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THE MAGAZINE OF  
THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS

Issue 1 2018

COMMUNITY CHRONICLES:  
AN EXPLORATION  
OF THREE PITTSBURGH  
NEIGHBORHOODS BEGINS  
WITH HOMEWOOD



ISSUE 1 2018

# INSIDE

# h

## 6

## FEATURE: IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS

In a three-part series, *h* magazine travels to the Pittsburgh neighborhoods of Homewood, Hazelwood and the Hill District, where The Heinz Endowments and other philanthropies are partnering with residents and local organizations to build on assets and expand opportunities. The first stop is Homewood, a neighborhood at the eastern end of the city where entrepreneurs and artists are working to redefine the community.

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The Heinz Endowments was formed from the Howard Heinz Endowment, established in 1941, and the Vira I. Heinz Endowment, established in 1986. It is the product of a deep family commitment to community and the common good that began with H.J. Heinz, and that continues to this day.

The 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 become a just and equitable community in which all of its citizens thrive economically, ecologically, educationally, socially and culturally. We also seek to advance knowledge and practice in the field of philanthropy through strategies that focus on our priorities of Creativity, Learning and Sustainability.

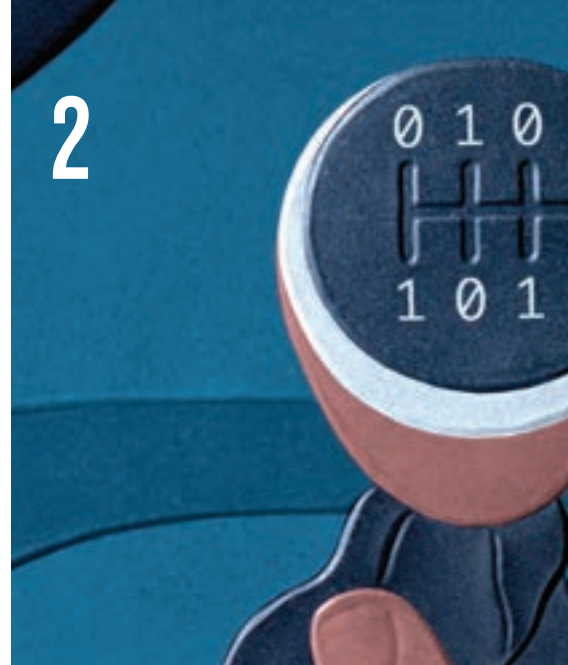
In life, Howard Heinz and Vira I. Heinz set high expectations for their philanthropy. Today, the Endowments is committed to doing the same. Our charge is to be diligent, thoughtful and creative in continually working to set new standards of philanthropic excellence. Recognizing that none of our work would be possible without a sound financial base, we also are committed to preserving and enhancing the Endowments' assets through prudent investment management.

**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, John Ellis, Donna Evans Sebastian, Carmen Lee, Grant Oliphant, Scott Roller, Courtney Tolmer. Design: Landesberg Design

**About the cover** Visual and performance artist Vanessa German created the whimsically colorful Art House in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood, where she welcomes local children to join her in indulging their imagination and creativity. Photo by Sam Fairchild.





# 2

## TECHNOLOGY SHIFT

As the Pittsburgh region takes the stage as a leader in technology innovation and artificial intelligence, making sure today's local workers have a role in this new future is a priority.

# 8

## 15208

Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood is reinventing itself, reviving the dreams of longtime residents, engaging newcomers, and partnering with civic and philanthropic allies to propel the community forward.

# 14

## STRENGTHENING FAMILY TIES

An array of support services being offered in Homewood provide parents like Shaquala Venson and Dorian Page options for addressing the needs of their families at any given time and under a variety of circumstances.

# 20

## ENTREPRENEURIAL ENERGY

Economic development is critical to revitalization efforts in Homewood, with philanthropic support given to local entrepreneurs to ensure their stake in the community's success.

# 24

## IN THE HOUSE

Tyree Allie used to keep to himself before attending the Lighthouse Project at the Homewood-Brushton YMCA, but now he creates and produces music, opening up new lines of communication to his peers and teachers.

# 28

## GROWING GREEN ACTIVISTS

An increasing number of Homewood residents are finding that a key component of improving their quality of life involves creating an environmentally healthy community for themselves and their families.

# 34

## STATE OF THE ARTS

Integral to revitalization efforts in Homewood are artists and arts organizations whose work brings vibrancy, enthusiasm and hope to the community.

# 40

## THE WRITE PLACE

Within the City of Pittsburgh is the City of Asylum, which brings together international writers fleeing persecution with local artists and art lovers to create a lively and creative community that enriches everyone.

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46 HERE AND THERE





# TECHNOLOGY

**E**conomist Lee Branstetter knows that artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous vehicles and other transformative technologies are poised to profoundly disrupt the economy and workforce across the region, nation and world.

And he has a ringside seat from which to watch it unfold.

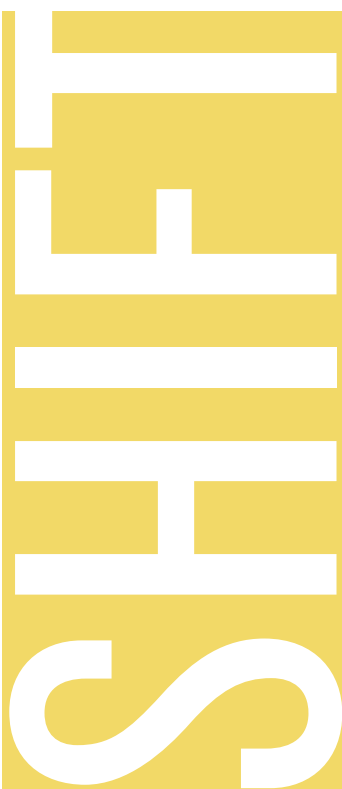
“My computer science colleagues believe this will be a big deal in the longer run, and all sectors of the economy will be utilizing these new technologies,” said Mr. Branstetter, a professor of economics and public policy and the director of the Center for the Future of Work at Carnegie Mellon University, where much of the groundbreaking science in those fields is taking place.

“We have some time to put into place policies that could cushion the impact on people who are likely to be vulnerable to these changes.”

Uber’s self-driving Volvos already roll along Pittsburgh streets and practice on a test track in Hazelwood Green, where a sustainable community is rising from the brownfield that had been the Jones & Laughlin steel mill. A few acres away, what remains of J&L’s Mill 19 is being reborn as a brain center of new technologies that includes the Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing Institute, a \$250 million public-private collaborative founded by CMU to push the boundaries of automation in U.S. industry.

In fact, innovations emerging from Pittsburgh’s companies and its major research universities, CMU and the University of Pittsburgh, have cast the region as a leading center of invention in the fields of automation, advanced robotics, autonomous vehicles, 3D printing and genomics.

The history of such far-reaching, technology-driven change is rife with examples of the economic benefits that have followed in its wake, including



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LEFT BEHIND.  
BY JEFFERY FRASER**

heightened productivity and competitiveness, new products, new markets and new jobs. Technological disruption also has eliminated entire occupations and increased demand for better-educated, higher-skilled workers. And it has sentenced those not equipped to meet those demands to economic hardship and dim prospects.

Desktop publishing software, for example, replaced entire newspaper composing room departments, eliminating typesetting jobs. More than 150,000 manufacturing jobs in the Pittsburgh region disappeared when the local steel industry collapsed under the pressure of technological change, weak demand and global competition. It triggered an exodus of mostly young adults in search of job opportunities elsewhere.

But Mr. Branstetter and others believe that doesn't have to be the case this time around. “We have an opportunity to look ahead, figure out where the next disruption is likely to occur and, for once, actually be ready with public policy interventions that can make the next round of disruptive impacts much less hurtful and more beneficial.”

