



# CHANGING SITES & SCENES

ALTHOUGH HOME TO ONE OF THE PITTSBURGH REGION'S FEW REMAINING STEEL MILLS, BRADDOCK BOROUGH STRUGGLES ECONOMICALLY BECAUSE OF THE INDUSTRY'S DECLINE. BUT A TOUR OF THE TOWN REVEALS THE DIFFERENCE A TENACIOUS MAYOR AND HIS MULTI-FACETED NONPROFIT CAN MAKE IN A COMMUNITY AND ITS PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE.  
BY ALLISON KEENE



A rooftop garden is among the unique features of a former-car-dealership-turned-destination-restaurant in Braddock Borough. As Chef Kevin Sousa strolls across a wooden plank in the garden above what will be his new Superior Motors restaurant, he has a clear view of one of his business's closest neighbors, the Edgar Thomson plant of U.S. Steel Corp.'s Mon Valley Works.

**A**long the main corridor of a small borough south of Pittsburgh sits a plentiful urban garden. Cars speed past neat rows of vegetables — tomatoes, potatoes, heads of lettuce — that are set back from the street behind a wooden fence. In stark contrast to this flourishing revitalization project

is the steel mill, a hulking metal monolith that looms behind the garden and overlooks the community.



Brian Cohen

Efforts to make Braddock “greener” coexist with the community’s lingering, though greatly diminished, industrial sector, as demonstrated by the Braddock Farms community garden, which volunteer Dana Angstadt helps tend just a stone’s throw from the Edgar Thomson steel mill.

U.S. Steel’s Edgar Thomson Works once flooded money into Braddock, making it a shopping and cultural center in the Pittsburgh region. After the collapse of the steel industry in the late 1980s, however, the mill became a shadow of its former self. It remained open, but the town was decimated.

Today, Braddock has a population of 2,153 — one-tenth its size five decades ago — an average property value of only \$4,800 and a business district with the gritty look of industrial decline.

But on closer examination, pockets of resurgence can be found in the struggling borough, especially along Braddock Avenue, which runs through the heart of town. Driving these efforts is the nonprofit Braddock Redux, started in 2003 by the passionate three-term mayor John Fetterman. His love for the community is tattooed on his forearm: 15104 — Braddock’s ZIP code. Guided by Mr. Fetterman and Braddock Redux, the once-bustling borough is striving to reinvent itself by pursuing a new economic infrastructure, encouraging contributions from enthusiastic artists and stimulating a renewed sense of community pride.

The mayor also credits investments by local philanthropies, including The Heinz Endowments and the Buhl, Pittsburgh, Richard King Mellon and Laurel foundations, which provided support that he believes has had a transformational impact on

In many ways, Mayor John Fetterman is as colorful as the entrance to Braddock's UnSmoke Systems Artspace. From the tattoo of the borough's ZIP code on his forearm to his energetic promotion of his town and its potential, Mr. Fetterman makes an impression that has drawn attention to revitalization efforts in the community.

Brian Cohen



his work to alleviate the stark economic disparity between Braddock and wealthier neighborhoods.

“It’s very humbling,” Mr. Fetterman says.

Endowments Community & Economic Development Director Rob Stephany describes Braddock as a “Rubik’s cube” that requires a creative plan to help pump new life into the borough. “It’s people and ideas that make the difference,” he says, “and they have great ideas and great people.”

Both are needed for the borough to recover from its dramatic decline. In the 1950s and 1960s, Braddock supported 20,000 residents and more than 243 thriving businesses. In a 2013 TED Talk, Mr. Fetterman described how the borough lost 90 percent of those residents and businesses. Census data from 2013, the most recent available, further outlines the extent of that downfall, estimating that nearly 40 percent of the borough’s population is below the poverty line.

“We shouldn’t have these communities that are so severely marginalized,” Mr. Fetterman says.

