From the Manhattan office of the gabbe group, not far from where Andy Warhol’s Factory upended public perceptions of modern art a half century ago, Jim Gabbe pauses to consider many of the same questions raised there.

“My own work is not what you’d call ‘art for art’s sake,’” he says, “but it does aim to understand how people relate to the larger stories unfolding around them. I see myself as someone who can help to start that conversation.”

A spirit of independence defines Gabbe, an accomplished writer, photographer, and video director/producer. In addition to co-founding a marketing and public relations firm with his wife Jill, he also established a financial trading business, profits from which fund his personal documentary-film projects.

“I can follow these ideas and explore the things that interest me because I cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset,” he explains. “You can’t wait for someone to come along and fund your project.”

His latest endeavor, A More—or Less—Perfect Union, turns his camera lens homeward to explore America’s current state of mind.

“The common refrain about our country is that we are inextricably divided into red and blue states, liberal versus conservative,” says Gabbe. “I wanted to test that perception by talking to people of all faiths and backgrounds, and I’m seeing a society that is far less polarized than we think. These conversations reveal a wisdom, intelligence, and compassion that you almost never hear on cable news talk shows. I started this project feeling a little jaded and cynical—and find myself falling in love with the USA all over again.”

Gabbe, who credits Northeastern with cultivating both his artistic and his entrepreneurial talents, has jump-started yet another project: He wants to help students in the College of Arts, Media and Design (CAMD) bring their own creative projects to life. With a gift last fall of $100,000, he and his wife established the James and Jill Gabbe Creative Leadership Scholarship to support exceptional undergraduates whose portfolios and project proposals blend artistic and entrepreneurial abilities with a civic-minded purpose.

“I’m convinced that we can use art to inform and entertain while making a positive contribution to society,” says Gabbe, who hopes his family’s scholarship will help advance Dean Xavier Costa’s vision of CAMD as a breeding ground for leaders in communications and the arts. “I’m pleased to help an aspiring creative leader achieve that.”