An increasing number of southwestern Pennsylvania stakeholders are embracing the challenge, such as companies, universities and colleges, economic development groups, and foundations, including The Heinz Endowments. Of particular interest to the Endowments is supporting ways to improve the prospects of people already struggling to find a place in the region's economic resurgence and to prepare them for the technological advances that are ahead.

“At the same time our city and region are waking up to a more robust economic future, we see under-educated portions of our population losing the on-ramps to those industry clusters,” said Rob Stephany, the Endowments’ director of Community



& Economic Development. “Our intent is to take a detailed look at how the region is building its economic future, look at the people who are not actively participating in it, and figure out what the bridges might be to help them get there.”

Major technological disruptions in the past did not lead to widespread, prolonged unemployment. For much of the 20th century, the level of education among American workers rose steadily, enabling them to keep pace with the constant demand for higher-skilled labor, report Harvard economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz in studies of the issue.

But, as educational attainment in the U.S. slowed near the end of the century, the advance of technology did not. And the income gap between higher-educated and less-educated workers quickly began to widen, a trend that continues today.

“Artificial intelligence and machine learning could extend these trends that we’ve been reckoning with over the past 40 years because you will be able to automate a new set of skills, reducing the demand for a new category of workers,” Mr. Branstetter said. “We’re not worried about an employment apocalypse. We’re worried that people will find jobs, but the wages they will earn, the benefits they get, will not be enough to sustain a family or a middle-class standard of living.”

The Center for the Future of Work is exploring ways to prepare for technological disruption with support from the Endowments and other foundations. For starters, researchers are trying to answer two key questions: Which industry sectors and occupations will take the brunt of the impact and when?

One way they’re doing this is to look at patent applications for clues. And they plan to let the machine learning algorithms they’re writing do the heavy lifting. Machine learning is a way to enable machines to learn tasks and improve their capabilities on their own from experience.

The idea is to have computers learn to read hundreds of thousands of patent applications, identify those involving artificial intelligence and machine learning, and compile information about them at speeds that teams of patent attorneys can’t come close to matching. The goal is to get an accurate preview of the impact of the technology by identifying industries likely to apply the patent, where on the map that will happen and what occupations will likely be affected.

Long-haul trucking is widely considered one of the major occupations that could be among the first to absorb the impact of the rise of autonomous vehicles. With Endowments support, researchers are scouring data, such as the distribution of trucking activity across market segments and where truck drivers live, to get a sense of how the industry is likely to automate in the next 30 to 40 years and predict where and how the labor impact will be felt.

“We can tell policymakers where these people live and how far they are going to fall down the income ladder if they lose their trucking jobs,” Mr. Branstetter said. “It will be useful, even essential, for policymakers to know where in geographic space and industry space these technologies are going to be implemented so they know where the shocks are going to be first felt.”

The Keystone Research Center is working with CMU researchers to investigate policy options for softening the impact on workers displaced by transformative technologies, such as a system of wage insurance, and preparing a broader population of men and women for the jobs of the future so they might benefit from the economic shift rather than be driven to hard times. And researchers at the Harrisburg-based labor research nonprofit are extending their investigation beyond U.S. borders to compare how other countries deal with workforce disruption.

Studies suggest that it doesn’t take a Ph.D. to land a decent job in an innovation economy. About half of the jobs related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the U.S. are “middle-skill” occupations that don’t require a bachelor’s degree, but do require workers to complete some type of post-secondary education program to acquire the skills the jobs demand.

“Middle-class wage growth drives economic demand. Education and skills training are public goods and generate benefits for employers as well as the workers trained,” said Stephen Herzenberg, an economist and executive director of the Keystone Research Center. “There is solid evidence that helping people train and get new jobs would generate benefits and relieve skill gaps.”

But compared to other industrialized nations, the U.S. invests little in “active” workforce development programs, such as training and programs to help workers search and prepare for jobs. The U.S. invested only 0.11 percent of gross domestic product in such programs in 2015, according to a report by the international Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Denmark, on the other hand, invested 2.1 percent of its GDP in similar programs.

“I believe we can manage these changes and end up increasing standards of living of more people,” Mr. Herzenberg said. “It’s a question of developing the political will to make the investment and enact policies.” **h**

**AT THE SAME TIME  
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# FUTURE CITY

5

Joshua Franzos



"Cities are the engines of national economies," said Bruce Katz, a former Brookings Institution researcher who co-founded New Localism Advisors, a consulting firm. "They're the centers of global trade and investment. But in this century, they're also the vanguards of problem solving."

One high-profile example of cities awakening to that role is the growing number committed to plans for reducing greenhouse gases and easing the threat of climate change. In particular, U.S. cities such as Pittsburgh are continuing to participate in the 2015 Paris climate agreement despite the Trump

Administration having decided that the nation won't.

In Cleveland, the housing authority built a public housing community for grandparents raising children as their own. It's a population that includes 3 million people nationwide who don't fit well in traditional public housing designed to accommodate parents with children or seniors living alone.

"It was the first time I'd seen a housing authority that got it, that this was the new reality of how people were living in the 21st century," Mr. Castro said.

In Flint, Mich., the state wresting management of the city away from local elected officials led to a four-year-old public water crisis. The state switched water supplies in the interest of austerity, but neglected to do the chemistry to prevent corrosion of lead pipes, exposing residents to dangerously high levels of lead in their drinking water.

"Flint is one of those places like many in the country where the ZIP code you were born in is the greatest predictor of where you'll end up," said Mona Hanna-Attisha, director of the Pediatric Residency Program at Hurley Children's Hospital who discovered high lead levels in Flint's children. "Children in Flint actually live 15 years less than children in a neighboring ZIP code."

The crisis, she said, also demonstrated the community's resilience and inspired residents to take action to fix the city's problems. Flint is expected to be one of the first cities to replace all of its lead water pipes. A model public health program for children is being built, and new services, such as affordable early childcare and nearly universal pre-school, are emerging.

Another challenge facing all cities is a world transformed by artificial intelligence and other technologies that promise investment, jobs and wealth, but could eliminate occupations and worsen income inequality.

"The real promise of technology in cities is that it gives us a chance to double down on our humanity and come back to a central question of how cities can do what they're good at, which is to support human flourishing," said Jennifer Bradley, founding director of the Center for Urban Innovation at the Aspen Institute.

But economic benefits and opportunity don't flow uniformly through neighborhoods.

That's not by accident, said Andre Perry, a fellow at the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program who grew up just outside of Pittsburgh in the borough of Wilkinsburg. "The only reason we're not seeing growth is because we don't trust people in certain places," he said. "When you invest in place and not people, you get gentrification."

"There are 1,200 majority black places in the United States, small and large. Many of these places have assets that are underdeveloped, that people ignore until something goes wrong. There are entrepreneurs, there is real estate, and there is leadership that is ignored. We need to find what's right and invest in those things." **h**

**T**he problems they came to discuss were national, even global, in scope and consequence: environmental threats; social and economic injustice; racism; and bracing for the impact of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies that are transforming economies, work and opportunity.

The audience they encouraged to solve them was local—and for good reason.

"This conversation is happening in a moment when arguably cities are more important than they have been in our nation," former U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julián Castro, pictured above, told the mostly southwestern Pennsylvania audience gathered in April for Pittsburgh's p4 conference on sustainability.

"It's very clear today that with the federal government and many state governments retrenching from support of things like education, health care, social services and housing, local [residents] must roll their sleeves up in the spirit of improving the community they all live in," said Mr. Castro, who currently is the Dean's Distinguished Fellow at the University of Texas Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs.

The former HUD secretary was among two dozen experts in fields ranging from economic development and design to public health, environment and social justice who shared their insights with local stakeholders interested in building the future of the City of Pittsburgh on principles of sustainability guided by the themes of people, planet, place and performance.