Many of the renewal efforts in the borough emphasize the arts, such as a black box theater, exhibition venues, and creative opportunities for residents to engage with artists and artworks.

Jeb Feldman hosts exhibits and community events at his UnSmoke Systems Artspace on Braddock Avenue. He says the key to revitalization is encouraging positive activities that can

help erase the stigma of the borough as dangerous. “Having six or seven positive experiences is really important in bringing a comfort level to the neighborhood,” he explains, “and that enables other things to happen.”

Further down Braddock Avenue, artists-turned-librarians Dana Bishop-Root, Ruthie Stringer and Leslie Stern have a similar philosophy. As members of the artists’ collective Transformazium, the trio works with the local Carnegie Library to infuse art into the community. Transformazium’s Braddock Carnegie Arts Program is based on their philosophy that art “flourishes with many—many voices, many hands, many viewers, many sources and many cultures.”

The three artists have devised a range of programming based at the library, including a Neighborhood Print Shop, artist in residency programs, weekly music events and library-based children’s programming. The women also take advantage of artworks donated by both borough residents and national patrons to teach those in the community, particularly young people, more about Braddock and art in general.

A unique aspect of Transformazium’s work is its art lending collection. Started in 2013 in cooperation with the Carnegie Museum of Art’s Carnegie International, the collection consists of 120 pieces of original art, some of them donated by Carnegie International artists. Work in the collection can be checked out



Allyson Keene



Duane Render



Allison Keene



Allison Keene



Allison Keene

## Investing in Braddock

Bright spots in Braddock are increasing as the result of residents and supporters contributing their creativity and hard work. Here are a few snapshots, from top left clockwise: Chef Kevin Sousa and others serving free barbecue lunches as advance promotion of Superior Motors restaurant; youth-oriented programs, such as Yoga for Kids, offered at the Nyia Page Community Center; urban gardening at the Braddock Avenue Youth Garden; baked goods produced by the Braddock Community Oven for activities such as pizza nights as well as for commercial businesses; experimental art projects presented at the UnSmoke Systems Artspace gallery; and, symbolizing Braddock's hope and potential, a mosaic welcome sign created by BYP youth and artist James Simon that replaced one vandalized with gang graffiti.



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Ally Kempf

by Allegheny County residents who have valid library cards, enabling them to take home and appreciate art they might not have had access to otherwise. The collection is promoted and interpreted by arts facilitators hired from the community, who have become experts on the collection and its potential uses and placement.

Janet Sarbaugh, the Endowments' senior program director for Arts & Culture, explains that the foundation currently provides annual funding for all the components of Transformazium's Carnegie Art Program, including support for the salaries of the art facilitators. Ms. Sarbaugh believes that Transformazium's work in Braddock is groundbreaking for the borough and for the Pittsburgh region.

"This artists' collective is conducting a fantastic experiment in proving the value of the arts for all," she says.

For Ms. Bishop-Root, the library's goal is to honor the people living in Braddock by creating new resources for them as the community continues to develop. "The people who chose to stay here and the people who ended up moving here . . . are all deeply invested in this community. For us, that's an incredible resource, and it's an incredible honor to be a part of that neighborhood."

Frederick Thieman, president of the Buhl Foundation, is impressed by Braddock's creative solutions for reinvention, including an investment in the arts and on attracting new visitors to Braddock. He is confident that the borough's "nontraditional strategies," led by Mr. Fetterman and Braddock Redux, are sound investments for the foundation community.

"[Mr. Fetterman] is creative, he's energetic, he's committed and he's innovative," Mr. Thieman says. "Any one of those grants has been leveraged by the sweat equity, community contributions and energy of the people there."

Mr. Fetterman believes that reinvention is only possible if Braddock balances attracting new residents and businesses to the borough with programs that support existing residents. One such program is the Redux-run Free Store in the 400 block of Braddock Avenue.

