

SPRING 2002



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The Magazine of The Heinz Endowments

## Teach Me!

Lessons from Pittsburgh's "noble bet" in early learning.

INSIDE: ECI's Long Reach | Going Wireless

# inside

Founded more than four decades apart, the Howard Heinz Endowment, established in 1941, and the Vira I. Heinz Endowment, established in 1986, are the products of a deep family commitment to community and the common good that began with H. J. Heinz and continues to this day.

The Heinz Endowments is based in Pittsburgh, where we use our region as a laboratory for the development of solutions to challenges that are national in scope. Although the majority of our giving is concentrated within southwestern Pennsylvania, we work wherever necessary, including statewide and nationally, to fulfill our mission. That mission is to help our region thrive as a whole community — economically, ecologically, educationally and culturally — while advancing the state of knowledge and practice in the fields in which we work.

Our fields of emphasis include philanthropy in general and the disciplines represented by our grant-making programs: Arts & Culture; Children, Youth & Families; Economic Opportunity; Education; and the Environment. These five programs work together on behalf of three shared organizational goals: enabling southwestern Pennsylvania to embrace and realize a vision of itself as a premier place both to live and to work; making the region a center of quality learning and educational opportunity; and making diversity and inclusion defining elements of the region's character.

**h magazine** is a publication of The Heinz Endowments. At the Endowments, we are committed to promoting learning in philanthropy and in the specific fields represented by our grantmaking programs. As an expression of that commitment, this publication is intended to share information about significant lessons and insights we are deriving from our work.

**Editorial Team** Linda Braund, Nancy Grejda, Maxwell King, Maureen Marinelli, Grant Oliphant, Douglas Root. *Design:* Landesberg Design Associates

**About the Cover** Curiosity gets the better of 3-year-old Taylor Allen as photographer Annie O'Neill focuses in on life at the Hosanna House early childhood learning center in Wilksburg. The community center is one of two organizations funded to carry on the work of The Heinz Endowments—funded Early Childhood Initiative.

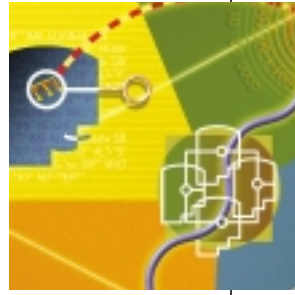
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### Down to the Wire

In Pittsburgh, nonprofits are helping lead the charge to create a more wired community. Their goal? To close the digital divide, even if they have to get rid of the wires to do it.



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### Pittsburgh's "Noble Bet"

One of the most impressive coalitions of community leaders ever assembled lost its battle to give thousands of needy children access to top-quality, early-education services. But two independent studies show how it still may win the war.



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### Early Childhood Learning: The National Scene

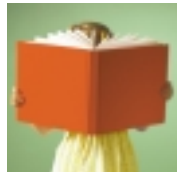
Lessons from Allegheny County's Early Childhood Initiative are guiding early-learning programs around the nation.



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# letters

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## **9 Mile Run (Fall 2001)**

Your Nine Mile Run piece is a wonderful tribute to a community that “gets it” about teamwork and environmental restoration. But two participants were not characterized fairly.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania gave the whole project its start with the Industrial Site Recycling Act, which Mayor Murphy used with such gusto at this and many other sites. This Act, and its rapid and expansive implementation in Pennsylvania, had led the nation. (President Bush signed his Superfund Reform Bill at Pennsylvania’s Site #1,000 in early 2002 in Conshohocken, Pa., and the campaign promise that gave rise to it was made at the US Gypsum plant—once a slag heap—in Aliquippa, Pa., in June of 2000.) Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection staff were intimately involved with many of Pittsburgh’s brownfield sites, and still are. The peripheral mention of Growing Greener money, and no mention of Department of Community Affairs money, is unfortunate in the way it misses the major change in the legal situation and subsequent regulatory climate in our state.

As for the US Environmental Protection Agency, Carol Browner was right—the site makes a good TV studio to tout a policy initiative, even a bad one. But on substance, EPA was actively hostile to real Superfund

reform for eight years, and impeded the kind of legislation in many states that would have had the results we are so proud of in our own. The EPA brownfield grant program was, and remains, little more than pork. It will clean up brownfields as effectively as the Great Society cleaned up poverty.

### **James M. Seif**

Vice President, Corporate Services  
PPL Services Corp.

*Mr. Seif was Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection from January 1995 to March 2001*

## **Without Sanctuary (Winter 2002)**

This past October I took several of my Greater Latrobe Senior High School students to the *Without Sanctuary—Lynching Photography in America* exhibit at The Andy Warhol Museum. As a result of our visit, Matt Mayger, one of my sophomore English students, was featured in your last issue of *h* magazine. During our field trip, Matt discovered a photograph that depicted his great grandfather, a former grand wizard in the Ku Klux Klan. His exposure to the photograph and subsequently to a bit of family history has had a profound effect on him. His willingness to share his experience has, in turn, opened his classmates’ minds to the effects of racism. When I read Jim Davidson’s article to my students and showed them the vivid photographs, they

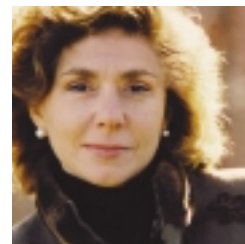
were all captivated, even those who seemed uninterested at first. My students were impressed because of the publicity, but they also became acutely aware of the power of the exhibit. And so it seems that through Davidson’s words Matt’s experience has perhaps inspired many more people to reevaluate the way they look at race relations in our country.

When Matt showed the article to his family, his father’s initial reaction was unfavorable. Although his father had given Matt permission to talk with a journalist about his ancestors, I’m sure that this public confrontation with his family history was met with a certain level of embarrassment. However, after reading the article, his perspective changed. Davidson’s words moved him so that he was able to tell Matt that he was proud of his son. The article was a true testament to Matt’s family’s ability to break the cycle of racism that plagues many American families. Similarly, Matt’s candor and courage is a true testament of hope for future generations.

### **Allison Duda**

Teacher  
Greater Latrobe Senior High School

**Comments:** The staff of *h* magazine and The Heinz Endowments welcome your comments. All print and email letters must include an address with daytime and evening phone numbers. We reserve the right to edit any submission for clarity and space. Published material also will be posted on The Heinz Endowments’ website, which offers current and back issues of the magazine.



# To our readers

**W**e devote much of this issue to examining the fate and lessons of Allegheny County's ambitious Early Childhood Initiative. For me, the most fundamental lesson is clear: It is time for our home state of Pennsylvania to stop being one of the nation's laggards on early learning and finally embrace responsibility for nurturing its neediest young minds.

All of us who supported the Early Childhood Initiative knew it might fall short. The goal—to make Allegheny County the first community in the country to give all its low-income, preschool-aged children broad access to high-quality learning programs—was unprecedented. Our model was untested, and securing state funding was bound to be tough in Pennsylvania, which, appallingly, is one of only nine states in the country that still doesn't fund preschool or Head Start.

But we had done our homework and received early indications from state government leaders that they would consider funding for the sort of program we were proposing. And supporters of the Initiative included major business and political leaders who believed they could persuade the governor that improved early-education policies were critical to Pennsylvania's economic future.

Still, we were right to brace ourselves against the risks. The program didn't achieve its aggressive enrollment and cost goals, and the state never did come through with even a substantive discussion on funding, let alone actual money. In late 2000, the program had to be scaled back to a demonstration project.

There the story might have ended, as is often the case when ambitious dreams go unrealized. But the Endowments had helped build a commitment to research and learning into the Initiative from its inception. When the program was launched in 1996, we had provided major funding for a multi-year, scientific study by Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of the program's impact on children.

When the Initiative foundered four years later, we believed there needed to be an equivalent commitment to understanding why. Experience has taught us that, in any effort to move social policy on a complex issue like this, progress comes hard. And, as in so many other areas of life, it is the product of people and institutions willing to take risks and learn from them. With that as our goal, we commissioned an in-depth evaluation by RAND Corporation.

The results of both studies are shared here. The RAND report offers a frank and detailed analysis of flaws in the Initiative's design and implementation. The Children's Hospital study offers evidence that surprised even its own researchers about the amazing difference that high-quality, early-learning programs can make in preparing children for school.

Taken together, these studies tell us how we can be smarter in promoting early-learning programs, but also that we are absolutely right to make that our focus. As you will read, the lessons we uncovered are already being applied in our work around Pennsylvania, and by other innovators in early-learning initiatives in other states around the country.

One of those lessons is the importance of persuading policy-makers to take this issue seriously and to give it the support and attention it deserves. A 1996 study commissioned for the Early Childhood Initiative calculated that the price tag of social failure—what it called the “rotten outcomes” of allowing disadvantaged children to be left behind—easily reaches \$1 billion a year in Allegheny County alone. One of those “rotten outcomes” is the surge in America's prison population, which increased by more than a third in the last decade.

Does Pennsylvania, whose prisons are also bulging, have an interest in supporting early learning? Does investing in children to give them a good start in life make more sense than trying to “fix” them or the problems they cause later? Does it make any sense at all that, over the past six years, Pennsylvania's corrections budget has jumped 12 percent while its education budget has dropped more than 4 percent? I'd encourage you to read the articles in this issue and then, as they like to quip in the halls of government, “you do the math.”

The Early Childhood Initiative was imperfect; bold, new ideas often are. Certainly it would have been easier for our community to heed the advice of a French bureaucrat the historian Daniel Boorstin once met, whose sign over his desk read, “Never be the first to try anything.” That's the safe course. No one was ever criticized for directing traffic on a trail someone else has blazed.

