



THIRTY YEARS AGO, YOUNG ADULTS WERE FLOWING OUT OF PITTSBURGH AFTER STEEL MILLS CLOSED AND JOBS IN THE INDUSTRY DISAPPEARED. TODAY, THE CURRENT IS REVERSING AS MORE YOUNG PEOPLE ARRIVE IN THE REGION TO SEEK COLLEGE DEGREES AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES PITTSBURGH OFFERS. BY BEN SCHWARTZ WITH REPORTING BY MONA MORARU

Stepping onto Robert Morris University's Moon Township campus can be, as the name suggests, a bit like stepping onto the surface of a different, if not lunar, world. The hallmarks of suburban sprawl—from stretches of cookie-cutter houses with predictably well-manicured lawns to clusters of unremarkable office parks—give way to a landscape dotted by well-built halls and leafy footpaths. Yes, parking lots abound, but the makings of a college hamlet are there among the rolling, grassy hills.

Less than 20 miles away in Pittsburgh's Downtown, Point Park University is slowly but efficiently transforming the city streets surrounding it into a college campus. The university is bordered by the bustling restaurants and shops of Market Square on one side and the Monongahela River on another. Stately buildings are adorned with bright-colored street banners to designate that they belong to Point Park. The only open space, so far, is a new corner parklet, a kind of down payment on the school's vision of an urban "academic village." The soul of the university, however, is about three miles away at the Pittsburgh Playhouse that is in the neighborhood of Oakland—for now. Point Park has plans to move the Playhouse to a new theater space Downtown, where it will serve as a world-class teaching and performance venue.

The two schools, which both have received Heinz Endowments support for many years, are different in some ways, but they reflect the broadening of educational opportunities in the Pittsburgh region over the past 30 years. Before the 1980s, many young adults streamed into the steel mills after graduating from high school. It was a steady job that could provide a good living and a decent pension. But when the industry folded, employment options dried up, and a number of young people left the area. Those who stayed had to seek new skills and training. Moving forward to help meet this need were a range of educational institutions, with Robert Morris and Point Park among those that flourished.

Both institutions began as junior colleges in the early 1960s and became four-year colleges later in the decade. They expanded into universities about

a dozen years ago and emerged from under the shadows of the region's goliaths of higher education, Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh.

"[Robert Morris] is no longer a school that primarily attracts 'first-generation' college students—it's a university of choice," says President Gregory Dell'Omo. "Here you get a strong liberal arts component as part of your core, but also a very professional, applied approach [to education]. It's a holistic experience."

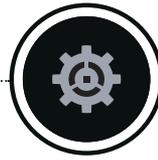
At the same time, both universities have carved out niches in certain fields for which they have become well-known in the region and beyond.

"I think Point Park and Pittsburgh are a reflection of each other, and the arts are central to Pittsburgh, so I think they are central to Point Park," explains Ronald Allan-Lindblom, vice president and



## ROBERT MORRIS UNIVERSITY

Students in Robert Morris University's School of Nursing and Health Sciences practice their clinical skills in a medical simulation laboratory. The computer-controlled mannequins respond like human patients. Robert Morris launched its nursing programs in 2003 with 18 students; today nearly 800 are enrolled in the nursing school.



artistic director of the Conservatory of Performing Arts and Pittsburgh Playhouse.

Over the past three decades, enrollments at both Robert Morris and Point Park have grown steadily with expanded graduate school offerings and increases in the number of full-time students. Of the 3,841 students enrolled at Point Park last year, 2,801 were full-time students, nearly triple the number attending part-time and more than double the 1,098 full-time students enrolled in 1984. While comparable enrollment figures from 1984 weren't readily available at Robert Morris, its 5,413 students include 2,070 living on campus compared to 950 who did so in 1984. It's not an exact indicator of the full-time enrollment increase since some full-time students have always lived off-campus. But the fact that so many more students are now living on campus reflects substantial growth in the number of full-time students and those coming to Robert Morris from outside the region, asserts university spokesman Jonathan Potts.

The Endowments has awarded grants of more than \$7.2 million to Point Park and \$3.2 million to Robert Morris over the past 20 years in support of their vision and growth. When Point Park's academic village plan was unveiled six years ago, for example, Endowments Chairman Teresa Heinz commended it as weaving the school's "presence into the Downtown fabric in a very exciting way. It expands considerably the opportunity for Point Park students to engage their academic programs in a vibrant urban setting."

In 2012, Robert Morris became home to Uzuri Think Tank, an Endowments-supported research center dedicated to identifying the factors shared by successful African American men and developing models of success for others to follow. Education Program Director Stan Thompson describes one of Robert Morris' strengths as offering students a variety of career-preparation options, "creating partnerships with nonprofits and internship opportunities where students can find a niche in its eclectic culture and enthusiastically celebrate Pittsburgh's rebirth."





And for some students, the schools' locations as well as their academic offerings are incentives for enrolling.

"I'm from an hour north of Buffalo, the most rural situation, so I was looking for a change of pace," says junior Sara Payne, 20, a journalism and global cultural studies double major from Buffalo, N.Y. "Point Park was Downtown, and that's what I wanted—a complete opposite lifestyle from what I was used to."

Pittsburgh furnishes all the opportunities of a big city, Payne says, yet has a small-town feel. "And Downtown is great because it's changing," she adds. "I'm excited to see the changes and all the construction that's going on."

Sophomore Nicolette Adamson wasn't sure if she wanted to spend her college years on an urban campus, even though her Monroeville, Pa., home is only about 20 minutes from Downtown Pittsburgh.

"I love the city, but didn't think I would like actually living in the city," explains the 19-year-old actuarial science major. "That's why I ended up falling in love with Robert Morris. It's such a nice rural community, but you're so close to Downtown... After learning about RMU's actuarial science program—most schools don't even have it as a major—that ended up being the deciding factor."

Pittsburgh's blue-collar roots also still have an appeal, even for young people pursuing higher education.

"I really wanted to stay in Pittsburgh... I think there's a lot of pride here," says Point Park senior Andrew Goldstein, 21, a journalism major who grew up in the area. "People from Pittsburgh are ready to dig into the trenches and go to work, like the lunch-pail crew they had going into the steel mills. I know pretty much everyone who's a third- or fourth-generation Pittsburgher had at least one, and probably more, family members working in the steel mills. I know I have. And we kind of take that mentality into whatever it is that we do." *h*

Point Park University's Conservatory Theatre Company enables students to put their talent on display in major productions such as "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson." The rock musical provides a modern update of the founding of the Democratic Party, Jackson's life, and his relationship with his wife, Rachel. The theater company is one of four in Point Park's Conservatory of Performing Arts. The university has two other student groups, the Conservatory Dance Company and Playhouse Jr., and The REP, a professional theater company. All four are housed in the Pittsburgh Playhouse, Point Park's performing arts center.