Mayor William Peduto embraced the concept in 2015. This year's event was the third p4 conference convened by the city and The Heinz Endowments to help inform the city's ambition to become a model of urban sustainability.

"We're trying to raise the bar for the community in terms of benchmarking Pittsburgh against the rest of the world by bringing in people with different perspectives and challenging ourselves about what Pittsburgh can be and how we can seize our own future rather than have it happen to us," said Andrew McElwaine, the Endowments' vice president of Sustainability.

Cities represent 85 percent of the world's gross domestic product and account for more than 50 percent of the world population. That percentage is growing as is the potential for cities' influence.

# IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS:

A three-part series  
featuring Homewood, Hazelwood  
and the Hill District

**B**etween the rivers and beyond the bridges, a patchwork of unique neighborhoods form the City of Pittsburgh. Each community has a history and identity of its own while contributing to the region's rich tapestry. But along with the nostalgic stories of past heydays and the promise of a technology-enriched future have been persistent and sobering narratives of racial, social, economic and educational inequities that have prevented some communities from thriving as much as others.

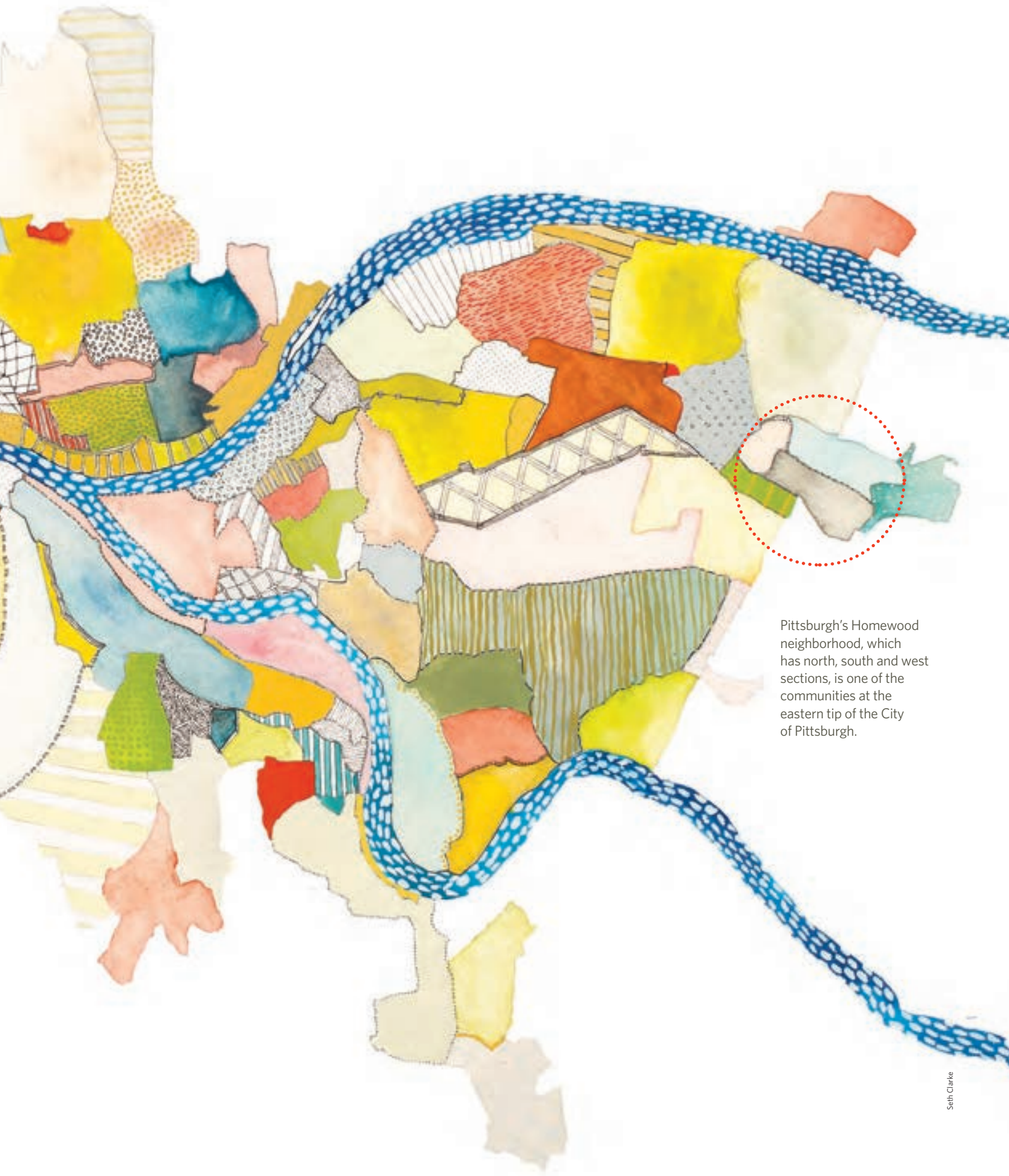
The Heinz Endowments is committed to investing in such communities and currently has a special focus on three neighborhoods: Homewood, the Hill District and Hazelwood. These were selected because of their established community partnerships with the Endowments as well as their assets, such as storied histories; creative spaces for artists; and engaged families, churches and other organizations and institutions that have defied assumptions about a dearth of community commitment.

Three consecutive issues of *h* magazine will take a more in-depth look at each of these neighborhoods through stories about the families and youth, artists and entrepreneurs who are working to enable the communities to realize their potential. Partnering with them are civic and philanthropic allies, such as the Endowments, that are offering support and assistance to the people and organizations that are addressing the needs of the communities.

The neighborhood featured in this issue of *h* is Homewood.







Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood, which has north, south and west sections, is one of the communities at the eastern tip of the City of Pittsburgh.





# 15208:

Residents and supporters of Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood are reinvigorating the





Modest homes like these on Hamilton Avenue are common in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood, but they belie the innovation and promising economic development occurring within the community.

community and boosting hopes for its brighter future. By Elwin Green



# A

## sk Homewood's longest-term residents what the neighborhood was like before 1968,

and they will tell you about not having to leave Homewood for anything. All they needed was on Homewood Avenue, including two movie theaters and a G.C. Murphy department store.

Over time, the neighborhood's population shrank somewhat from its postwar high as communities across Pittsburgh lost residents to the suburbs. Homewood's complexion also changed with an influx of Hill District residents displaced by construction in the early 1960s of the Civic Arena, a venue that hosted concerts and was home to the city's hockey team until it was razed and replaced more than 50 years later. Meanwhile, Homewood, once a mix of German, Irish, Italian and African American families, became majority-black. And at the beginning of 1968, it was still thriving.

Then the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered. Homewood Avenue went up in flames.

The loss of the business district exacerbated the continuing loss of residents through the 1970s, and conditions worsened as the American steel industry imploded, taking the Pittsburgh region's major revenue source with it. In January 1983, unemployment in the Pittsburgh metropolitan statistical area reached 17.1 percent. Over the next few years, the job of steelworker—one of the few occupations that would allow a black man in Pittsburgh without a college degree to support a family—disappeared, sparking further outmigration.

During that same span, the crack epidemic emerged, along with the War on Drugs, which resulted in a disproportionate number of neighborhood residents being incarcerated.

But most did not surrender to crack or fall into crime. They worked what jobs they could find and raised their children. They attended the two-dozen-plus neighborhood churches. They participated in block clubs, a mainstay of the community's Operation Better Block (OBB) that was formed in 1970 to promote neighborhood improvements. Over time, the smaller clubs reconfigured into larger clusters as OBB

expanded its community organizing activities along with its housing and youth programming revitalization efforts.