But by going first, our community made a difference. RAND's report calls the Initiative a “noble bet” and stresses that its “failure to achieve its greatest ambitions should not obscure the positive aspects of its legacy.” The program helped real children, created quality early-learning programs in several communities that previously had none, and increased public awareness of the importance of quality in early care and education.

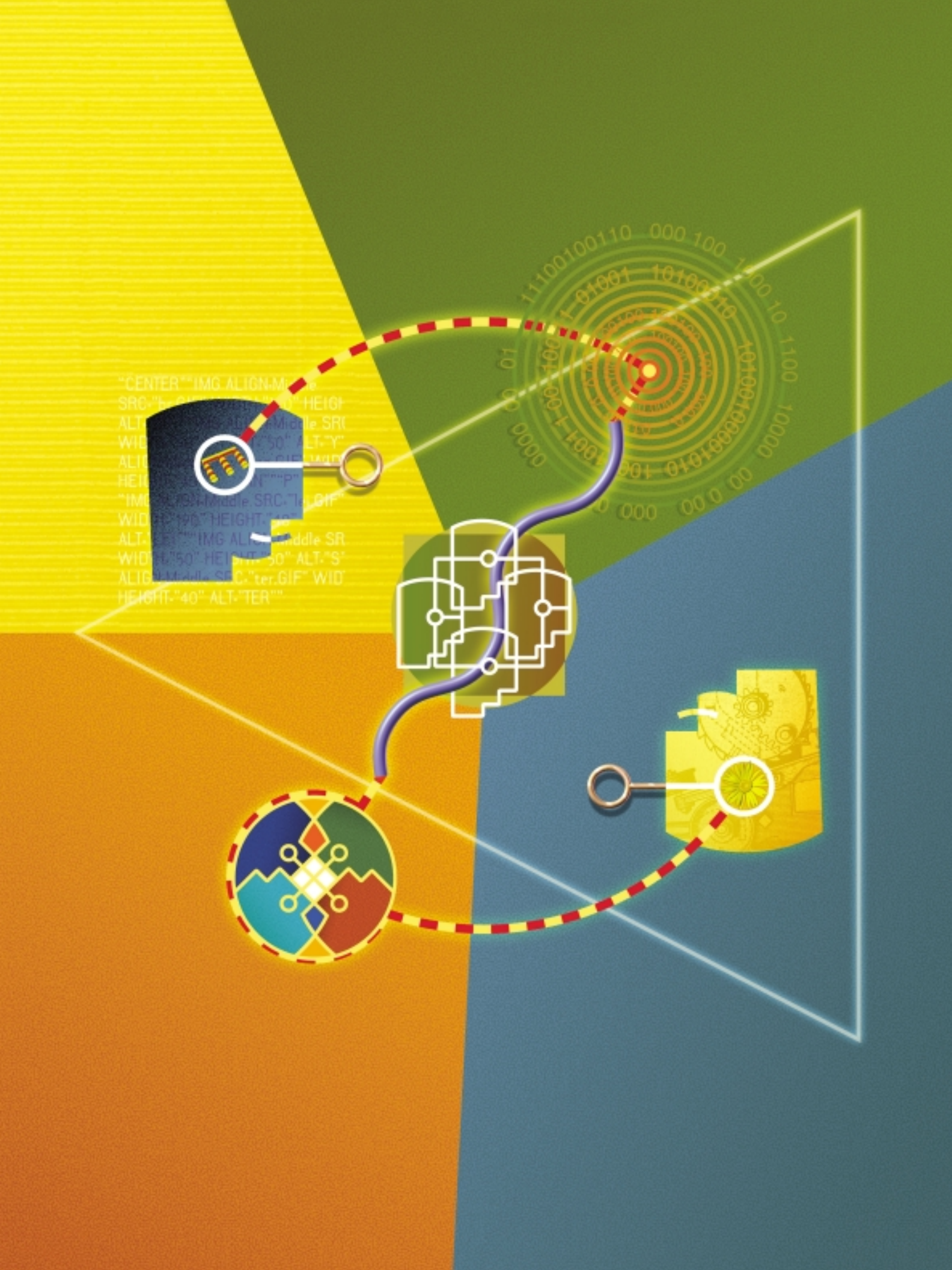
Those are laudable accomplishments, and they should cause our community to redouble its efforts, just as they are inspiring other communities to pick up where Allegheny County left off. The trail we helped blaze with the Early Childhood Initiative is too important for us to abandon now. But we cannot go it alone. Now more than ever, Pennsylvania must open its eyes to the opportunity that early learning represents, for the future of its children and of the Commonwealth itself. *b*

DOWN TO THE

Nonprofits help lead the charge to create a more wired Pittsburgh

wire

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“I didn’t know a regular computer could do all the things I’m learning about here, especially in video production.”

**Alyson Blackburn** Student





The Rev. Rae Hodge of First Allegheny Presbyterian Church on Pittsburgh's North Side plays a more secular role as a teacher-mentor to high school student Alyson Blackburn in a video filmmaking class at Community House. The youth activity center's high-speed Internet access and digital cameras are beyond the reach of most household budgets.

*By David Friel*  
*Photography by Steve Mellon*

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**A**lyson Blackburn focuses intently on her computer screen as she prepares to add her voice to the audio track for a short movie in which she is producer, director, technician and actor. "Quiet on the set!" she yells before hitting the record button. The director's lingo immediately quiets chattering students working in the multi-media center of Community House, a nonprofit activity center for young people, especially those from struggling neighborhoods on Pittsburgh's North Side.

A year ago, the 16-year-old from Perry Traditional Academy had trouble getting access to anything more than a basic computer. But on this Wednesday night in February, after a full school day and dinner at home, Blackburn is wired up in the multi-media room, surrounded by Apple iMac computers fitted for high-speed Internet access, sophisticated video cams, recording equipment and enough software to create film festival-caliber movies. At Community House, she is one of the fortunate few, a regular at the center since age 5. She has basic computer knowledge from school and home. But neither teachers nor parents have the resources to supply the sophisticated equipment that surrounds her at the center.

"I thought I knew a lot about computers," says Blackburn as she makes editing cuts to a two-minute documentary about how family has influenced what she values in life. "But I didn't know a regular computer could do all the things I'm learning here, especially in video production." Blackburn's mastering of more complex software and equipment has produced benefits in other areas of her life. Mentors at the center say she is unusually articulate for her age and a quick study when it comes to taking textbook concepts and

applying them to real-world situations. She's even set a new production challenge—making a much longer documentary on her experiences with the Mary L. Stone Program, which introduces promising African-American high school students to predominantly black colleges.

Blackburn's story—of a North Side teenager discovering a whole new world of opportunity and at the same time learning more about herself—could be repeated thousands of times every day, according to leaders of neighborhood development groups and area educators. How? By making Community House's access to technology the rule rather than the exception, helping all nonprofit groups across southwestern Pennsylvania bridge the digital divide with affordable, efficient access to high-speed transmission technology.

Since 1996, The Heinz Endowments and several other foundation partners—including Richard King Mellon, Jewish Healthcare, Grable, Buhl and McCune—have been inching the two sides of the digital divide closer together with a Technology-For-Learning strategy that involves library systems, schools, community groups, homework-help programs and adult literacy organizations. The goal is to

McCleary Elementary School teacher Molly Peck and students Tiffany Chirico, left, and Ashley Siriano, in foreground, react to an on-screen creation made possible through one of Community House's sophisticated computers.

provide high-speed Internet access and training so that people have greater access to learning opportunities.

For many other cities, where telecommunications companies wire communities based on their ability to produce a steady stream of income from paying customers, Pittsburgh's ongoing effort has been unique: a grass-roots campaign led by nonprofit groups and foundations. "The strategic challenge—to find ways to get around hefty costs and ensure equal access for all—is daunting," says Dr. Doreen Boyce, president of the Buhl Foundation and one of the leaders in the community wiring effort. But accomplishing it, she says, would position the region for incredible quality-of-life gains.

"One of our most important grantmaking strategies involves finding ways to promote computer literacy, which leads to all kinds of opportunities, from an individual getting a better job to a neighborhood group having more influence with City Hall," says Gerry Balbier, Education Program Officer at The Heinz Endowments. "For students and for working adults, being connected to a computer network is as important as being connected to a transportation network for school and job."

In Pittsburgh, where a recent America Online survey found the city and its environs to be first in the country in computer usage by young people, the stakes couldn't be higher.

"We're dealing with children coming out of fractured areas—children with only one parent, drug problems, incomes below the poverty line—but these kids still have so much hope," says Community House Director Wayne Peck, who also serves as senior pastor of First Allegheny Presbyterian Church, the organization's sponsor. "If we can give them better levels of support and better (technology) tools, that puts them in the middle of things instead of being marginalized. And that gives them higher expectations," says Peck.

While young people have the most to gain from bridge building across the digital divide, other constituencies also stand to benefit, including civic and issue advocacy groups that stand to have more influence over public policy. In the offices of 3 Rivers Connect, an Endowments-supported nonprofit that is both think tank and activist in the Pittsburgh wiring effort, the goal is to create an "Information Commons." Executive Director Ron Gdovic says that most of the group's current projects revolve around the notion of a virtual town green. "You would be able to visit the Commons and find the Little League schedule. You could get into a virtual argument with your city council representative. Then you could check out the greenmap for the best places to mountain bike in the city. It's all about convincing government agencies and private companies to share their information, then developing a tool so that information from various sources intermingles and flows freely to the public."



Jamar Porter is at work developing his own web page.



“One of our most important grantmaking strategies involves finding ways to promote computer literacy, which leads to all kinds of opportunities, from an individual getting a better job to a neighborhood group having more influence with City Hall.”

