



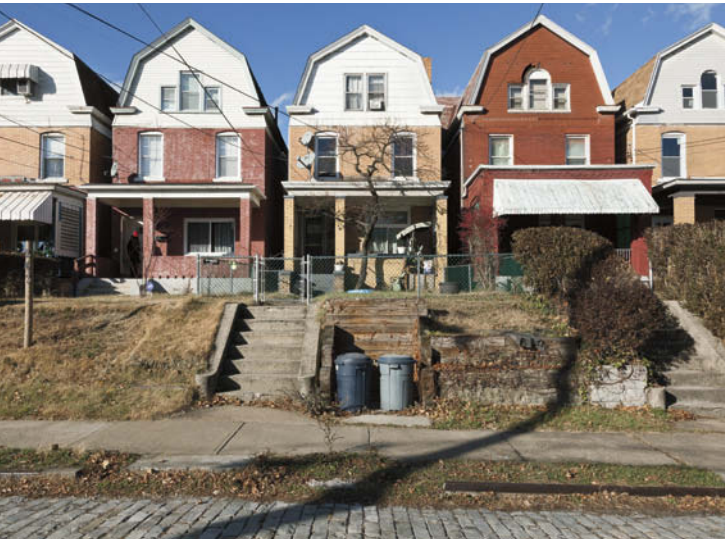
A nonprofit partnership supported by The Heinz Endowments is helping some Hazelwood residents like Maurice Cole, left, buy their first homes. The project also is stabilizing the neighborhood for future generations such as, from left to right, Juell, Creasure and Icesis Jones, whom Cole knows through youth programs he works with at their school and at the Center of Life community empowerment organization.



REVITALIZATION OF PITTSBURGH'S HAZELWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD ISN'T HAPPENING OVERNIGHT, BUT WITH THE SUPPORT OF LOCAL PHILANTHROPIES AND NONPROFITS, RESIDENTS HAVE PURSUED IMPROVEMENTS THAT ARE VISIBLE, CONSISTENT AND INDICATIVE OF A BRIGHTER FUTURE. BY JEFFERY FRASER

RIVERTOWN REBIRTH

MAURICE COLE CAN
TESTIFY TO THE NEW DAY
DAWNING IN HAZELWOOD,
WHERE THE LOSS OF THE LOCAL



Tom Johnson

STEEL MILLS
FUELED DECADES
OF DECLINE
THAT TESTED
THE RESILIENCE

OF THE RESIDENTS WHO
REMAINED IN THE PITTSBURGH
NEIGHBORHOOD.

Maurice Cole's home,
above center, sits cozily
among other similarly
designed houses
on Trowbridge Street
in Hazelwood.

A utilitarian three-story brick house on Trowbridge Street that stood vacant for four years is now his—gutted, rehabbed from carpet to ceiling and priced to suit his moderate income by a collaboration of nonprofits backed by city and private foundation dollars.

“It’s a wonderful feeling to be able to stay in the community where you were born and raised,” says Cole, 44, walking a friend through the first home he’s ever owned as finishing touches are applied to the interior renovations. “I know everybody on this street.”

Last June, the Carnegie Library Hazelwood branch—rescued from closing only a few years earlier—opened in an abandoned church that’s been renovated and repurposed as a neighborhood community center, which also houses new family support and child care training programs.

In August, the charter school Propel Hazelwood welcomed its first students, bringing an end to a stubborn campaign for a neighborhood school waged by parents and community leaders since 2006, when the last public school in Hazelwood was closed.

The community also is coming together in the face of tragedy. On Oct. 13, 22-year-old Marcus Critten was shot and killed in neighboring Glen Hazel. It was the first homicide committed in two years, but the memory of more violent days in the neighborhoods is still fresh. Some 75 people rallied in a cold rain the following night to discuss how to prevent a resurgence of the violence. A week later, they staged a “walk for peace” through the streets.

“Instead of sitting at home saying, ‘Here we go again,’ they came out. I’ve never seen people this committed,” says Kristine DiPietro, who has lived all of her 67 years in Hazelwood. “I think it’s because they see all of these changes happening.”