Homewood residents also patronized the remaining neighborhood businesses, and just as Pittsburgh's economy was bottoming out in 1983, the owners of three of those businesses—Sarah Goode of Goode's drugstore, Sara Trower of Trower's Cleaners and Neil Dorsey of Dorsey's Records—formed the Homewood-Brushton Revitalization Development Corporation. In a surge of activity, the agency built new homes, brought new businesses to the neighborhood, published a newspaper, operated a radio station—and then folded, its ambitions having outstripped its finances. That organization was followed in 1999 by the Homewood-Brushton Comprehensive Community Organization. HBCCO created a neighborhood strategic plan, but never implemented it because of a number of factors including a lack of funding.

With the turn of the century has come two shifts in Homewood: an increasing amount of activity focused on rebuilding the neighborhood—carried out by individuals and organizations in the absence of an overarching strategic approach—and a renewed effort to create a comprehensive neighborhood plan. In both cases, longtime residents find themselves joining hands with newer residents or non-residents, including government officials, nonprofit organizations, and members of the philanthropic community such as The Heinz Endowments and the Richard King Mellon Foundation. These individuals and groups are responding not only to Homewood's challenges, but also its opportunities.

"Our focus is on how much strength we can build from within Homewood," explained Scott Izzo, director of the Richard King Mellon Foundation, which has invested \$30 million in the neighborhood in the past 10 years.

And the community is becoming stronger, contends Homewood native John M. Wallace Jr., a University of Pittsburgh sociology professor and pastor of Bible Center Church who has helped to launch educational, environmental and business ventures that have taken root in the neighborhood.

"I think Homewood is moving forward in a positive direction," Dr. Wallace said. "We continue to have challenges, of course, but as





# 1950s

Homewood's business district was bustling in 1950, especially on the main drag of Homewood Avenue, which was dotted with familiar commercial fixtures such as G.C. Murphy and Rexall Drugs stores along with neighborhood-specific businesses like the Nite Hawk Bar and the Belmar Theatre. Homewood also was predominantly white, though a significant African American population lived in the community.

Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh Library System



# 1970s

By 1970, Homewood was a mostly African American neighborhood that was trying to regain its footing after the despair that followed the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A key player in this effort was Operation Better Block, which was established that year to revitalize the Homewood-Brushton community with programs that included street beautification projects such as tree plantings along with housing and youth initiatives.



Sam Fairchild

# 2018

While Homewood Avenue is not the bustling commercial center it once was, it still is the site of significant community institutions. These include Community College of Allegheny County's 32,000-square-foot Homewood-Brushton Center, left, which houses a Learning Resource Center; a reading lab; two fully equipped computer labs; two e-learning rooms; a science resource room; and a state-of-the-art science lab for classes in anatomy, physiology, chemistry and microbiology.



Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Heinz History Center

I look back over the last decade, things are definitely [moving] in an up and to the right direction.”

The most visible projects are new construction, particularly housing. In 2005, Building United of Southwestern Pennsylvania, a nonprofit developer, built 20 homes in the neighborhood. The houses, priced between \$135,000 and \$145,000 and partially financed with federal and city subsidies, sold quickly. Over the next 13 years, projects by Building United and other developers would include a senior housing complex with retail space on its first floor, new rental housing, rehabbed homes and other single-family home construction.

While there is momentum for housing in Homewood, Building United’s executive director, the Rev. Samuel Ware, believes that the neighborhood is not yet at the point when market momentum will make for-profit development feasible without subsidies.

“In order to get to the tipping point, I believe you need to do an additional 200 [units of housing], minimum, and probably closer to 500 to really change things,” he said.

And he cautioned against focusing exclusively on affordable housing, which some consider key to community development. “You can’t grow a community in a positive direction if everybody in the community is on government subsidy,” he noted.

On the commercial development side, nonprofit lender Bridgeway Capital purchased in 2013 what may be Homewood’s largest building, a five-story, 150,000-square-foot former Westinghouse warehouse that Bridgeway renamed 7800 Susquehanna in recognition of its street address. The building is now home to several small businesses—mostly startups, created by young entrepreneurs—as well as the Trade Institute of Pittsburgh, which offers a 10-week program in the building trades, and the University of Pittsburgh’s Manufacturing Assistance Center, which provides a 14-week program in machining.

Homewood also continues to build on its legacy in the arts. The neighborhood home of jazz composers and pianists Billy Strayhorn and Ahmad Jamal now has multiple venues for pursuing music education. The Afro-American Music Institute (AAMI) has taught music to pupils of all ages since it was established by Dr. James Johnson and his wife Pamela in 1982. Likewise, the Jazz Workshop Inc. has used the Homewood branch of Carnegie Library for classroom space since 1973, as well as offering a weekly series of jazz concerts there each summer.

Just a block away from AAMI and the library, the newly renovated Homewood-Brushton YMCA hosts the arts-focused Creative Youth Center, and is one of eight branches remaining in the Greater Pittsburgh YMCA system after the organiza-

tion filed for bankruptcy and closed several other branches. With its focus on youth engagement and outreach, the Homewood-Brushton Y is a good example of how the YMCA provides programs according to the wants and needs expressed in each community.

And a half-mile or so from the YMCA, artist Vanessa German sculpts, paints, writes poetry and teaches children to express themselves through art in her Art House, which is elaborately adorned with her own colorfully creative work and that of neighborhood youth.

Homewood’s challenges and successes cannot be entirely isolated from those of the city and of the region. Perhaps that is nowhere more obvious than in matters of health and the environment. Initiatives are underway to help residents learn about and address indoor and outdoor air pollution, and to increase healthy eating options and physical activity.

One experiment to model green electricity generation and food production is Oasis Farm and Fishery, an urban micro-farm, where a greenhouse contains aquaponic and hydroponic

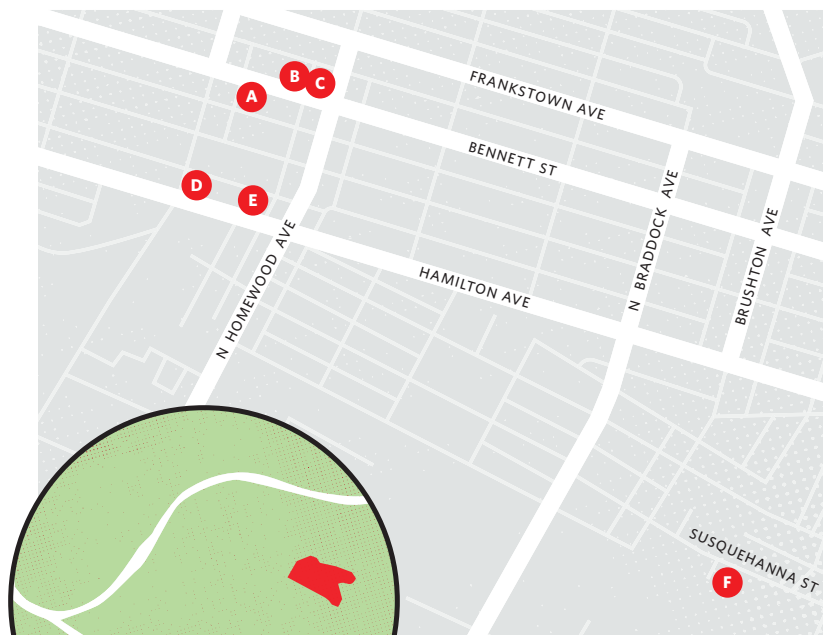
systems for growing vegetables and fish. The entire operation runs on direct current provided by solar panels, making it independent of the grid. Dr. Wallace joined with John Camillus, a professor at Pitt’s Katz School of Business, and Bopaya Bidanda, a professor at Pitt’s Swanson School of Engineering, to conceive the project.