**Gerry Barbier** Education Program Officer, The Heinz Endowments





# WIRING THE YOUNG AT HEART

Leaders in community efforts to close the digital divide by providing computer and Internet access across the income spectrum also must deal with the generational spectrum. At the Vintage Adult Care Center in East Liberty, a group of older women have put aside knitting needles and yarn from one class and taken up mouse clickers and keyboards in another. Staring squinty-eyed into computer terminals, eight web-surfing newbies are learning their way around the Internet. It's one of six classes offered throughout the year in subjects ranging from basic computer use to managing personal health care on the Net.

Instructor Milton Nance, assisting a computer class "freshman" above, remembers the moment he was shocked into realizing that there is no age limit to learning opportunities—especially in computer literacy. In the spring of 1999, his first year as the lead instructor, Nance was addressing a class of seniors at the opening of a basic computing course when he came face to face with his third-grade teacher, by then in her 80s, sitting comfortably at one of the desks. "She was primed and ready to go. I was the one who was intimidated," he says.

The grass-roots partners and funders who have kept Pittsburgh in the race among cities for "most-connected" status have a lot of obstacles still to overcome. While the recent AOL survey and a Progressive Policy Institute study show significant Pittsburgh youth involvement with computers, a more business-centered "computer literacy" ranking of cities is not so positive. *Yahoo! Internet Life* magazine's annual ranking of the country's "Most Internet Savvy Cities" this year again excluded Pittsburgh from its top 50 list. The city did move up from last year's 78th slot, says Don Willmott, the magazine's technology editor, and San Francisco, San Jose and Austin continue in the top three spots.

Willmott says the magazine's measurement process includes more than just Internet use and the numbers of high-tech jobs in the community. Additional benchmarks include how many businesses are online and how well local governments are employing Internet technology. In the case of Pittsburgh, its city government presence on the web is judged average in comparison to slick connectors like Boston and Austin. More important regionally, the city government has gotten mixed reviews for its first significant hard-wiring effort related to the cable franchise agreement.

Local equal access advocates were in the thick of complex and occasionally cantankerous negotiations that went on for most of 1999 before a 10-year cable television and high-speed wiring agreement was signed with telecommunications giant AT&T. Tough questions remain about costs that will determine how many of Pittsburgh's nonprofit community groups will be hard-wired and what the degree of access will be.

Below: Community House Director Dr. Wayne Peck reviews web page autobiographies with Nikko Shakleford, left, and Renard Smith.

The controversial contract requires the telecommunications company to build a high-speed, or broadband, fiber optic network. Part of the pact provides for an Institutional Network, or I-Net, encompassing 88 community groups in the city that would be connected to the system and with one another. This was a significant accomplishment at the time—few if any cities elsewhere in the country had won similar concessions as part of their cable franchise agreements—but in exchange, AT&T also won the right to charge I-Net members hefty installation and monthly access fees.

Now, as AT&T is lagging behind schedule in installing fiber optic cable around the city, nonprofits, schools and

libraries are getting impatient. Groups not included in the original I-Net agreement—and many who were—are also wondering how they can gain affordable access once the grid is completed.

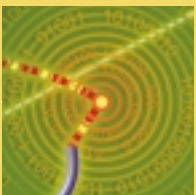
Stepping into that “affordability divide” has been The Heinz Endowments, which, since 1999, has invested more than \$1.5 million in special program and operating support to 3 Rivers Connect. The most recent grant—for \$500,000—has gone directly toward finding ways to help community groups get connected to the Information Network.





“The potential for groups to be able to interact with residents, for people to learn and be informed about issues, is tremendous, and we’re only now getting a taste of what is possible.”

**Dan Cohen** Former Pittsburgh City Councilman



Community House teacher Tim Flower works with Jonathan Springer on his web-based video. Students spend an average of two to three months developing ideas and producing their personal stories in the Digital Storytelling program made possible by The Heinz Endowments and other foundation funders.

“What impresses us is that these groups are willing to go to the mat every now and then with some heavy hitters in the public arena to ensure that they be given affordable access to this public resource,” says Balbier.

Among efforts being led by community groups is an alternative strategy to use wireless technology to provide them with fast, affordable access to the Internet. 3 Rivers Connect and a technology consulting organization called Information Renaissance are exploring this approach in a pilot project involving Community House and two similar organizations—Hosanna House in Wilkinsburg and Hill House in the city’s Hill District.

For these community groups that have been hampered for years with long waits due to low-speed Internet, the 10-megabits-per-second wireless connection is a godsend—more than 178 times faster than the old hook-up speed. For aspiring students like Community House’s Blackburn, the new wireless technology is what makes “Digital Storytelling,” the program on which her video filmmaking is based, possible for large numbers of students in reasonable time frames. The wireless connection pilot also makes it possible for Community House to share its program with the other groups, and for Hosanna House in turn to share material from its job-training lab.

“In many respects, the wireless option may be the better bet because it allows us to move around private vendors of cable services and fiber optic wiring where costs are unpredictable and service is unreliable,” says Balbier.

Other cost-defraying options on trial at 3 Rivers Connect include a bulk-buying effort that allows community organizations to get group rates on high-speed connections, and a service menu option allowing groups to pay only for modem speeds that they need. In the financially strapped Wilkinsburg

School District at Pittsburgh’s eastern edge, a Grable Foundation–supported program supplies computers and training for high school students.

These efforts taken together represent the essence of what 3 Rivers Connect’s Gdovic describes as “a multiple-layer, multiple carrier, multiple transport model that’s making a dent in the digital divide.”

Former Pittsburgh City Councilman Dan Cohen, a key negotiator on the city’s cable contract with AT&T, says that while Pittsburgh’s experience has not been perfect, the grass-roots foundation–city government–nonprofit partnerships are moving the city to a higher level of interaction. “After all, it isn’t just about the Information Network itself, where you physically connect a group to the pole that’s outside the building,” says Cohen, who now works full-time negotiating cable franchise agreements for municipalities across the state. “The effect of this is that communication power in this town is going to be running at a higher power and a much higher speed. The potential for groups to be able to interact with residents, for people to learn and be informed about issues, is tremendous, and we’re only now getting a taste of what is possible.” *b*



Enhancing family connections is a key goal of foundation work in bridging the digital divide. Raven Branch works on her story project as mother, Marta, looks on.



One of the country's most ambitious early-learning initiatives didn't turn out as planned. But thanks to two major new studies and an ongoing demonstration project, it is turning out valuable lessons—and inspiration for the future.

# PITTSBURGH'S "NOBLE

Four-year-old Rashad Wheeler exults at having made the right choice in a bingo-like game in which children match shapes and objects during a morning session at the Hosanna House center in Wilkinsburg. Rashad is one of more than 1,000 children across the county who have benefited from intensive preschool education in a day care setting.





BET”





Martha Poellnitz, a preschool education instructor at the Wilkinsburg center, snuggles with 3-year-old Alfonzo Farrish as she reads a book to him and classmate Cierston Taylor.

*By Grant Oliphant and Douglas Root  
Photography by Annie O'Neill*

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The mood was electric when a diverse group of early-childhood experts, child-care providers and a cross-section of Pittsburgh's political, business and civic leaders gathered to celebrate the first full year of the Early Childhood Initiative in October 1998. Known to most in the gathering simply by its acronym, ECI, the Initiative was a Big Idea: nearly two years in the planning, it was going to mark Allegheny County as the first community in the country to make quality early-learning programs broadly available to low-income children.

Some 200 people had crowded into a meeting room at Pittsburgh's Rivers Club to hear from a roster of speakers that included U.S. Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, Teresa Heinz, chair of the Howard Heinz Endowment and board member of the Vira I. Heinz Endowment, and David Shapira, CEO of Giant Eagle Corp., the region's leading grocery store chain. There was some trepidation: everyone in attendance knew how unprecedented this effort was, and that unexpected challenges were making for slower progress than expected. But together the audience projected a sense of pride and excitement at their community's willingness to embrace responsibility for

nurturing its neediest young minds. The meeting was peppered with, in the words of a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reporter the next day, "enthusiastic applause from an audience that needed no convincing."

In late 2000, there was no gathering when the United Way of Allegheny County, the agency responsible for administering the Initiative, formally announced that the program had failed to meet its ambitious objectives and would be ramped down. With support from The Heinz Endowments, which had played a pivotal role in creating the original program, a pared-back version of the Initiative would be continued in two communities

*Grant Oliphant is the director of communications, planning and evaluation, and Douglas Root is the communications officer for The Heinz Endowments. Both are members of h magazine's editorial team.*

At the 4 Kids Center in Braddock, Mayer Craig, 4, dances up a storm as part of a game that blends numbers learning with physical activity. Teacher Loni Mounts, far right, encourages her.

and its management transferred. But the original vision of connecting thousands of poor children with quality early-learning experiences would not, it seemed, be realized.

It was a puzzling and disappointing end to an effort that had been marked by such enthusiasm only two years earlier and that had captured national attention during its brief early existence. It was also, as it turned out, not an end at all.

Thanks to a sizable commitment to research and evaluation, the Initiative is yielding valuable lessons about the design, implementation and impact of early-learning programs. Many of the program's backers now see its first three years as a difficult but informative learning experience, a first step in a much longer process of making early learning the rule rather than the barely imagined exception for Pennsylvania preschoolers.

Early childhood care is a hot spot in America's ongoing culture wars. Most child-development experts accept as a fact of modern life that the majority of young children, especially low-income children, will spend a large part of each day in the care of someone other than a parent. For these professionals, the issue is no longer whether this is a good idea, but whether care-taking organizations can be deliverers of quality preschool learning.

It is well documented that the first few years of life lay the foundation for later learning. Studies have demonstrated that a child's capacity to succeed in the primary grades is shaped by the learning experiences he or she has in the years prior to school. But most child care in America is neither designed for nor equipped for delivering high-quality educational experiences. This is especially true of the child care options available to low-income families.