Giselle Fetterman, the mayor's wife and unofficially titled First Lady of Braddock, runs the Free Store, which centers around three rainbow-painted shipping containers laid end to end like dominoes. The containers sit in a previously empty lot that buzzes daily with activity as volunteers organize the donated

clothes, toys and furniture. The Free Store, which aims to eliminate food and clothing insecurity in the borough and receives surplus goods from places such as Costco, Osh-Kosh, and Giant Eagle, and name brands such as Lego and Juicy Couture. Patrons take items free of charge.

"These things were going to waste, and I wanted to direct them where there was need," Mrs. Fetterman says.

Among Braddock Redux's other promising revitalization projects is the Superior Motors restaurant, spearheaded by renowned Pittsburgh chef Kevin Sousa. Envisioned as a world-class, community-oriented restaurant, Superior Motors is scheduled to open this summer on the first floor of a refurbished Chevy dealership that was once an eyesore on Braddock Avenue. One of its views is of the Edgar Thomson Works, the town's economic driver of yesteryear.

The hope is that the destination restaurant will breathe new life into a community bread oven and purchase the bulk of its produce from Braddock Farms, the urban garden that sprawls across two empty lots on the main thoroughfare, as well as consume the harvest from Superior Motors' own rooftop garden. The restaurant also will host a job-training program in connection with the Braddock Youth Project, a youth employment program created by Braddock Redux and AmeriCorps in 2006 to encourage youth to get off the streets and into jobs that help improve the community.

Mr. Sousa, who has "HARD WORK" tattooed across his knuckles in gothic capital letters, is accustomed to opening restaurants in challenging areas. He led previous successful ventures in less prosperous sections of Pittsburgh's East Liberty and Garfield neighborhoods. In recent Pittsburgh Post-Gazette articles, he acknowledged, however, that he also is working to erase the debts he amassed from those businesses. After he and Mr. Fetterman decided to open Superior Motors in 2012, Mr. Sousa gave up ownership of two restaurants, closed a third and moved his family to Braddock.

"I have a soft spot for areas that are struggling," Mr. Sousa says, adding that he is interested in more than starting a new business. "I have no interest in dropping a fancy restaurant in Braddock and not being part of the community. I like to be a part of the growth of a community."

When traditional funding for the risky restaurant venture was difficult to find, Mr. Sousa and Mr. Fetterman turned to an increasingly popular method of financing: Kickstarter. They

launched their campaign in December 2013, asking the community to donate and help them reach their \$250,000 goal. To their surprise, they shattered that number, earning \$310,255 in just over a month. With 2,026 backers—65 percent of whom were Braddock residents – Superior Motors’ campaign became the most funded restaurant project in Kickstarter’s history.

The Kickstarter campaign and support from the foundation community enabled the project to move forward. In the case of the Endowments, \$150,000 was awarded to Braddock Redux to loan to the restaurant. Another \$40,000 was given to the nonprofit to support the job-training program, which also has attracted funding from other philanthropies, including the Laurel and Buhl foundations.

Mr. Fetterman considers the community’s support of Superior Motors as a sign that the borough is ready to revitalize. “People just want to see good things happen in Braddock,” the mayor says.

And Superior Motors is expected to draw attention to and expand upon some of the good things that already are occurring in the community. Braddock Farms, for example, repurposed unused space along Braddock Avenue that once illustrated blight in the borough and now is an inspiring sight for residents. Started in 2006 by Grow Pittsburgh, an urban agriculture nonprofit, Braddock Farms is in its ninth growing season. The farm supports more than 40 varieties of vegetables in white growing tents and neat garden plots.

With funding from the Endowments and the Pittsburgh and Richard King Mellon foundations, the farm’s initiatives include serving as an activity site for the Braddock Youth Project. The Endowments also awarded grants in 2011 and 2012 to support youth mentoring at the Braddock Youth Project’s garden, which is a short walk down Braddock Avenue from Braddock Farms, and to fund sustainability initiatives and nutritional education, explains Wayne Jones, the Endowments’ senior impact officer.