Sam Fairchild

Completed in 2014, these houses constructed by Building United of Southwestern Pennsylvania transformed a former vacant lot on Finance Street in Homewood.





### HOMWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD ANCHORS

Once a wealthy community in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Homewood experienced periods of prosperity, anguish and promise during the last century. And for nearly two decades, despite continuing challenges, the community has been steadily building on its promise with support from neighborhood organizations and institutions that have provided the foundation for later development.

**A** Similar to its neighborhood home, the **Homewood-Brushton YMCA** has evolved over the decades, most recently developing a youth arts focus to meet the needs and interests of the community.

**B** **Operation Better Block Housing** was one of the first organizations committed to revitalizing Homewood after rebellions following the 1968 assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. crippled the business district.

**C** As one of the community's newer institutions, the **Homewood Children's Village** has become a key player in revitalization efforts with its focus on improving neighborhood children's educational and life outcomes.

**D** More than a book repository, the **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh-Homewood** has served as a gathering place for community forums, exhibits, plays and musical performances.

**E** The **Afro-American Music Institute** started in 1982 in a church in Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood, but moved six years later to Homewood, where it provides music education and personal enrichment to local youth and adults.

**F** **7800 Susquehanna** may be a commercial enterprise but, as Homewood's largest building, it stands out as a representation of the neighborhood's hope for economic growth through entrepreneurial initiatives.

At the Homewood-Brushton YMCA, a fitness center serves the branch's 700-plus members, who can work out solo, participate in group exercises, or use a personal trainer, said Executive Director Julie Motley-Williams. The YMCA's health fairs are open to everyone, and other activities include a bike ride for children in June. The Y also grows fruits and vegetables on site, which a chef uses to prepare fresh meals daily during the school year for 125 children, some of whom help to grow the food.

Another neighborhood institution with a wellness emphasis is the Homewood Children's Village, which created an Office of Child and Community Health after realizing that academic performance is deeply affected by children's physical well-being. The department sponsors an annual 5k run/walk and health expo, and has published a 33-page "Healthy Food and Gardening Access Guide" for the neighborhood.

Seeds for the Village were planted a decade ago when Dr. Wallace and Aliya Durham, then-executive director of Operation Better Block, led a group on a trip to New York to observe the Harlem Children's Zone, a comprehensive educational and community services initiative famous for helping Harlem children to escape cycles of poverty and failure.

Mr. Izzo of the Richard King Mellon Foundation was in that group. When they returned to Pittsburgh, "everyone was committed to trying to do something positive in Homewood," he said.

The Homewood Children's Village launched in September 2010 with a focus on improving children's educational outcomes and continues to serve Homewood's families with increasing success. Its 2017 annual report states that 82 percent of Homewood graduates were accepted into post-secondary institutions in the 2016-17 school year.

As different initiatives provide new opportunity and optimism in Homewood, Dr. Wallace noted that the foundation for the steady progress was laid before examples of success were evident.

"I think there's a lot of things bubbling up. People will say it came from nowhere," he said. Then he added with a smile, "Nowhere, or 15 years of work!" **h**

Dorian Page of Homewood helps his son Ira with his homework at the library in the neighboring community of East Liberty.







# STRENGTHENING FAMILY TIES

FAMILIES ARE THE BACKBONE OF ANY COMMUNITY, AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE REDEVELOPMENT PUZZLE IN PITTSBURGH'S HOMEWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD.  
BY CHRISTINE H. O'TOOLE PHOTOS BY ANNIE O'NEILL



Born and raised in Homewood, Dorian Page is a patriarch in the Pittsburgh neighborhood, with a deep commitment to helping others. An Army National Guard veteran, he coaches young boxers in the Police Athletic League and has worked with the Veterans Leadership Program to assist fellow vets in finding housing. Now, as a single 54-year-old father of two, he is requesting and receiving help and, in the process, discovering effective, friendly ways to enable his family to thrive.

Shaquala Venson is determined to provide the best for her 3-year-old son, King-Ray. First, the 21-year-old enrolled in the Baby Promise program in Homewood, which offers weekly sessions on how to provide a safe and loving home. In April, she placed him in Pittsburgh Public Schools' premier pre-kindergarten program, a mile from her old high school in the neighborhood. She knew of Crescent Early Childhood Center's outstanding track record in preparing preschoolers for kindergarten, and she is confident that it is the next step in his cradle-to-career success.



Over the past decade, a number of community initiatives to support individuals and families and improve overall quality of life have emerged in Homewood, often with philanthropic support. Along with city, county and school district programs, a variety of nonprofit organizations are investing in the lives of neighborhood residents. These include the Homewood Children's Village, a network of programs that link schools, churches, health and human services providers and their allies to build strong families. Based on the groundbreaking work of the 48-year-old Harlem Children's Zone in New York, the Homewood effort, officially founded in 2010, has grown organically.

Yet, the Homewood neighborhood is facing a challenge: how to provide dozens of approaches from many providers within a broadly effective service ecosystem. Instead of attempting to usher families through programs in conveyor-belt style, the different groups encourage families to connect based on the needs they perceive at a given time. Homewood's vision is to be a big, welcoming house filled with open doors.

For Mr. Page, this has meant participating in a local Fathering Program and then discovering the Homewood Early Learning Hub, where he and his 5-year-old son, Ira, drop in frequently to play and learn. For Ms. Venson, the Baby Promise program at the Homewood Children's Village led to joining the Village's Circles program, with mentors to help her reach her personal and financial goals.

"Back in 2010, it was innovative to think about families and children from a neighborhood level," said Michelle Figlar, vice

president for Learning at the Endowments, where commitment to Homewood totals nearly \$13 million to date. "Now, local is the new national. We ask, what local policies can we change? How do you pilot ideas to take them bigger?"

#### **Making a good start**

When Ms. Venson enrolled in the Baby Promise eight-session series in Homewood, she expected to learn about child development, home safety, discipline and stress management, and nutrition and healthy foods. But at each Saturday meeting, while her son played with other toddlers and caregivers at the neighborhood YMCA, she found more: Strategies for coping with childhood asthma. Advice on preventing lead poisoning. Tips on saving with couponing. New friendships and some lighthearted activities, like learning Spanish phrases and soap-making, changed the pace. After the first session ended, she re-enlisted for another eight weeks.

"It's all about wanting to do more for your children—with any resource," said Erica Lewis, program director for the Village's Baby Promise and Circles programs. "Those participants that are most successful come back every week."

She added that Baby Promise is open to all caregivers of children from birth to 5. "We benefit all ages: single moms, fathers, married couples, grandparents and grandchildren."

Baby Promise is a doorway that opens into other supports as well. The Homewood-Brushton Family Support Center, a project of Allegheny County Department of Human Services, welcomes any family with a child under 5, offering or ensuring



Shaquala Venson reads to her son, King-Ray, while relaxing in Mellon Park, which straddles Pittsburgh's Shadyside and Point Breeze neighborhoods and is minutes away from Homewood.



access to prenatal support, health insurance, child development services, summer camps and more.

A smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten has strengthened early achievement in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, said Carol Barone-Martin, executive director of Early Childhood Education for the district. “Other cities are starting to value early childhood learning. We started a long time ago,” she said.

Homewood’s Crescent Early Childhood Center, enrolling more than 200 2- to 5-year-olds, is the district’s largest early childhood center, with a majority of African American students. “We collect data on our children and we see significant growth,” Ms. Barone-Martin said. “There is no racial achievement gap when they leave the PPS early childhood program. All the children are equally successful.”

At Crescent, Ms. Venson’s son, King-Ray, is receiving the strong start that is his mother’s priority. “I want him to be able to make his own decisions. I want him to learn a second language, so we can travel together,” she said.