The term "quality" may itself be misleading. Research funded by The Heinz Endowments several years ago found that, for most parents in Pennsylvania, quality means finding a place for their children that is safe and clean. For child-development professionals, it means those things as well. But they also see the need for a solid educational component: good care shouldn't just babysit the body, it should also nurture the mind.



That notion raises a red flag for many social conservatives who believe third-party care giving is disruptive of family: in effect, a social program they would prefer not to support with their tax dollars. Early-learning programs, they argue, are just another way of shifting responsibility for child rearing away from parents, where it really belongs, and onto the backs of taxpayers.

That debate makes its presence felt in Pennsylvania policy-making circles. "There are some people in the legislature who believe the solution to our early-childhood needs is pretty simple—mom stays home," says one Harrisburg lobbyist.

# 8

Besides Pennsylvania, number of states that do not fund preschool or Head Start.



Personal convictions aside, it's an unlikely remedy. According to "Kids Count," a special report from Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, "In Pennsylvania today, both parents or the only resident parent of 62 percent of children under 6 are in the labor force." And, the report adds, these children spend "upwards of 50 hours a week in out-of-home settings, where educational experiences are often less than optimal."

Yet Pennsylvania remains one of only nine states that do not fund preschool or Head Start. Even full-day kindergarten, a proven boost to school readiness, gets no additional state funding. As a result, only 30 percent of Pennsylvania's kindergartners

attend full-day programs, compared to 50 percent nationally.

All of this made Pennsylvania an unlikely home for a program as bold as the Early Childhood Initiative was at the time of its launch nearly six years ago. There had been pockets of innovation on early learning around the state for years, with southwestern Pennsylvania often at the forefront, but in Harrisburg, the governor and legislature had resisted significant change. Still, during the same period in North Carolina, Georgia and Colorado, early-childhood programs were growing due to strong leadership from sympathetic governors—despite political crosscurrents similar to those in Pennsylvania. The Early Childhood Initiative's backers felt that a strong regional demonstration of the program could be just the push Pennsylvania needed to begin transforming its early-learning status from laggard to leader.

"There was a real sense that this was a moment in time and we needed to seize it," remembers Marge Petruska, director of the Endowments' Children, Youth & Families Program and a key planner of the Initiative. She points out that the early-childhood field had already conducted substantial research into the relationship between early learning and school readiness, and that new scientific attention was being focused nationally on the connection between early-learning experiences and the physical development of the brain.

"We looked at all this information and asked ourselves, 'What are we waiting for? When are we going to stop talking about quality early-learning programs and actually start trying to build them?'" Petruska remembers. "It was time to see if we could make these programs available to significant numbers of kids in our community who really needed them."

The "we" in this case was a remarkably large and diverse group of foundations, early-childhood experts, child-care providers, and community and business leaders. Over an 18-month period, they shaped a detailed plan for the \$60 million Initiative that would create, over five years, a network of 80 early-childhood education facilities anchored in the county's poorest neighborhoods. These facilities ultimately would serve some 7,600 preschool-aged children, and each would deliver an impressive package of early-education services. The United

# 30

Percent of Pennsylvania kindergartners  
who attend full-day programs.

20

Way of Allegheny County was given day-to-day management responsibility, and the Initiative was quietly launched in late 1996. After an additional period of putting staff and processes in place, it began creating facilities in 1997.

From the outset, the Initiative's organizers had known that the risks of failure were substantial. The program's targets were unprecedented. Its structure was untested because there were no proven models to follow, and its success depended on a host of variables beyond its control. The very attributes that made the Initiative exciting—Big, Bold, New—also made it vulnerable. Planners knew they had to account for that fact in their thinking. That was why the program's business plan included an “off ramp” that would allow the Initiative to be scaled down after three full years of operation if success was proving elusive.

But that didn't lessen the pain when, three years later, the program was far from hitting its numerical targets. At its peak, in May 2000, the Initiative was serving 680 children, only 25 percent of the number expected by that point and only a tenth of the total number targeted. The network was providing half as many child hours of service as the original business plan had intended for that point—a more accurate and encouraging gauge of its progress, but still far off the mark. And per-child costs, while still in line with numbers cited in other successful early-learning studies, were coming in much higher than original estimates. Most troubling of all, it was becoming clear that the state was not going to agree to provide the long-term funding the program needed to survive beyond its own early-learning stage.

By the end of that summer, organizers came to the difficult conclusion that the Initiative, at least as originally envisioned, could not continue. After investing five years—two in planning,

three in implementation—and a total of \$34 million, they decided it was time to steer the Early Childhood Initiative onto the off ramp they had hoped would never have to be used.

“Watching this effort get scaled back was like dealing with a death in the family,” remembers Initiative leader Dr. Jerlean Daniel, a professor of psychology in education at the University of Pittsburgh. “It was a while before some of us could talk about it, and part of the reason for that was because we knew a long-term effort could change so many lives.”

“It's one thing to plan for an outcome like this, and something else altogether to actually have to face it,” says the Endowments' Petruska. “In terms of the kids, all of the science and all of the anecdotal evidence suggested we were on exactly the right path. But there just didn't seem to be any progress toward breaking through the scale and affordability barriers—actually delivering the services to large numbers of children at a sustainable cost. It was incredibly frustrating.”

That frustration was felt at every level of the Initiative—funders, business leaders, United Way managers, child-development experts, academicians, neighborhood center managers and parents using the services. “You could see kids who had no social skills improving each week and becoming more curious about learning. In a roomful of these kids, it's like watching flower buds open up before your eyes,” says Barbara Willard, vice president of children and youth services for Heritage Health Foundation, which runs the program at Braddock's 4 Kids Childcare Center, one of the Initiative's surviving facilities.

Given such feelings, the temptation might have been just to try to keep the program going as long as possible and hope for a miracle. In fact, Initiative leaders actually used the



“We started out with one of the most impressive coalitions ever brought to bear on one of the country's toughest problems, and it unraveled over the issue of long-term funding. We need to regain that community will to learn how to do it for the long term.”

Dr. Jerlean Daniel, University of Pittsburgh

# 50

Percent of kindergartners nationally who attend full-day programs.

Older children at 4 Kids Center are so enthusiastic about word learning and reading that they race one another to the Book Corner each day to get prime seating. Plopped in a chair, far left, is Iman Bey sharing a book with D’Vante Williams. Seated next to them is Mayer Craig; and seated next to her, back to camera, is Amber Riley. Leaning in for a glance at Amber’s book is Tatiana Crosby while Alyce Winn reads in foreground.



offramp that was built into the original plan. But taking the exit on large-scale service delivery did not mean an abandonment of the entire effort.

“We felt that would have been a huge mistake,” explains Maxwell King, the Endowments’ executive director. “Maybe that’s easier for us to see as a foundation, because in philanthropy we observe all the time how difficult this kind of social change work can be. We know from experience that progress doesn’t come easily, and that the only real failures are the projects you don’t learn from and build on.”

With additional funding from the Endowments and the Richard King Mellon Foundation, the Initiative, rather than simply being ended, was honed down to a demonstration

model. Its management was transferred to the University of Pittsburgh’s Office of Child Development, which had experts in research-oriented programs. Within this new framework, seven centers in two struggling communities—Braddock and Wilkinsburg—would continue operating as ECI sites for another three years. This would allow their operators, Heritage Health Foundation for Braddock and Hosanna House in Wilkinsburg, to continue refining their cost models and to identify alternative funding sources.

It also would allow for the continuation of research into whether the Initiative’s approach to quality education really did benefit children. Beginning with its launch in 1996, a 15-member research team from Children’s Hospital of

Three-year-old Nyjah Cephas has her own dresser in Wilkinsburg center staffer Kevin Topper as she readies for a lavish wedding. Looking on is 4-year-old Cierston Taylor.

# 23

**In ECI's target neighborhoods, percent of kindergartners and first graders who typically don't advance to the next grade level.**





# 2

Percent of ECI participants retained in kindergarten or first grade.



Pittsburgh had developed a rigorous, multi-year study, which was still in progress at the time of the cutback.

But that research was only designed to answer one set of questions swirling around the Initiative in the wake of its retrenchment. It couldn't shed light on the problems that had stunted the program's growth. The community was abuzz with speculation on that score, and the Initiative's supporters in particular wanted to know how a program that had been so meticulously planned, backed by so many influential people and organizations, and supported with such extensive resources, could have come undone. What went wrong?

The Heinz Endowments, as anxious as any stakeholder to understand what happened, also concluded that this question needed to be answered. Convinced that the answer needed to come from an impartial observer, the Endowments commissioned an in-depth examination by RAND Corp., a research powerhouse known for its objectivity and intellectual rigor that had recently opened a new branch in Pittsburgh. In a highly unusual move, the Endowments arranged for the community, rather than just the foundation, to be the client for the study.

"Our board felt very strongly that, given our close association with ECI, the study needed to have some distance from us. RAND needed to know they were accountable to our whole community, not just to the Endowments," explains King. "And we felt everyone who had supported this program, or participated in it or just plain believed in it, had the same right as we did to know what really happened."

At a combined total of about \$1.8 million, the child-outcomes study and the RAND research represented one of the most comprehensive evaluations of a grantmaking initiative ever undertaken in the region's foundation community. In March and April of this year, as results from both studies were released, that investment began to pay dividends.

# 21

Percent of children referred for special education in ECI's target neighborhoods prior to the Initiative.