Hazelwood residents and community organizations that refused to allow the neighborhood to break under years of economic and social distress are beginning to see the payoff. Prospects of regaining economic opportunities long absent improved when four local foundations set out to transform a brownfield separating the neighborhood from the Monongahela River into a 21st-century mixed-use community. And a special initiative of The Heinz Endowments to position the

neighborhood to seize those opportunities is providing a level of resources, financial and otherwise, that is greater than any they’ve had available to support their work in the past.

In 2002, the Endowments and the Richard King Mellon, Claude Worthington Benedum and McCune foundations bought the 178-acre site of Hazelwood’s abandoned steel and coke works with the idea of creating a sustainable mix of office space, light industry, residential housing, parks and trails that would set new standards for urban brownfield development. Their vision of the project known as Almono, an acronym for the city’s three rivers, includes integrating it with the existing neighborhood—something residents insisted on from the onset.

“We’ve worked hard to make sure the foundations know that we want this to be seamless, that we don’t want walls around it. It’s important that it becomes one neighborhood,” says DiPietro, whose volunteer work on hunger, community development and other local issues dates back several decades.

In response, the Endowments chose Hazelwood as the focus of its first place-based initiative, which involves all of its grant-making programs in supporting the neighborhood’s rejuvenation and finding ways for local residents and businesses to benefit from the Almono development and not be displaced by it.

“The exciting part of Hazelwood is that we can plan for that environment to unfold,” says Rob Stephany, director of the Endowments’ Community & Economic Development Program.

Hazelwood’s prosperity has long been influenced by what transpired on that brownfield. In 1960, when the steel and coke mills were at their peak, some 13,000 people and 200 businesses called Hazelwood home. In the 1980s, the steel industry collapsed, and the decline of the neighborhood, already thinned by migration to the suburbs, accelerated.

When the last mill closed in 1998, only 6,000 residents remained in Hazelwood. By 2010, only 4,317 were left. Businesses dwindled to a handful. The incomes of nearly 24 percent of the neighborhood fell below federal poverty thresholds. The housing market was dismal.

Two years ago, the Endowments staff set out to explore a partnership with the neighborhood around revitalization. They assembled a local advisory board and recruited those known for



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HAPPENING IN HAZELWOOD
Revitalization efforts in Hazelwood are fueled by residents' energy and public-private investment that's apparent by the range of activity in the neighborhood. Here are a few scenes that capture community change in progress.



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1. First day of school at Propel Hazelwood charter school
 2. Hazelwood residents at a community meeting
 3. Setup of a farm stand that is bringing fresh food to the neighborhood
 4. Thursday Night Live summer performances featuring youth in Center of Life programs
 5. Grand opening of the Carnegie Library of Hazelwood and community center
 6. Increased youth employment exemplified by participants in the Student Conservation Association program
 7. Grand opening of the Hazelwood Family Support Center
 8. Plans for development of the Almono site
 9. Storymobile for the Hazelwood community
 10. Community Light Up Night parade



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their work to improve Hazelwood, beginning with the Rev. Tim Smith, executive director of the nonprofit Center of Life, which is highly regarded in the neighborhood. The advisors were anything but shy, rejecting the Endowments' suggestion that the first order of business be a comprehensive community plan.

"The neighborhood beat us over the head and reminded us that they've had dozens of studies done over the last 10 years that never resulted in demonstrative change or improved people's lives or opportunities," says Eric Stoller, the Endowments' Community & Economic Development program officer who also keeps an office in Hazelwood. "Before we could get people to participate in something like that, there first had to be some hope that this was going to be different."

They met over the course of a year to identify issues that had long been neighborhood priorities and work out strategies to address them. The Endowments began investing in the neighborhood with grants totaling more than \$5 million in 2012 and 2013 alone.

One priority was the Carnegie Library Hazelwood branch. Neighborhood residents drew a line in the sand when the library board announced in 2011 that the branch would be closed due to systemwide deficits. To save the library, people petitioned, rallied, lobbied and collaborated with other communities whose branches faced a similar fate. For Hazelwood residents, it was about more than saving the books, CDs and computers that their tiny library above a beer store offered.