As an outgrowth of her participation in Baby Promise, she also is articulating her own goals through Circles, a national mentoring initiative to increase family strength and financial stability. The Village’s Circles program was launched this year and is the fourth chapter in Pittsburgh, with the Endowments as lead funder. The initiative is a response to the great need for new approaches to persistent poverty. The city’s poverty rate is 30 percent, with African American communities like Homewood particularly affected.

When Ms. Venson attends Circles’ 12-week introduction, in weekly Saturday sessions, she sees participants share information

on deeply personal topics, such as stress and trauma, along with practical support on issues like housing and energy conservation. Now that she is looking for a new address in Homewood, she gets frequent tips on vacancies through the group’s Facebook page. As program director, Ms. Lewis also has guided Ms. Venson’s application for a new home through Habitat for Humanity.

Ms. Venson appreciates the help. She has worked steadily since age 13 in the food and service industries. “There’s no respite as a single mother,” she said. “I have to keep the wheels rolling.”

Circles has assisted her in controlling her family budget and planning for savings—a key foundation. In May, she moved to the second phase of the program: pairing up with a trained long-term mentor called an ally.

“Allies are volunteers who ask only one question. Not ‘Do you need money?’ or ‘How can I fix it?’” explained Karin Vanzant, a national leader in the Circles movement. “It’s ‘What do you need from me?’”

While Ms. Lewis admitted that there were “bumps in the road” in establishing the Homewood Circles, she said “a solid 10 families” are in the current cohort and “are flourishing.”

Ms. Venson noted that she also is grateful for help from her father, who lives in Homewood. But some in the community can’t always rely on family for support.

Other programs available in the neighborhood that might meet the needs of these individuals include Sojourner House Moms, which provides 21 units of housing to homeless, single mothers, and aids the women’s early recovery from mental illness and addiction. Veterans can find support—or participate in providing it—through The Mission Continues, a group of former military servicemen now aiding their neighbors according to the needs of the community. In Homewood, the organization’s focus is youth and includes recreational and educational programs along with refurbishing venues that support youth activities.

#### Taking next steps

Mr. Page first attended weekly Fathering Program classes at the Homewood-Brushton Family Support Center because he wanted to improve his son’s behavior.

“I needed help,” he recalled. His son’s after-school program suggested that Mr. Page try some new strategies. After the center referred them to a behavioral health program, Ira “came a long way,” said his father. “I’m proud of his progress. He likes being around his peers, and he communicates better with them—and with me.”

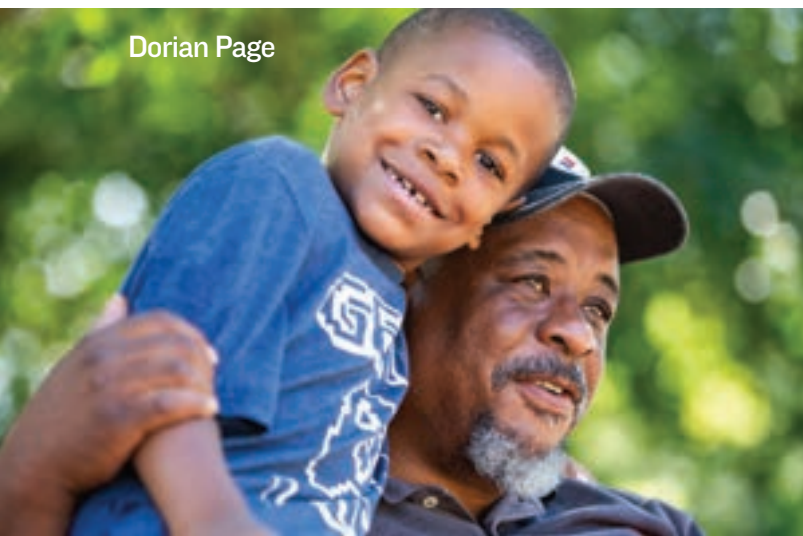
The Homewood center, which is part of a network of Allegheny County Family Support Centers, now provides onsite immunizations and wellness visits with staff from UPMC Pediatrics in a partnership with Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC.

“They’re providing health care right at the center,” said Ms. Figlar of the Endowments. “They’re piloting strategies to bring health care to families. That’s hard to take to scale. Not every center might be able to do that. But it totally aligns the early childhood efforts with health systems. We are starting to see that statewide and nationally—a cross-programmatic approach.”

Dorian Page, below left, and Shaquala Venson, right, each enjoy a sunny summer day in Pittsburgh’s Mellon Park with their sons, Ira and King-Ray, respectively.

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”

Dorian Page







Shaquala Venson

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Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf has endorsed that strategy. Last year, he proposed a merger of four agencies into the new Department of Health and Human Services. The reorganization is intended to provide one-stop applications for a variety of public benefits and simplify licensure for providers.

A generation ago, the introduction of the Head Start program launched a series of innovations in early learning. Ongoing research has proved that age-appropriate play and learning helps preschoolers succeed when they entered kindergarten.

Trying Together (formerly named the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children) is a regional nonprofit that provides support for parents and home child care providers in a variety of settings. In Homewood, the group maintains the Early Learning Hub — where Mr. Page also takes his son, Ira, regularly — as a public space offering resources for all.

With core support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation as well as the Endowments, the Hub’s work reflects deeply researched best practices and developmentally appropriate programs. In practice, its atmosphere is more like a toddler’s birthday party, sparkling with color, laughter and bright ideas to engage families.

Among the Hub’s most popular activities is Buzzwords, which involves a partnership of cultural organizations and is aimed at increasing toddlers’ vocabulary, enhancing family engagement and providing creative play opportunities. Research has demonstrated that children’s language skills at age 3 predict their language skills at age 9 or 10, resulting in better school performance in high school, college and beyond.

Buzzwords was created in 2004 by PNC Grow Up Great, a \$350 million initiative of The PNC Financial Services Group intended to prepare children from birth to age 5 for success in school and life. With support from the Endowments, Buzzwords was brought to the neighborhoods of Homewood and Hazelwood in a series of free, hour-long programs that included young artists and staff from local museums.

At an April session, the word of the day was “illusion.” A dozen families, including Mr. Page and Ira, arrived early for a casual dinner. Soon, presenters from Carnegie Science Center and the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust circled the room, wearing silly stuffed-animal hats. They chatted with toddlers, who explored toys and books. Mr. Page

tied a floor-length magician’s cape around his son’s neck. After a spirited rendition of the Buzzwords theme songs, the group listened intently to a reading of “Duck! Rabbit!” a whimsical picture book about optical illusions. The evening finished with each child crafting a two-sided whirlygig.

“It’s fun to hear the families’ comments as they leave,” said Hub director Rachele Duffy. “They’ll see an opera performed or watch a ballet, and say, ‘Let’s do this at home!’”

The Buzzword series has attracted an average audience of 40 to 50 participants, she said. A lending library of books, blocks and other playthings gives parents fresh ideas for family play.

Ms. Duffy also invites guests to consider the Baby Promise program and recommends the Family Support Center and Homewood Children’s Village as sources for referrals to other services, from free computing to career training. For school-age siblings, the Village offers summer and after-school activities, such as chess tournaments, podcasts and poetry.

And based on families’ needs, the Hub might direct them to The Lighthouse project at the Homewood-Brushton YMCA, which provides arts and music enrichment and tutoring for high school students, or to faith-based programs like Ruth’s Way, which offers life coaching for young women ages 13 to 21. Word of mouth among programs strengthens the network.

Ms. Duffy said that the Hub extends its reach to families and caregivers throughout Homewood in part by purposely moving around its programs to new locations. For example, while based on Kelly Street in Homewood, the Hub moved the Buzzwords program to the Family Support Center on Rosedale Street in May, and then relocated Buzzwords again in July to The Shop, a large maker space on Dallas Avenue. Ms. Duffy said that spreading the word about Hub programming is worth the effort of changing activity addresses.