24

## The Rand Report

# What lessons have we learned?

*(Excerpted from A Noble Bet in Early Care and Education, the RAND report on Pittsburgh's Early Childhood Initiative)*

- 1 Design a flexible and simple administrative structure directed by an independent board and leaders who have clear authority, as well as independent critical reviews of plans at the outset.**
- 2 Be sure assumptions made in business plans realistically account for choices that will be made by individual stakeholders (such as the type of service needed as opposed to what may be offered).**
- 3 Consider building a large-scale initiative from a series of smaller-scale pilot projects.**
- 4 Adopt straightforward business plans that focus on clear, well-defined goals. Avoid approaches that promise community control but are run as top-down bureaucracies.**
- 5 Explore alternative management models that take community needs seriously and provide more appropriate incentives. It is possible to allow communities to 'dream big' under a management structure that controls costs and ensures quality.**
- 6 Make policymakers full partners, ensuring they invest in programs that increase parental knowledge about quality, that provide for professional development of the workforce, and that promote quality among early care and education providers.**

The child-outcomes research by the team from Children's Hospital belies the notion that the Early Childhood Initiative "failed," at least in terms of its impact on students. "In nearly every measurable area of development, children graduating from the Early Childhood Initiative are showing impressive results as real as higher marks in school performance and lower enrollments in special education classes," says lead researcher Dr. Stephen J. Bagnato.

In fact, the improvement results in some categories were so dramatic that Bagnato and his team initially didn't believe them. "Some of the findings were very surprising, and we're paid to be skeptics," he says.

It's easy to see why he and his team might have been surprised. In school districts where students were recruited—among the poorest in Pittsburgh—about a quarter of them typically do not pass kindergarten and first grade. But Bagnato's team found that after three years of Early Childhood Initiative participation, less than 2 percent of the students failed to advance to the next grade level, a finding widely reported in news coverage after the study's publication.

The study covered 834 children at 48 sites—in effect, every child who stayed with the Initiative long enough for results to be meaningful. Relying on 40 key indicators, it tracked outcomes like early literacy, social skills and behavioral development.

Every child in the study qualified for the "at-risk" label. Poverty and a host of other factors combined to put these children in a category that research has shown typically falls farther behind the educational norm with each passing year. Fourteen percent of the study group had the additional burden of developmental delays that would have qualified them for special education programs. And 18 percent demonstrated social and behavioral problems severe enough to merit a mental health diagnosis and ultimately enrollment in a costly behavioral support program.

Bagnato found that the 86 percent of the study's children who were simply at risk—in itself, no small hurdle—were

# 1

## Percent of children referred for special education in ECI's target neighborhoods after the Initiative.

able to beat the odds and progress at average rates for their age group. Even more impressive, after nearly three years in the Initiative, the children who had suffered from developmental delays were also performing at average levels, and the children with behavioral problems showed normal social skills and behavior patterns. So impressive were their gains that, in a blind test, kindergarten and first grade teachers ranked the Initiative's children in the average to above-average range compared to other children their age.

As a result, special education referrals in school districts within the Initiative's target neighborhoods dropped from a whopping 21 percent to about 1 percent. "Special ed classes cost schools an additional \$90,000 per student over twelve years of schooling," says Heritage Health Foundation CEO Robert Grom. "Even at the high end, ECI costs less than half that. It's pretty hard not to argue that we should be spending our money differently."

Bagnato says these results are directly attributable to the Initiative's exacting emphasis on educational quality. "From a conceptual and quality standpoint, the programming was very well designed. Each center knew its children and tailored its programs to fit their personalities and the needs of the neighborhoods." But the underlying strategies, the learning outcomes, were the same.

"For us, that's the most important message of this evaluation," says Teresa Heinz, whose leadership was critical in shaping the original Initiative and getting it off the ground. "Pushing an aggressive agenda on preschool education is exactly the right place to be and the right place to stay."

That conclusion makes it all the more difficult to understand or accept the Early Childhood Initiative's fate. How could a program so adept at helping children thrive fail to thrive itself?

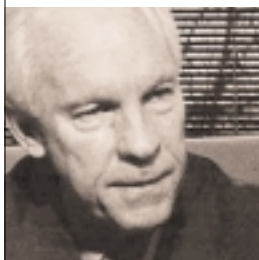
To secure its own survival, though, the Initiative had to do much more than deliver quality. RAND's study of the program's design and implementation, released just three weeks after Bagnato's report, found that high aspirations for the program left no room for error.

"Given the breadth of the ambitions and the obstacles out there in the world to achieving those ambitions," says Brian Gill, RAND's chief investigator for the study, "success for [the Initiative] meant that it had to get its vision, theory of action, administration and operation just right in order to have a chance to succeed."

With the bar set so high, the Initiative was almost bound to fall short. One major problem, according to RAND, involved the Initiative's organizational structure. The program's design called for a central administration housed at the United Way that would be responsible for funding lead agencies in each targeted community. Top administrators also would be responsible for supervising and monitoring designated neighborhood agencies serving children and their parents.

"This theory of action proved to be cumbersome and problematic," the RAND study team found. The most important organizational path, the one routing providers of high-quality early-education services directly to families, was beset with speed bumps created by an extensive top-down structure. Researchers found that placing several layers of organization between funders and families also caused misdirection and confusion.

The departure, early in the Initiative's life, of two of its key leaders further complicated an already unclear chain of command. Murky lines of responsibility and authority hampered the Initiative's ability to make quick and decisive course corrections once the program was under way.



**"The business and political support for this vision is still very much on board. When you have solid evidence showing significant learning gains to children who need it most, and you have another study that tells you how to go back to the drawing board to do it right, then you go back and do it."**

Jim Roddey, Allegheny County Chief Executive

Three-year-old Chris Woodard has the best seat in the house by way of Nicole Roberts' lap as the Wilkinsburg preschool-education instructor leads him and his classmates in a rhyming song about colors.





One example was the program's failure to predict correctly the types of services parents would want. The Initiative's business plan anticipated that the greatest demand would be for a part-day, Head Start–like program. In reality, most parents opted for much costlier, full-day, center-based care.

That fact, which in itself doubled the cost of the program over its estimates, was exacerbated by Pennsylvania's speedy implementation of welfare-to-work regulations. A massive shift of young Allegheny County parents from the welfare rolls to hourly payrolls set off a critical shortage in day care center slots and made full-day supervision the norm. Adhering to quality standards that prevented many long-standing neighborhood day care operations from participating, the Initiative began building new centers that drove up per-child costs and alienated many of the program's neighborhood partners.

The Initiative's original business plan overlooked centers' fixed costs, meaning that in facilities with less than full enrollment, per-child costs would be higher. Since enrollment in the Initiative's centers averaged 73 percent in 1999, costs inevitably rose.

At the Initiative's third year, its peak, the total per-child cost was \$13,612. This was in line with costs at some of the country's most successful preschool education delivery programs, and in that sense it was not extraordinarily high. But it was three times the \$4,400 per-child cost promised in the Initiative's original business plan.

This compounded another problem for the program: the challenge of gaining public sector support. Even at the originally planned \$26 million annual cost, the Initiative's leaders knew that the private sector could not sustain that level of funding over the long term. The problem of public sector sustainability had been addressed in the Initiative's business plan by way of a three-year campaign to convince state government to become the primary funder after five years.

Early on, planners had received promising indications from the Ridge Administration about its willingness to consider such funding. But RAND found that the Initiative's backers may have placed too much faith in these early signals, which proved misleading.



Braddock center students Mac'Kailla Jones, 6, at left, and Deja Nelson, 4, far right, are locked in a fierce game of Concentration to help them with reading. The referee is instructor Chasity Parker.



Five-year-old Steven Sparrow holds the attention of his group at Braddock's 4 Kids Center. Looking on intently, from far left, are Cheyanne Wilt and D'Vale Mudd, both 4, and Jordan Fair, 5.



RAND offers several explanations: an unwillingness by state officials to challenge the political philosophy, especially strong in Pennsylvania's rural areas, that early education is the responsibility of individual families, not taxpayers; that once the Initiative shifted its emphasis to full-day care, state officials, whose welfare-to-work rules had helped create that demand, saw the program only as expensive child care, not education; and that the financial commitment Allegheny County officials were seeking from the state "was large enough that it would inevitably raise issues of regional fairness among Pennsylvania political leaders," the report stated.

"We've learned a lot of lessons from this but one of the biggest is that the long-term strategy for continued funding was not realistic," says Chuck Queenan, senior counsel for Kirkpatrick & Lockhart and Chairman of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, a business-led regional economic development group. "What attracted a lot of the corporate partners to this effort was first and foremost that the goals were worth the investment. Some of us were convinced we could make state government see it that way, but it seems we underestimated the conflicts and overestimated our persuasive abilities."



When RAND team leader Brian Gill briefed stakeholder groups like the Conference on the study findings, he often made reference to a description that eventually became part of the title of RAND’s 83-page final report. “One person we interviewed described the Early Childhood Initiative as a ‘noble bet,’ and interviews with so many others confirmed this characterization,” Gill told one group. “It was a bet because its success was not certain by any means; this was the first large-scale effort of its kind in the country. It was noble because the goals were worth taking a chance on.”

If the Initiative was indeed a bet, though, it was not of the all-or-nothing variety. The RAND report notes that the Initiative’s failure to achieve its greatest ambitions should not obscure the positive aspects of its legacy. It helped to build the capacity of a number of low-income neighborhoods to provide “apparently high quality” early care and education services, and it expanded several Head Start providers into licensed, full-day program centers.

“Before the Initiative, there was not a single licensed day care center in Braddock,” says Heritage Healthcare Foundation’s Bob Grom. “These are as critical a service to the families in these neighborhoods as access to a grocery store and public transportation.”

Of national significance, RAND found, was that the Initiative “demonstrated the ability of the Pittsburgh community to mobilize large-scale support and funding from diverse constituencies and political perspectives.” It also trained a spotlight on a self-conflicting political philosophy among those who demand that every able-bodied person hold down a full-time job but who also decry government being held responsible for the care and education of preschool-aged children.