In addition to gardening, Braddock Youth Project employees constructed a café in the Nyia Page Community Center, which was named after a two-year-old girl from Rankin who died of exposure and abuse in 2010. The group’s other programs include videography, advertising, screen-printing and beekeeping.

Several young people who have been involved with the Braddock Youth Project agree that it has helped to change their lives as well as their community. Dario Soto, 22, joined the group in 2009 and returned to work for two years as an AmeriCorps

member. Last summer, he reached his AmeriCorps service limit and was not eligible to work in the urban garden after August. But he describes his time in the program as “a blessing,” helping him overcome the trauma of his mother’s drug addiction and the experience of being shot at 13.

“I was a troubled kid,” Mr. Soto says, “but now it’s finally starting to level off. I didn’t think I was going to graduate high school, and BYP helped me.”

D’Ondre Kelly, 19, is glad for the opportunity to help in the town’s reinvention. Tired of witnessing violence in his neighborhood, Kelly has been with the program every summer since 2009. “I’m working here for my community,” he says. “I want to make Braddock a safer place.”

Braddock Youth Project participants who work at Braddock Farms will be the first allowed to apply to Superior Motors’ nine-month, paid training program, which will include the farm as a practical classroom. The project will have three facets: urban gardening, restaurant service and food preparation, says Julie Pezzino, director of Grow Pittsburgh. Trainees also will be eligible for free housing in a refurbished convent.

Braddock Farms manager Marshall Hart believes that Superior Motors will be a way for young people to apply what they have learned in the Braddock Youth Project garden and Braddock Farms in a traditional work setting. “If they really see the value of digging in, if they see people getting jobs, if they see people at Superior Motors, then they can see where this goes,” he says. (To see video about building renovations for the restaurant, go to <http://www.heinz.org/video/SuperiorMotors.mp4>.)

A more symbolic illustration of the transformation underway in Braddock is the contrast between its former and current welcome signs. The one now marking the borough’s entrance is a mosaic of glass and pottery that reads “Welcome to Historic Braddock.” It was created in 2007 by students in the Braddock Youth Project and Pittsburgh artist James Simon.

The original sign, vandalized with white spray paint to read “Welcome to Braddock, Compliments of the Crips,” now hangs in Mr. Fetterman’s kitchen. He calls it a reminder of the street violence that enveloped Braddock when he arrived in 2001.

“That right there is a good metaphor for how much things have changed,” he says, pointing to the old sign on the wall. “We need to take care of the residents that we have, and we also need to take the community in a new direction.” *h*

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

## STUDENTS FROM BRADDOCK TRAVEL TO NICARAGUA



Braddock Youth Project

With support from a Heinz Endowments grant, five Braddock Youth Project participants went on a nine-day service trip to Nicaragua to work at Quinta Los Chavalos, a school whose students receive tuition support from Building New Hope, a nonprofit based in Pittsburgh and Nicaragua. The photo album documenting the students' experience can be found on the Braddock Youth Project Facebook page.

When Tatiana Crosby stepped off the plane in Granada, Nicaragua, last year, it was her first time outside of the United States. For most of the five teenagers from Braddock, a borough south of Pittsburgh, the Central America trip was the first stamp in their freshly printed passports — and for some their first time on an airplane.

Ms. Crosby, 19, says that landing in Nicaragua was both exciting and frightening. It wasn't until she and the other youth, along with their chaperones, arrived that she realized how far she'd traveled.

"It really hit me... that I can't really turn around and go home," she recalls. "I'm in this whole other country."

A 2013 grant awarded by a group of Heinz Endowments Youth Philanthropy interns took Ms. Crosby and other students who were part of the Braddock Youth Project on a nine-day service trip to Granada. The Endowments' internship program allows teams of recent high school graduates from the Pittsburgh region to develop grantmaking ideas and recommend support of up to \$25,000 to programs that benefit youth and their communities. For one intern group, the Braddock Youth Project was the perfect fit.