"When you've lost schools, lost population, lost good housing stock, had your bus service cut and then your library is closed, to many in the community that would've been seen as the final nail in the coffin," says James Richter, executive director of the Hazelwood Initiative, the local community development corporation. "It says you're not valued, that there are other stronger communities worthy of more interest. That's the tide we're trying to change."

Their efforts were rewarded when city voters approved a 0.25-mill real estate tax to support the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, rescuing the Hazelwood branch and others from elimination.

When the neighborhood library moved into the new Hazelwood Community Center in June, it settled into the 7,000-square-foot first floor of the once-vacant building. Library membership has soared. Now twice the size of the

previous branch, it offers 1,800 CDs, books, magazines and DVDs; computers and Wi-Fi; a teen space and a separate children's area; a community meeting room; and a steel mural of animals and birds in the trees of "Hazel Woods" by West Homestead artist David Lewis.

In August, an outdoor concert at the library featuring young neighborhood jazz musicians drew a crowd large enough to overwhelm the library plaza and to move future concerts to a parking lot to accommodate the unexpected popularity.

"People came from all over. It was crazy," says Mary Ann McHarg, the library branch manager. "And it was fun."

The Endowments worked with the nonprofit ACTION-Housing to buy the former church, awarding more than \$1.9 million to transform it into a community center that is the region's first commercial building constructed to Passive House standards, which require exceptional energy efficiency. The center also is seen as an anchor to a revitalized Second Avenue because it is strategically located in the heart of the neighborhood within sight of the roughly graded plains of Almono, where new neighbors will someday live and work.

Several blocks to the east, the former Burgwin Elementary School is alive with children after sitting quiet and empty for eight years. It's a reversal of fortune for a community whose longing for a school was apparent when LaKeisha George, principal of what is now Propel Hazelwood charter school, met neighborhood parents for the first time this summer.

"Parents and grandparents would say they used to go to school here, and they wanted the same thing for their children and grandchildren," she recalls. "They wanted a place in the community where children can learn, a place where learning is valued. They wanted to be a part of the school. And not having a school made it seem like the community isn't important."

Propel Hazelwood opened in August with a near-capacity 197 students in grades K-4. Securing a building was not the stumbling block it had been in previous attempts to bring a charter school to the neighborhood. The Hazelwood Initiative bought the Burgwin school with a grant from the Endowments and other funding partners, including the DSF Charitable Foundation. As part of an arrangement to preserve the school as a local asset, Propel's rent payments are split between covering the costs of building maintenance and supporting a community development fund created to help finance neighborhood projects.



Sean Means

It takes a village to rejuvenate a community, and investment in Hazelwood has included participation by veterans like Joel Laudenslager, who along with other members of The Mission Continues Pittsburgh Service Platoon volunteered with Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh to rehabilitate an abandoned four-story house in the neighborhood.

“WHEN YOU HAVE A SOLID NEIGHBORHOOD AND ALL OF A SUDDEN HOUSES BECOME VACANT, TWO THINGS HAPPEN: EQUITY DROPS WHEN MORE THAN TWO HOUSES ON THE STREET GO VACANT, AND CRIME GOES UP.”

Steve Hellner-Burris, executive director, Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh

Providing additional educational opportunities in the neighborhood is a new Hazelwood-based Reading is FUNDamental Storymobile, which was unveiled in October. Supported by another Endowments grant, the library-on-wheels not only makes more books available to children and families, but also allows RIF Pittsburgh to offer supplemental resources and activities to early childhood centers and classrooms, after-school programs and public housing communities.

Another anchor of learning in the community is Center of Life, which has been finding creative ways to engage children in education for longer than a decade as part of its mission to empower local residents and the neighborhood.

Its popular Crossover program, for example, requires children playing in its sports leagues to participate in the organization’s Fusion tutoring initiative, where tutors assist with homework and parents learn how to help students with their schoolwork at home. As part of The KRUNK Movement,

students express themselves through jazz, hip-hop, dance, recording engineering and visual arts while running the program as a production company and learning some lessons in business along the way. The Center of Life Jazz Band, born through the music program, took second place at the Monterey Jazz Festival Next Generation competition in 2011 and then returned the following year to take first place, earning a standing ovation from the California audience for its performance.