“I can rattle off all the scientific disciplines that come into an effort like this, from economics to child psychology, and all of these validate the benefits to these children. But none of the science amounts to anything without the human commitment factor,” says the University of Pittsburgh’s Daniel, currently on assignment as a senior advisor in the federal Head Start program in Washington. “We started out with one of the most impressive coalitions ever brought to bear on one of the country’s toughest problems, and it unraveled over the issue of long-term funding. We need to regain that community will to learn how to do it for the long term.”

RAND’s report lists a variety of lessons that future programs should draw from the Early Childhood Initiative’s experience (see “What lessons have we learned?” on page 24), and the program’s backers say they are intent on putting them into practice in some kind of sequel.

“The business and political support for this vision is still very much on board,” says Allegheny County Executive Jim Roddey, who helped lead the Initiative before winning public office. “When you have solid evidence showing significant learning gains to children who need it most, and you have another study that tells you how to go back to the drawing board to do it right, then you go back and do it.”

But the challenge now, says the Endowments’ Teresa Heinz, is to get a firm handle on cost and sustainability issues that hampered the Early Childhood Initiative while at the same time building greater demand in Pennsylvania for quality education programs. To that end, in addition to its ongoing funding for Pittsburgh’s scaled-back Initiative, the Endowments is funding model early-learning programs in York, Lancaster and Erie. It also is supporting a multi-year



“I look at both of these studies and I can only say that we were absolutely in the right place with this program—how well these kids have performed and the ways in which their parents have responded make that absolutely clear. When you look at the organizational part, it’s clear we didn’t have our hands on all the variables. But we were ahead of our time, and some group had to forge ahead. I want to see this re-embraced at the same scale because now we know where to go.”

Karen Shapira, United Jewish Federation

Sue Kennedy, a full-time teacher in the infant room at Braddock's 4 Kids Center, gives a morning welcome to 4-month-old Isabella. Both the Braddock and Wilkinsburg centers operate from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the work week.

32



extension of Bagnato's research to examine child outcomes at those sites as well as Pittsburgh's.

Two lessons from the Initiative are helping guide these efforts, according to Heinz. One is the importance of choosing the host agency carefully. "The missions must match precisely. You need the right personnel involved from the start, and you need them to stay with the program at least long enough to see it through the development phase," she says.

The second lesson is to obtain the support of statewide political leadership early on. "We can't go it alone," says Heinz, "that much is clear. In states where this agenda advances, it advances because of strong, enlightened political leadership. We have to find a way to persuade Pennsylvania's officeholders to show leadership on an agenda that is so obviously right for our children."

The remaining Initiative centers in Braddock and Wilkinsburg, once meant to be among scores of sparkling jewels in a crowning program that would have stretched

across the county, may now be only diamonds in the rough—remarkably successful legacies of the larger, unfulfilled dream. But because of the willingness of the Initiative's supporters to study what happened and to share their findings, those centers now also serve as powerful lures for leaders in Pittsburgh and elsewhere in Pennsylvania to regroup.

"I look at both these studies and I can only say that we were absolutely in the right place with this program—how well these kids have performed and the ways in which their parents have responded make that absolutely clear," says Karen Shapira, a trustee and past chair of the United Jewish Federation and one of the architects of the Initiative. "When you look at the organizational part, it's clear we didn't have our hands on all the variables. But we were ahead of our time, and some group had to forge ahead. I want to see this re-embraced at the same scale because now we know where to go."

Given sentiments like that, it is hard to believe the Initiative's surviving centers—or the newer efforts in York, Lancaster and Erie—will remain diamonds in the rough for long. The enthusiasm displayed by the Early Childhood Initiative's supporters at that celebratory gathering nearly four years ago hasn't gone away. It has just turned into a quieter, and perhaps wiser, determination.

"It's sad that our first attempt at ECI didn't succeed as we had hoped, but it's not a tragedy," says Teresa Heinz. "You almost never get everything right the first time out of the gate in this type of work. The tragedy would be if we gave up now." *b*

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION



The report *A "Noble Bet" in Early Care and Education: Lessons from One Community's Experience*, Brian Gill, lead author; Jonathan Caulkins; Jacob Dembosky, April 2002, is available on RAND's website at <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1544/>

For a full copy of the report, *Quality Early Learning—Key to School Success*, contact the SPECS evaluation team at 412.692.6300, or by email at [uclid@pitt.edu](mailto:uclid@pitt.edu). The full report will also be available on the UCLID Center's website by the beginning of June: [www.pitt.edu/~uclid](http://www.pitt.edu/~uclid)

# EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

*By Douglas Root*

## THE NATIONAL SCENE

The Early Childhood Initiative was a local program, but its impact has been felt far beyond Pittsburgh and even Pennsylvania.

On a cold March morning at the 4 Kids Center in Braddock, a struggling former mill town on the edge of Pittsburgh's eastern border in Allegheny County, harried parents do their early-morning drop-off routine—pulling children out of coats and mittens and planting quick kisses before heading to work.

Barbara Willard, the director of 4 Kids and several similar centers, is moving a bit slower than usual. She's conducting a tour with a half shuffle, thanks to a devoted 2-year-old clinging tightly to one leg. Willard, a tall woman with an air of authority, is wearing a crisp business suit to match her administrative title. Still, she is very much a mother figure at the center, which operates 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. five days a week.

"Hold on tight, honey, we're going to go over the baby gate," she says. The girl's pigtails fly into the air as Willard picks her up and swings the giggling cargo up and over to the other side. Willard is physically strong, which comes in handy when managing the center's 106 children.

In this early spring enrollment period, there are two infant rooms where a teacher, a teacher's assistant and a teacher's aide are interacting with a group of 11 infants. In the transitional toddler room, a pack of eight 13- to 18-month-olds, just learning to walk, are gathered around another three instructors, including an education specialist who is leading them in organized game playing. In the "toddler 1" room, 10 children between 18 months and 2 years are riding around with

# WA

In Seattle, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation teamed up with a governor's task force to create an impressive regional effort on improving early-childhood education. Much of the support base for that effort was built from studying Pittsburgh's Early Childhood Initiative.



# CO

In Denver, former banking executive Doug Price was inspired by the wide-ranging coalition assembled for Pittsburgh's Early Childhood Initiative and thought his state could mount a similar effort. He quit his job to found Educare Colorado and hired one of the former managers of Pittsburgh's Initiative to begin the ambitious program that is on its way to providing preschool education to tens of thousands of children.

tricycles and other wheeled toys, blissfully unaware that they are participating in a play plan that helps them develop fine motor skills. Yet another room holds a group of 11 3-year-olds who are listening intently to a story read to them by a teacher trained in storytelling.

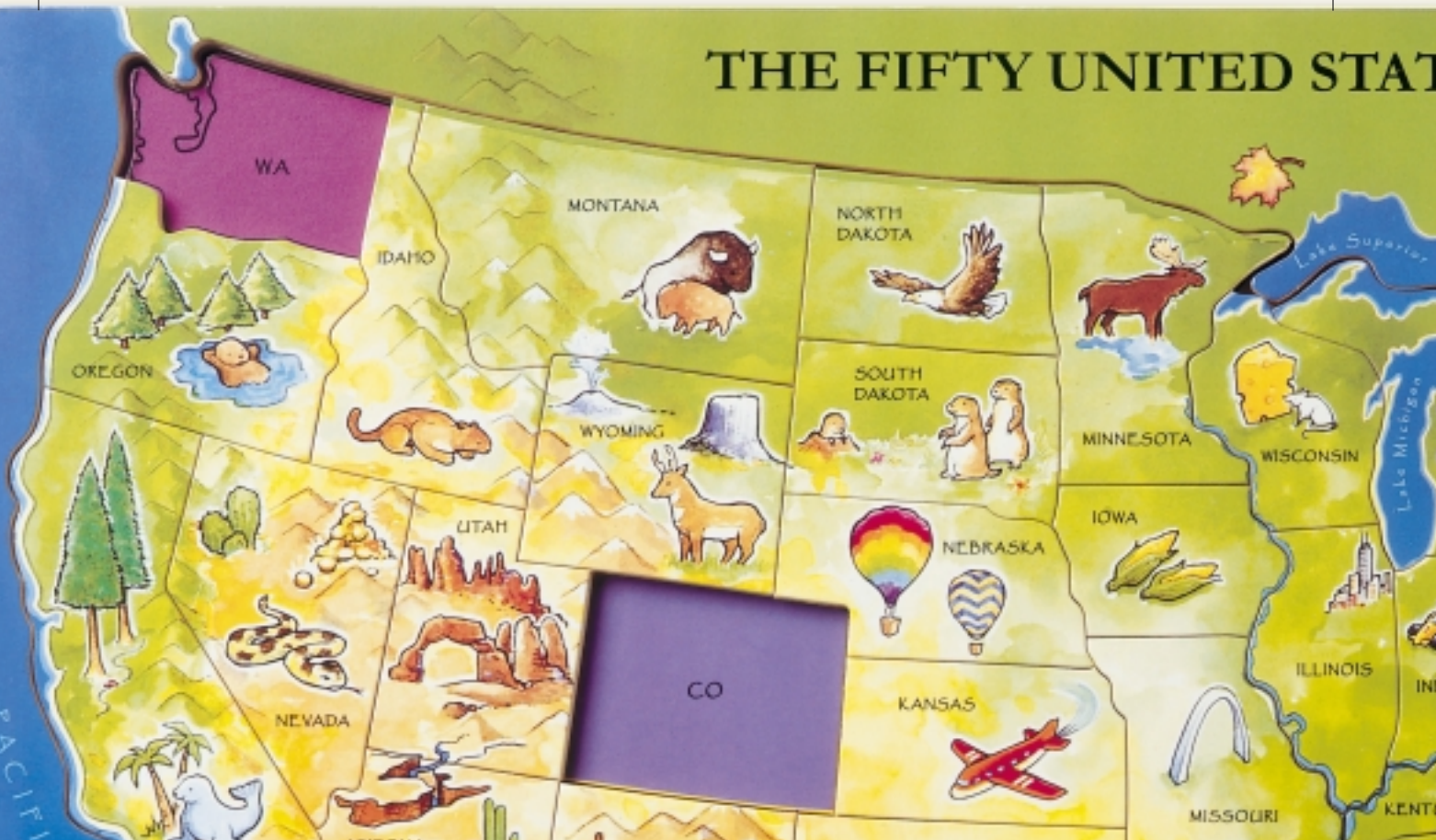
Outside, in a fenced-in play area behind the center, 32 4- and 5-year-olds are climbing, sliding and crawling over some of the most inviting playground equipment available. After a hot lunch and a nap, these same children will be ready to work on pre-writing skills and drawing before moving on to a story lesson and more outside play time.