Former youth philanthropy intern Jacalyn Sharp was a member of the team that created the grantmaking project called GPS: Global Perspective Scholars. Its goal was to support an international experience for youth from low-income backgrounds, particularly those from Pittsburgh or nearby towns affected by the steel industry collapse. Ms. Sharp says international travel is invaluable in building confidence and professional skills.

"Traveling is traditionally a rich person's activity," she explains. "It puts you in an elite group of people who feel like they've seen the world and experienced the world and have...global knowledge and perspective."

But what made the Braddock group most appealing to the philanthropy interns were the different efforts already underway to improve the quality of life for all the borough residents, including the youth.

"The interns didn't buy into the old narrative of Braddock as a failed steel town; that history was irrelevant," says Wayne Jones, the Endowments' senior impact officer and coordinator of the foundation's youth philanthropy initiative. "Braddock to them was this funky town where the cool mayor was doing exciting things with youth, gardens and the arts. The interns were particularly inspired by the intentional focus on youth as assets to be nurtured and developed."

In partnership with the nonprofit Building New Hope, which is based in Pittsburgh and Nicaragua, the five Braddock teens worked in the garden and classrooms of Quinta Los Chavalos school in Granada. While teaching English, the youth learned about gardening, Nicaraguan culture and the Spanish language.

Jessica Schmidt, program coordinator for the Braddock Youth Project, chaperoned the students along with translator and former AmeriCorps member Danielle Green.

Ms. Schmidt chose Granada because of its connection to Braddock's youth-run community café, which sells fair trade coffee produced by Building New Hope. The organization uses its profits to support the high school tuition of Granada students. Ms. Schmidt says access to high school education is allowing more students from that city to attend college.

"The community has grown leaps and bounds because of its partnership with Building New Hope," she adds.

"It's kind of unheard of for kids from rural areas to go to college, but kids are starting to go."

The Braddock youth participated in 13 pre-departure workshops, a requirement of the GPS grant. These included Spanish instruction, lessons on Nicaraguan culture, travel and safety guidelines, and presentations on Building New Hope and gentrification in Nicaragua.

Communicating in Spanish still proved difficult. Autumn Wilson, 18, says her group and the Nicaraguan students often relied on gestures, developing a game of pointing to objects and teaching each other the Spanish and English words for them.

Deon Archie, 17, remembers that speaking Spanish was a challenge, particularly since he was the only Braddock student who hadn't studied the language. "That was my first time speaking Spanish," he says. "It was an experience for me, just learning Spanish. But, it was fun speaking a new language."

Ms. Schmidt describes how the Braddock youth had previously struggled to see the value of a second language, but having to use their skills to communicate with the students in Nicaragua showed them the advantages of being bilingual. She says they grew much more comfortable with the language by the end of their trip.

And even though the youth were familiar with Nicaraguan culture before they left, traveling abroad showed them differences between Braddock and Granada that they didn't expect.

Alternative styles of transportation surprised Kenez Singleton, 19, the most. He saw very few cars, and most people rode horses, bikes and three-wheeled rickshaws called tuk-tuks. He recalls watching families and groups of people all traveling on one bike.

For Brandy Quarles, 17, poverty was the most difficult aspect of the trip. She and the youth were visiting La Boquita beach when a little girl tugged on her arm and begged in Spanish for a drink of her tea. She had never seen that happen in Braddock. "I felt so bad, I wanted to cry. The girl was just so little."

Ms. Schmidt believes that experiencing firsthand the differences between American and international lifestyles is valuable for youth. The work the students did taught them to view themselves and their community from a larger perspective.

"In order to see your community's assets and your community's needs, you need to see how other people do things in other places," she says. "It opens your mind to new ideas of community development."