“We live out of boxes,” she said cheerfully.

Mr. Page believes Homewood’s new offerings are the right innovations for his neighborhood.

“Back in the day, Homewood had school gyms that were open a couple days a week. But it was more of an athletic program. We need more creative education for African Americans,” he insisted. “I need a destination, a place to do something that will make life better for my son. With [the new Homewood programs] you get pulled in.” **h**

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BY ELWIN GREEN

A popular hashtag for online discussions about Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood is #HomewoodIsHappening. • To put it another way, Homewood has many things happening: entrepreneurship, real estate development, urban agriculture, arts and culture. Government, philanthropy, academia and opportunity-minded individuals have all turned their eyes toward Homewood and are finding fertile ground for growth in all of those economic and quality-of-life arenas. • At the same time, neighborhood residents are laying claim to their piece of the community development pie to start or expand their own businesses and to participate in the revitalization planning process. • “We want what happens in our community to be the decision of residents, not the investors, not the banks,” said the Rev. Samuel Ware, executive director of the nonprofit lender Building United of Southwestern Pennsylvania and chairman of the Homewood Community Development Collaborative. “We need to control our own destiny, not watch as others make decisions for us.”

## ENTREPRENEURIAL ENERGY

7800 SUSQUEHANNA



For Nisha Blackwell, the 7800 Susquehanna converted warehouse has been a good fit for her small business, Knotzland, where she creates bowties from donated fabrics.





## EVERYDAY CAFÉ

An enterprise designed to do more than produce revenue is Everyday Café, a coffee shop that opened in November 2016. The original concept goes back to 2010, when John M. Wallace Jr., a University of Pittsburgh sociology professor and pastor of Bible Center Church, assembled a team to pursue the possibility of creating a café in a former post office, providing Homewood residents and others with a “third place,” somewhere other than home and work in which to meet for business or social reasons.

After Oxford Development and S&A Homes acquired the building to make way for Homewood Station, a senior housing complex with first-floor retail spaces, Dr. Wallace’s church partnered with Operation Better Block to place a café in one of those spaces.

Since it opened, Everyday Café has received five-star reviews on Facebook and proven to be a popular gathering spot. Dr. Wallace himself, pictured in the blue-patterned shirt talking with Jason Jones, community development divisional manager for Woodforest National Bank, also enjoys having meetings there. Besides serving breakfast and lunch, the café hosts special events, such as networking programs, business presentations, or study sessions for young people, usually held on Monday evenings. Support from The Heinz Endowments has helped it to stay afloat as it approaches the break-even point.

A significant amount of what is “happening” in Homewood occurs inside the walls of 7800 Susquehanna, a former Westinghouse warehouse that nonprofit lender Bridgeway Capital purchased in 2013. The intent was to make the building a hub for enterprise, and it has become that.

Within the five-story, 150,000-square-foot structure are two training programs. The Trade Institute of Pittsburgh occupies 11,000 square feet of the building and offers instruction in construction trades, such as brick and block masonry, carpentry and stone work, and provides apprenticeship opportunities in welding and carpentry. Most of the students were formerly incarcerated, and the program touts its impact on recidivism: Only 3.6 percent of program participants return to prison after one year compared to 22.5 percent of inmates statewide.

Last year, the University of Pittsburgh’s Manufacturing Assistance Center, established in 1994, moved from Pitt’s Applied Research Center, about 17 miles northeast of the city, to the Homewood warehouse. The center’s 9,000-square-foot space includes classrooms where students learn precision manufacturing, programming for machine tools, and computer-aided design and manufacturing technologies. The program boasts a 95 percent job placement rate for graduates, and the jobs pay livable wages, starting at \$18 to \$20 an hour.

“The baby boom generation, they’re retiring,” explained marketing and outreach specialist Claire Guth. As a result, local manufacturers will need to hire 22,000 people in the next five years and 80,000 in the next decade. “It’s the easiest part of the day, getting people jobs,” she said.

The center also offers small-business development services, educational programming for schools, summer camps, and a “maker space” with 3D printers and other equipment that community members can use after being trained by staff. “We just want to help nurture the next generation of Pennsylvania manufacturers,” Ms. Guth said.

And artists and entrepreneurs who got their start outside the walls of 7800 Susquehanna have found the location to be a welcoming one.

Homewood native Nisha Blackwell was working her way through nursing school when she got downsized from her job at a coffee shop. A friend was holding a birthday party for her daughter soon after, and Ms. Blackwell couldn’t afford a gift. So she opened a sewing machine that she had never used, taught herself to stitch, and created hair bows. They turned out to be a hit with the other moms. “I came home from that party with six customers,” she recalled.

In August 2014, Knotzland was born, creating custom bow ties.

For Ms. Blackwell, Knotzland is not just a revenue stream, it is a mission-driven enterprise, dedicated to sustainability. She makes her bowties from donated fabrics that would otherwise be discarded and added to the landfills that make the fashion industry the second largest source of pollution. She also employs local residents as part-time seamstresses, strengthening the neighborhood economy.

Knotzland moved to 7800 Susquehanna in May 2016, and Ms. Blackwell has put nursing school on the back burner. She has taken advantage of business opportunities as they arise, from forming a partnership with an artisans’ collective in Kenya to being chosen in January to join Facebook’s Small Business Council.



Members of the Homewood Community Development Collaborative gather for a group photo on the steps of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh-Homewood to mark the launch of the organization, which is dedicated to promoting the neighborhood's economic growth.

## HCDC AND HBBA

## COMING ATTRACTIONS

The University of Pittsburgh's first Community Engagement Center is expected to open in Homewood in September. Center director Daren A. Ellerbee describes it as a "front door" to Pitt in the neighborhood—a point of entry where residents can gain access to university resources—and "a place where community and university people come together to work on projects and programs."

The brainchild of Kathy Humphrey, Pitt's vice chancellor of engagement, the Community Engagement Center will provide space for the Institute for Entrepreneurial Excellence, part of the Katz School of Business, to offer neighborhood entrepreneurs assistance with business development. It also will house a Neighborhood Legal Services office, which will work with Pitt's Law School to provide free legal services, and a Pitt-assisted Communities and Schools program, which will work to mobilize university resources to address community needs.

The center will connect different departments at Pitt that do work in Homewood, such as the School for Social Work and the School of Engineering, and help them all to link with Homewood residents to discover how the university can better serve the community.

The Homewood Community Development Collaborative (HCDC) and the Homewood-Brushton Business Association (HBBA), both formed in 2014, have helped to give neighborhood residents a voice in the wave of development that is building in Homewood. HBBA assists neighborhood entrepreneurs in growing their businesses, and advocates on behalf of Homewood's business community. With some two dozen members, the organization meets monthly and has established the Homewood Small Business Expo, which provides vending opportunities along with training sessions each November.

During the past two years, HBBA also has sponsored a holiday market that gave members and other vendors the opportunity to set up shop in temporary facilities during the Christmas season. This year, it plans to bring back an event first held in October 2016: a progressive dinner that will allow both residents and visitors to sample the cuisine from a series of restaurants or caterers. Association President Vernard Alexander's big dream for the group is to obtain a grant that would fund the hiring of a part-time executive director.

The Homewood Community Development Collaborative is a group of nine nonprofit organizations that is working to provide overall strategy for promoting economic growth in the neighborhood. It has partnered with the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Department of City Planning to invite residents and businesses to help create the Homewood Comprehensive Community Plan to guide future development. Collaborative members include Building United of Southwestern Pennsylvania, Community Empowerment Association, the Homewood Children's Village, Homewood-Brushton Business Association, Homewood-Brushton Community Ministries, Homewood-Brushton YMCA, Homewood-Brushton YWCA, Operation Better Block, and Race Street 2050.