Only a few years ago, this snapshot of the daily routine for many of Braddock's preschool-aged children would have been drastically different. Preschool learning was nonexistent. Even minimal day care was a poor bargain in a town long used to "poor" as a prefix for most of life's essentials.

But since September 1998, the Braddock center, operated by the Heritage Health Foundation where Willard is vice president of children and youth services, and a similar operation in Wilkinsburg, operated by Hosanna House, a community social-service organization, have been staging areas for early-childhood education's dream project, the Early Childhood Initiative. The centers are organized from the inside out: they're anchored to neighborhood organizations where parents are partners, and they're run by managers and preschool educators who follow curriculums designed to instill an amazing capacity for learning in children who otherwise wouldn't have had much of a chance for school success.

The combination has created one of the richest preschool education environments in the state. Now, child development experts say that two independent evaluations of the

## THE FIFTY UNITED STATES



# PA



In York and Lancaster, ongoing lessons from Pittsburgh’s Early Childhood Initiative have been helping fine-tune programs to better meet the needs of hundreds of preschool-aged children. York’s thriving Focus on Our Future, which had start-up funding from The Heinz Endowments, is developing school district–connected preschool centers as a result of one lesson from Pittsburgh’s experience.

“Pittsburgh’s Early Childhood Initiative was the first to think about this in an organized, big-picture way, and it was our inspiration.”

**Doug Price** President, Educare Colorado

Initiative—one showing substantial gains in some 1,000 children tracked in the program, the other offering process and management lessons for more successful large-scale implementation—are expected to have a profound influence on early-learning programs throughout the country.

In fact, early-education leaders elsewhere in Pennsylvania, Colorado, Washington and Georgia, to name a few, have been reflecting the Initiative’s quality triumphs and distilling its hard management lessons for several years now.

“Pittsburgh’s Early Childhood Initiative was the first to think about this in an organized, big-picture way, and it was our inspiration,” says Doug Price, president of Educare Colorado, a coalition of business, philanthropic, government and education leaders that has been working since the early 1990s to create a statewide early-education system. “Pittsburgh’s experiences have taught us a lot about developing partnerships and holding realistic expectations connected to funding.”

The reason program leaders around the country have been such quick studies of the triumphs and pitfalls of the Early Childhood Initiative is that many of its original planners have been offering honest assessments of the program’s successes and failures, even as independent studies were just beginning. Key backers like Teresa Heinz, Karen Shapira and Allegheny County Executive Jim Roddey, and key staffers like Martha Isler, the former director of the program through the United Way of Allegheny County, have been sought-after speakers through all its milestones: in 1996 when the Initiative began,



# GA

Atlanta is one of 11 cities across the country benefiting from Vital Connections, a national United Way–directed program that delivers top-quality preschool education in day care settings. The program has its roots in the Pittsburgh Initiative, where the local United Way agency was a developer and manager.

“Pittsburgh’s Early Childhood Initiative was never about building better day care. It was about getting children ready to succeed in school and supporting every child with all the resources they needed to do that. This is the framework that caught the rest of the country’s attention.”

**Martha W. Isler** Former Director, Early Childhood Initiative

in 2000 when it was scaled back and in recent weeks with publication of the studies’ findings.

“The studies help to put some solid credentials behind what we’ve been saying for a long time out of our own experience and passing on the lessons we’ve learned,” says Isler. “What the numbers and measurements can’t show so well is the idea that this program was never about building better day care. It was about getting children ready to succeed in school and supporting every child with all the resources they needed to do that. This is the framework that caught the rest of the country’s attention.”

In many respects, that core philosophy has helped set the tone for more than a dozen programs that have followed the Initiative. Managers and funders as diverse as a business group in Colorado, a governor’s task force in the state of Washington and school district–connected collaboratives in Eastern Pennsylvania are all interested in understanding how Pittsburgh was able to mount the community will to undertake an ambitious program with the goal of serving thousands of children. “They want to know how you dream big and allow for a learning curve without losing support,” says Marge Petruska, director of The Heinz Endowments Children, Youth & Families Program. “They want to know how you maintain quality and still deliver at a large enough scale that you’re not leaving children behind.”

Joyce Wilbur, an administrator at United Way’s North American headquarters in Virginia who helped design the Early Childhood Initiative in her previous role as a manager in United Way’s Pittsburgh office, says United Way branches across the country were galvanized by Pittsburgh’s commitment to early learning. “They’ve been learning that there’s nothing wrong with dreaming big and nothing standing in the way of implementing it,” says Wilbur, “just not in the form in which Pittsburgh originally conceived of it.”

Wilbur says an 11-city, United Way–sponsored program known as Vital Connections has its roots in Pittsburgh’s program. United Way agencies in cities as large as Atlanta and as small as Fitchburg, Mass., are implementing the quality

standards established in Pittsburgh's program but being much more realistic in relations with donor groups. "If I had it to do over again in Pittsburgh, I would have prepared investors better to expect a 10-year time frame for seeing significant returns instead of five years. These other agencies have learned a lot about donor financing based on our experience in Pittsburgh."

In York and Lancaster counties in Pennsylvania, lessons from Pittsburgh's Initiative have been shaping early-learning programs since 1997. The York program, Focus on Our Future, which had early funding from The Heinz Endowments and the Pew Charitable Trust, has been thriving.

A stakeholders leadership group similar to Pittsburgh's, whose members represent business, philanthropy, education, child care and education, has carefully monitored funding levels and ensured sustainability by finding solid partners like the York Campus of Pennsylvania State University. "Honestly, our strategy from the beginning was to follow Pittsburgh's lesson of getting quality education programming into the existing child-care system," says Gail Nourse, Focus on Our Future's executive director for the past five years. "What the Pittsburgh Early Childhood Initiative leadership was telling us was that if we wanted to engage the child-care community and make them partners in the program, we had to take their concerns seriously. We needed to give a lot of attention to helping these centers become accredited rather than work around them. What the Pittsburgh Initiative did so well was to set a standard of intensity in programming and in mentoring. That's what we've followed but we've done it working in the system of existing agencies."

A key goal of Focus on Our Future has been to improve the quality of care offered by existing providers and to assist those providers in meeting accreditation requirements. Twinned with that goal has been a successful effort to train child-care workers in child development and preschool education. In its first three years of operation, the program turned 22 centers and 21 family child-care homes in York County into licensed, effective early-learning programs.

In Denver, banking executive and investor Price quit his job in 1998 to work full-time harnessing a wide-ranging coalition of community leaders similar to that in Pittsburgh to create Educare Colorado. He cites the Initiative as "the standard out there that told us what we should be expecting of ourselves and our community in early education."

Price and other community leaders set out to revolutionize a system of lackluster day care in Colorado into one of the best early-education systems in the country. Their bipartisan advisory team, which ranged at one point from Focus on the Family representatives to liberal Democrats, has made significant strides in learning how to sustain a statewide system of high-quality preschool education in the day care setting. Included among Educare's successful fundraising strategies is a voluntary tax check-off that allows taxpayers to donate a portion of their refunds to a child-care quality improvement fund.

While financial sustainability is important to Educare, Price says developing community sustainability is just as essential. "That's one of the things we learned from the Pittsburgh program, that you need to support parents as decision makers, that the community must be connected at the neighborhood level and that the program must be monitored and evaluated at all levels." Once that part of the system is solidly in place, says Price, "you can move to the next level of building accountability and incentives into the system."

While Educare had to take a different tack in funding strategy—"we didn't have a force as powerful as The Heinz Endowments behind us at the time"—addressing the business side of the Colorado Initiative was key. "We learned from Pittsburgh leaders that this was not a programming issue. It was a systems issue. Pittsburgh had the resources to do brick and mortar and the philosophy of 'if you build it, they will come.' But we learned to reverse that, based on what Pittsburgh's experience was telling us. We've formed partnerships with government, even down to the level of local politicians." *b*

### Two Pennsylvania Foundations Win National Honors for Website

Two Pittsburgh foundations have received top honors for the excellence of their websites in a national competition designed to promote effective communications by America's philanthropic organizations.

The Heinz Endowments received the gold award and the Roy A. Hunt Foundation the bronze in the Wilmer Shields Rich Awards Program, which is sponsored annually by the Washington, D.C.-based Council on Foundations, a national organization made up of nearly 2,000 private and corporate philanthropic organizations. The Seattle-based Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, created by Microsoft founder and CEO Bill Gates, received the silver award.

"It's amusing to have two Pittsburgh foundations surround the Gates Foundation on what is arguably Microsoft's home turf, but it shouldn't come as a surprise," commented Maxwell King, executive director of The Heinz Endowments. "Pittsburgh is rapidly emerging as a national leader in the social application of cutting-edge technology, and this is just one more expression of that direction."

