his comments, Hoeffel said he was concerned that, if the county could not mount a

compelling argument, its appeal might be considered frivolous, and a court might award sanctions. But Castor said in his decision, Ott had already found that the petitions were filed in good faith and did not award the sanctions that the Barnes Foundation had requested.

"I see no downside to advancing these ideas," he said of the county's arguments for standing. "We're doing it in-house," using county attorneys, he pointed out. "The public has said we should do everything we can to keep the Barnes, and we [commissioners] all promised we would do that."

On her first day in the office Monday, the Barnes Foundation's new vice president said one of her goals is to "create an awareness campaign" for the Barnes in its new location, that would "make sure the words and perception out in the public are positive," and "that the Barnes Foundation is not always known for the controversy." The events of recent days may make that task a bit more difficult.

Duncan, however, brings to the job more than 23 years of experience with some of the country's leading museums. She began her development career with the Smithsonian Institution, working in the central office of membership and development. From 2000 to 2008, she served as director of development of the Dallas Museum of Art, working with recently retired director Jack Lane to build a senior management team to take the museum to national prominence.

That, she said, was "a two-part process, building the collection and building community engagement."

"I have worked throughout my career in the museum field with unique and wonderful organizations that just spoke to me," she said of her decision to make the move to the Barnes.

"Coming to the Barnes was a matter of falling in love with the collection," Duncan said. Another attraction, certainly, was the opportunity to work with the institution at a "life-changing moment," both for the gallery and for "those of us working together."

Despite recent history, "I think a wonderful trajectory is in front of us," she said.