Because of this track record, Center of Life was awarded a three-year, \$1.35 million grant from the Endowments in 2012 to expand its work. But, Smith mentions another measure of success that underscores the conditions under which many of the children in these programs grow up and manage to thrive.

“We haven’t had one kid who’s been in our music and arts program get killed,” he says.

Back at the yellow brick house on Trowbridge Street, Cole marks his entrée into the ranks of Pittsburgh homeowners. For the nonprofit partnership that made the sale possible, his experience represents a small but important step in a strategy to help heal Hazelwood’s dysfunctional housing market.

In 2010, nearly one in five houses in the neighborhood stood vacant, the Trowbridge three-story being one of them. The median sale price of a home had fallen to \$5,700, and 41 percent of taxable property was tax-delinquent—twice the citywide average.

Cole's house was the first put on the market under a "rehab to resale" program that is part of a market-stabilization strategy supported by the Endowments to improve housing stock and curb vacancy. With help from the foundation funds, Hazelwood Initiative buys vacant houses, and the home improvement nonprofit Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh rehabilitates them. The organizations recover their costs through the proceeds of sales and second mortgages provided by the city Urban Redevelopment Authority, and income-eligible buyers can avoid paying those mortgages by living in the house for at least five years.

"When you have a solid neighborhood and all of a sudden houses become vacant, two things happen: Equity drops when more than two houses on the street go vacant, and crime goes up," says Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh Executive Director Steve Hellner-Burris.

Rebuilding Together also is doing smaller-scale renovations on owner-occupied houses, ranging from something as simple as patching or painting to replacing a roof or siding on a house. Such work has been done on 55 Hazelwood houses in the past 18 months.

"We see it as a way to keep their value and stabilize these streets so other houses don't go vacant," Hellner-Burris says.

In addition to the community advantages, the initiative helps support the financial stability of individuals who participate in some fashion. Existing and new homeowners can benefit from their increased housing values. A small crew of Hazelwood residents who do much of the work are part of an on-the-job training program run by Rebuilding Together, where they earn an hourly wage and are taught carpentry and other skills. Two of the eight men have already landed jobs elsewhere with skills learned last summer.

Sixty-seven-year-old DiPietro is looking forward to even more improvements in the only neighborhood she has known. She remembers Hazelwood's mills, the "terrible sulfur smell" that neighbors associated with jobs, and a robust business district that included two movie theaters. She watched those businesses leave and witnessed the corrosive effect of population loss and prolonged disinvestment. And she's convinced the dark clouds are finally lifting.

"I've seen Hazelwood in its heyday and its down days," she says. "Now, I'm seeing its resurgence." *h*

It's early fall, and Hazelwood's first family support center will not open to the public for another two weeks. But already 4-year-old Kariye is looking forward to the days he will visit it with his mother. She is one of the parents who was asked to offer ideas to help shape the program and choose a provider to run it.

"He's been smiling from ear to ear ever since we started coming here," says Zoie Pitzarella as her son pops his head into the doorway, beaming, as if on cue.

The family support center opened in late October in the new Hazelwood Community Center, occupying 2,900 square feet on the first level of what had been a vacant church on Second Avenue in the heart of the neighborhood. It shares that part of the building with The Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children's latest Early Learning Hub, which supports parents, early childhood educators and other caregivers. The neighborhood Carnegie Library occupies the second floor of the center.

Both the community center and the family support center are part of a Heinz Endowments place-based initiative that includes all of its program areas in efforts to strengthen the neighborhood and empower those who live there. The Endowments created the initiative three years ago to better position the existing Hazelwood neighborhood to gain from the development of an expansive brownfield in the community center's backyard that the Endowments and three other foundations bought with designs of turning it into a 21st-century mixed-use community.

Early work involved engaging residents in the process of identifying their most pressing needs, as well as strategies to address them. Family support emerged as one of the strategies mentioned by a group of residents who had been asked to discuss issues affecting children and families.

"Top on the list of needs were supports for families and a place where families could go and get help with parenting skills and their child's development," says Marge Petruska, senior director of the Endowments' Children, Youth & Families Program. "That just fit the role that family support centers play in communities."