Tod Hunt, president of the Hunt Foundation, agrees. "This is a great symbol for Pittsburgh of the work that foundations and nonprofits are doing here to put technology to positive social use," he said. "The Internet is an excellent tool for grantmakers to use to present their funding interests and application guidelines in a clear and concise manner. It really streamlines the process and gives nonprofits a glimpse into the history of a particular foundation, especially if it's a family one."

Website addresses for the winners are [www.heinz.org](http://www.heinz.org), [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org) and [www.rahuntdn.org](http://www.rahuntdn.org).

# here & there

### New Website Maps Green Pittsburgh

Want to learn more about southwestern Pennsylvania's environmental and recreational treasures?

At [www.greenpittsburgh.net](http://www.greenpittsburgh.net), you'll be introduced to an abundance of great places, from secluded fishing spots to locations for hiking, rafting, climbing and dozens of other recreational favorites. Supported in part with funding from The Heinz Endowments, the site helps residents and visitors alike see why the environment is such an important part of what makes this region a fun place in which to live and work.





**At left:** A decaying section of downtown Pittsburgh's central retail core where Fifth Avenue runs into historic Market Square. **At right:** The Plan C consultant's vision of the same corner revitalized with a mix of local and national ground-floor retail stores with below-ground parking. On upper floors, loft-style apartments overlook the square.

Hunter Interests, Inc. of Annapolis



### Plan C Downtown Renovation Held to Civic Design Standards

When Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy decided to pull back on a massive redevelopment plan for the central downtown retail core because of community opposition and the retreat of a key anchor store, many believed the chance for revitalization was lost.

Few development experts expected a 13-member task force created by the mayor more than a year ago to generate enough consensus to come up with an acceptable replacement plan. That may be why the mayor's recent announcement of a new \$363 million blueprint for redevelopment from the task force was front-page news and cause for renewed hopes among those who believe in the importance of thriving city centers.

The report on development of the steadily decaying retail corridor bounded by Fifth and Forbes Avenues and Market Square, a historic city landmark, calls for a



mix of national and local retail stores, loft-style apartments, a showcase hotel at the city's western gateway, a new public market and a re-design of the square. The new plan, developed with the help of urban development consultant Don Hunter of Annapolis, Md., is \$158 million cheaper than the original. Although it does not now have a private developer signed on, the mayor has publicly embraced the plan and announced a process for soliciting developer proposals. Despite private developer participation, there will almost certainly be some public subsidies and a multi-million-dollar contribution from private and corporate foundations.

Task force members, who represent merchant businesses, corporations, the real estate market, city government, preservation groups and the foundation community, surprised observers with their ability to develop general agreement on elements that had caused the Murphy Administration plan to stumble. These include embracing sustainable development principles such as saving architecturally significant buildings rather than leveling entire blocks. Also,

members developed a list of incentives for local merchants to participate in the plan that ideally would prevent property from having to be purchased under the city's eminent domain powers.

"While we weren't able to get complete consensus on the eminent domain issue, I think we came the closest that any group has come to moving it aside as an obstacle," says Caren Glotfelty, Environment Program director for The Heinz Endowments and a task force member. "It is critically important to the success of the Endowments' organizational goals that this renewal project for the city center get under way," says Glotfelty. "But at the same time, we want to ensure that any investment we make is returned to the public through good civic design."

The Endowments participated in Plan C as part of its Civic Design Initiative, a multi-disciplinary effort to promote superior urban planning in the region.

Among the civic design standards that would be applied to the new development: historic preservation; new construction that meets green design certification; a competitive, juried selection process for new building design; and recreational amenities, public spaces and a process for acquiring public art.

### National Sustainable Conference in Pittsburgh

Southwestern Pennsylvania became a national teaching laboratory for the country in March, when the Urban Land Institute hosted a two-day symposium on "The Practice of Sustainable Development." About 150 leaders in the fields of architecture, Smart Growth economics, private development, the environment and business came together to explore trends in sustainable development and to see Pittsburgh's successes in brownfield transformation, green building design and urban green space protection.

Participants visited PNC Firstside Center (shown here). Other sites profiled by the conference, which was sponsored in part by The Heinz Endowments, included: Summerset at Frick Park, Pittsburgh Technology Center South Side Works, and the housing and business community of Washington's Landing, built on what was once one of the most polluted land parcels in the city.



Members of the Neco Gato group perform at the Multi-Cultural Arts Initiative's re-defining event downtown.



## Multi-Cultural Arts Initiative Gets Multi-Faceted Makeover

The regional organization responsible for promoting African-American artists has stepped out of the shadows to show off a new logo and a re-charged effort to build audiences for diverse arts groups.

The Multi-Cultural Arts Initiative, a long-term funding project of The Heinz Endowments and The Pittsburgh Foundation, recently launched a high-energy kickoff for the campaign at Bosa Nova. The public event, says Initiative Senior Program Officer Beverly Portis, is designed to reach further into Pittsburgh's

African-American community groups—clergy, media, business and youth leaders among them—to use them as eyes and ears for Initiative staff. The campaign's call to action is also matched by increased foundation funding—more than \$800,000 will be available this year for grants distribution to artists and group performers, a nearly \$160,000 increase over last year's budget.

Retired Pittsburgh Cultural Trust President Carol Brown, now a board member of The Howard Heinz Endowment, told a diverse audience of several hundred that the original funding strategy behind the Endowments' support of the Initiative was basic cataloging—to learn more about the numbers and types of African-American artists and performance groups. In the years since, she said, expectations have grown.

"Cultural diversity is essential to the future prosperity of this region; that is a simple fact. In order for our region to grow, it must be able to speak to people from a broad range of cultures, nationalities and backgrounds," Brown said. "A region that celebrates the arts of diverse cultures signals itself as a welcoming home for all those would do business here, build companies here or simply apply their skills here."

Since 1990, the Initiative has awarded more than 300 grants totaling \$4 million in theater, dance, poetry, music, photography and art.

## Creative Heights Grantees Announced

A robust cultural environment affords artists opportunities to be paid for producing new work. To help foster that sort of environment in Pittsburgh, the Endowments have launched the Creative Heights Initiative, an innovative grants program that encourages professional arts organizations and individual artists to partner on the production of new work. Their joint proposals are considered by a panel of arts administrators, artists and Endowments' staff who award as much as \$40,000 to ensure each project's completion. At least two-thirds of each award must go directly to the artist and be directed to project-related costs. Creative Heights is based on a similar program operated by the Haas Funds in San Francisco.

This year's first competition resulted in five awardees being chosen from proposals submitted by 29 arts organizations:

► The Pittsburgh Children's Museum and artist Tim Kaulen, for the creation and installation of interactive artwork for the expanded and re-designed museum. During

a year-long residency, Kaulen will produce a work around the concept of "Fantastic Inflatable Menagerie," large, air-filled sculptures that move through the manipulation of elastic cords.

► Srishti Dances of India and Indian classical musician—composer—vocalist Charu Collur, for a residency program that will allow Collur to develop new musical pieces for Srishti's repertoire of Classical Odissi dance. The program will culminate in a performance at the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater in East Liberty later this year.

► The Pittsburgh Symphony Society and composer Leonardo Balada, to create a new orchestral work.

Based on the composer's initial vision of a planned "Symphony No. 5," the piece will have

its world premiere in September 2003. Balada plans to involve Carnegie Mellon University student musicians and software engineers in its development.

► Pittsburgh Filmmakers and Carolyn Speranza, for an eight-month collaborative project to create "Sight of Stillness," a video exploring meditation from artistic and scientific perspectives. Pittsburgh Filmmakers will host a symposium to publicize the finished work.

► The Pittsburgh Film Office and film director— animator Tom Megalis, for a six-month project to develop "Pieces of Jo," a video-film project combining real film footage and stop-motion re-creations. The piece, which will feature a Greek family in Pittsburgh coping with the mental breakdown of one of its members, is expected to be entered in the 2003 Sundance Film Festival competition.



"Stay Puff," an inflatable sculpture by Creative Heights awardee Tim Kaulen.



### **Arts-and-Literacy Mini-Grants Awarded for Reading Partnerships**

In a comfortable corner in one of the Pittsburgh Public School's four Head Start classrooms, a pack of preschool children sit cross-legged and wide-eyed. A new visitor, a librarian from the Carnegie Library, reads a story carefully selected to connect with the theme of a featured work of art from the Carnegie Museum of Art. Following the reading session, the librarian and a specially trained local artist lead the children in a song, game or other group activity also linked to the art theme. After seven weeks, the Head Start children visit the Carnegie Library and Museum of Art to search out the works they have been introduced to in the reading sessions.



This is Stories in Art, Junior — one example from this year's group of 10 recipients of The Heinz Endowments' Ready for Life ... Arts-and-Literacy Mini-Grants. The program, with awards averaging \$5,000, attempts to build partnerships among professional artists, community organizations and schools

around the goal of literacy development. Recent independent studies confirm that the arts can enhance a child's communication ability by promoting memory retention and understanding.

The preschool program is a spin-off of Stories in Art, a 7-year-old museum-library collaborative, which has introduced about 3,000 Pittsburgh school-aged children to the literacy benefits possible in combining books with art. This year's preschool adaptation will extend the reach to about 80 city Head Start students. All the early literacy program winners emphasize parental involvement in programming, especially in the development of student art and picture book projects to be exhibited at a final public reception.

The mini-grant program, administered through Gateway to the Arts, made 11 awards last year. More than 500 children benefited from teaching partnerships among 43 organizations and 27 local artists.

THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS

Howard Heinz Endowment  
Vira I. Heinz Endowment  
30 Dominion Tower  
625 Liberty Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-3115

412.281.5777  
www.heinz.org

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