The Endowments helped introduce the concept of family support centers to Allegheny County over 20 years ago. Today, more than two dozen centers operate in county neighborhoods. Each offers services and activities that promote the healthy development of young children, stable families and effective parenting. One distinguishing characteristic of the centers is their reliance on the parents themselves to tailor programs to suit their community.

Studies suggest that family centers in Allegheny County and elsewhere are both popular and effective in strengthening parents and families in ways important to the outcomes of children, particularly those growing up in low-income homes.

In Allegheny County, more than 3,400 families with 5,600 children are enrolled in family support, and most of those families have household incomes below the federal poverty line. Nearly 60 percent of the families have participated in the programs for at least two years.

WE ARE FAMILY:

HAZELWOOD FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER HELPS TO CHANGE A COMMUNITY

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services has long embraced the concept of family support centers and commits about \$8 million to the program each year. "It's one of the few programs that really empowers parents," says Director Marc Cherna. "They drive the program, choose what they want and have a real voice in what happens. They also recruit their peers, and that's critical.

"It's often difficult to get people to come in for services," Cherna adds. "And people who are the most isolated are the toughest. The best way to get them in is to have their neighbors recruit them. That's what happens in family support. Families get the support they need and don't end up in the human services system because of that."

Among the indicators of the programs' effectiveness: Some 98 percent of children enrolled in county family centers start kindergarten on time, and the immunizations of 96 percent of the children are up to date. A recent survey also suggests that family support markedly improves parents' understanding of how to get help when they need it, and boosts confidence in their ability to meet their family's needs with the resources they have. And parents give family support centers high marks for improving their parenting skills, reducing their stress and helping to achieve goals set for their families and themselves.

In Hazelwood, nearly one in four households live in poverty and another 23 percent are "near poor," with incomes of no more than twice the federal poverty level. Some 30 percent of all households have children, and 61 percent of those families are headed by single mothers.

A panel of Hazelwood parents was organized by the Endowments to help establish the neighborhood family support center. Part of their job was to choose an agency to run the program. Through a process of interviews with applicants and visits to their family centers, they selected the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, largely based on its record and reputation earned while operating the community's Head Start and Early Head Start programs for decades.

A grant awarded by the Endowments helped start the family support center and covers expenses to operate it for the first two years, after which the Allegheny County Department of Human Services picks up the operating costs. "It's a wonderful model of a public-private partnership," Petruska says.

For the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, the new family center offers an opportunity to reach a broader population of local families in need.

"There are many people in Hazelwood who are just above the poverty line whose children can't get into Head Start because of that," says Debbie Gallagher, who oversees the family center and the nonprofit's Head Start programs in the neighborhood. "With family support, we can serve anyone in the greater Hazelwood community who has a young child, and we aren't going to ask about their income."



Annie O'Neill

Based on parents' suggestions, the center will have three family support specialists on staff, giving it the capacity to provide in-home services to as many as 75 families to address issues such as child development, nutrition and parent-child interaction. Other services and activities that could emerge include parenting education, assistance for family members seeking a driver's license or applying for a job, or a support group for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

The Hazelwood center also is designed and equipped to accommodate learning and fun. With its turquoise-and-gold color scheme, the space contains shelves of books, games and craft supplies; a collection of toys; and a built-in water table where children can create waterfalls and sail toy boats.

"We want our kids to be safe and have goals and dreams," says Chelsea Pitzarella, 23, who lives a few blocks from the center and is a stay-at-home mother to her 2-year-old daughter, Chanel. "And everyone wants their kids to go to college."

Like her identical twin, Zoie, Chelsea Pitzarella served as one of the parent advisors to the family center. "I think the center will help put it in [the children's] heads that... they can be what they want to be."

Hazelwood's revitalization has included a focus on children and families, and the new neighborhood Family Support Center is central to that effort. From left to right, Tayler Webster, Danielle Gill, Debbie Gallagher, Maharia Lane and Tillie Figlar-Quinlan help cut the ribbon during the center's grand opening in October. Standing behind Tillie are Sherry Hoover and Greg Quinlan.

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Chelsea Pitzarella, Hazelwood parent