A land use proposal previously crafted by Operation Better Block with resident input is being incorporated into the plan, which will set outcomes in the areas of education, culture and recreation, mobility, public health and public safety, workforce development, housing, business and innovation, urban design and development, and sustainability. Action teams for each area have begun meeting, and will continue to do so to implement the plan after it is completed.

"We want [the plan] to house the desires, wishes and aspirations of the community," said Rev. Samuel Ware, HCDC chairman.



Jullian Henry, of Lawrenceville, seated, examines the work of Lashay Manus, right, at The Natural Choice Barber Shop & Salon Homewood, one of the anchor tenants in The Shop. The barber shop and salon is the second location and apprenticeship training site for master barber Nate Mitchell's natural hair grooming and styling business, which has been popular in Oakland, Pittsburgh's university hub, for more than 20 years.

While 7800 Susquehanna is an entrepreneurial center, it is not Homewood's only hotspot for regenerative economic activity.

The Shop takes its name from the fact that it used to be an auto body shop. Otherwise, there's no connection between its past and its present, which owner Adam Paulisick describes as "a brand new view of co-working."

Typically, co-working spaces allow budding entrepreneurs to set up shop by paying to share office space and facilities, rather than having to rent space and buy office equipment entirely on their own. The arrangement can save them significant money, but Mr. Paulisick envisioned going further.

"I wanted to make sure that the definition of entrepreneur was about people that use their hands [to create] as much as about people who use their hands to code on a keyboard," he said, adding that he also did not want money to be an issue for users of the space.

The Shop opened in January 2017, and after more than a year of experimenting to see how the space might be most useful, the concept emerged that members of The Shop could use the space and its facilities in exchange for donating 10 hours or more of their time to serve Homewood. The Homewood Children's Village directs the use of the volunteer hours.

There is no set monetary price for membership; so far, the Shop's primary source of income is rental fees for events. But because the fees do not cover expenses, Mr. Paulisick is using his own funds to keep things going for now. "The model will find its legs at some point," he said.

The Shop began offering formal memberships in May, and Mr. Paulisick's goal is to attract 100 committed members over the next year.

## THE SHOP





**D**inner hour is social hour at the Homewood-Brushton YMCA branch.

Every school day from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m., dozens of students pack into the newly renovated cafeteria on rolling schedules, claim spots at family-style or two-seater flat-top tables surrounding the room, and line up for hot meals. The time is an opportunity to catch up on homework, crack jokes with old friends, or make new ones by diving into one of the many conversation clusters around the room.

For Tyree Allie, an 18-year-old senior at Pittsburgh Westinghouse Academy K-12, this routine is just one of the reasons the YMCA's Lighthouse Project has been fairly life-changing for him since he joined last year. He described himself at that time as being a friendly but somewhat distant acquaintance to many and true friend to a few. Other students might have known the 5-foot, 8-inch youth, with his dark glasses and easy grin, to see him around campus or in the neighborhood. But they regarded him superficially, like a stranger who was a footnote to the day rather than someone who was a real part of their lives.

"I was one of those guys that had friends but didn't do anything," Tyree acknowledged. "You would see me in the hallway and know who I [was] but I probably never would do anything with you."

Then a friend convinced him to visit the neighborhood YMCA to check out the Lighthouse Project. The program provides

hands-on instruction and guidance in creative disciplines such as music, filmmaking, visual arts and spoken word, and folds that arts training into a college preparatory component. Tyree began attending regularly, and his attitude and interactions with others started taking a turn for the better.


"For a while there I was a very closed-off and emotionally detached person. I didn't get really close with anyone who wasn't immediate family," he said. "To join this program with people I didn't know who they were, and to get to where I am with them today, was honestly astonishing."

Initially established in 2007 by the YMCA as a small satellite site at Westinghouse, Homewood's neighborhood high school, the Lighthouse Project was designed to serve as a safe space that gave students after-school supervision and a basic introduction to creative fields that aligned with their interests. By the 2010-11 school year, students in the program were demonstrating it was much more.

A study conducted by Pennsylvania State University researchers showed Lighthouse students had 10 percent better attendance than other Westinghouse students and grade point averages that were on average 0.7 percent higher. Graduation rates for Lighthouse students reached 87 percent, a stark contrast to Westinghouse's overall rate of 50 percent.

In 2013, seven students from the Lighthouse Project group Profound Myndz were tapped to perform their song "All In" during

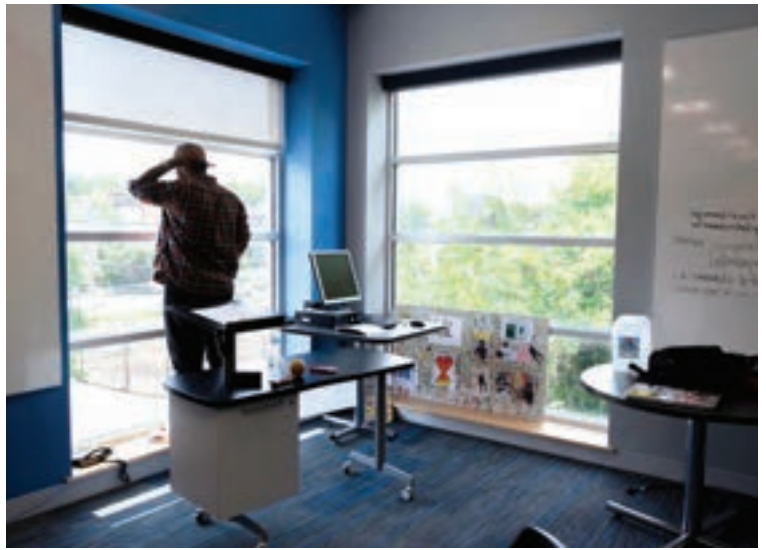


A portrait of Tyree Allie against a solid blue background. He is wearing a grey baseball cap with 'SWS' on the back, large black headphones, and a red, black, and white plaid button-down shirt. His hands are clasped in front of him, and he is looking down. He has several colorful wristbands on his left wrist and a silver watch on his right wrist. A blue cable from the headphones is visible.

**“TO JOIN THIS PROGRAM  
WITH PEOPLE I DIDN’T KNOW...  
AND TO GET TO WHERE I AM  
WITH THEM TODAY WAS  
HONESTLY ASTONISHING”**

**TYREE ALLIE**





Clockwise from top left: Jahari Owens-Dixon, left, and Josh Karman, right, share a laugh while working in the Lighthouse computer lab. Tyree Allie, who is not in this year's summer program, takes a moment to gaze out a window before going back to a project he's working on independently during Open Lab time. Tyree practices in the Y's studio sound booth while Pogie Bell serves as production engineer. Giordan Dixon goes online to conduct research for the upcoming CD he's producing as part of the Lighthouse summer program. Brandon Hammond makes beats on a phone app as he works on his Lighthouse summer project. In music production, a patch bay, like this one, is used to connect the outputs of one piece of audio gear to the inputs of another.



the YMCA Europe Festival before a crowd of 10,000 in Prague, Czech Republic. Partnerships with Steeltown Entertainment, Bridge to College, and Community College of Allegheny County have helped students get their first glimpses into the film production industry and taught them how to break into the business.

Also during the program's first 10 years, the Lighthouse Project caught the eye of Justin Laing, then a senior Arts & Culture program officer at the The Heinz Endowments. Mr. Laing was in the process of developing a specific focus for the foundation on out-of-school arts programs for youth in African American and distressed communities. The Lighthouse Project and James Brown, the YMCA's youth and family program director, participated in the Endowments' exploration of quality out-of-school-time programming.

YMCA staff were particularly inspired by visits to nationally regarded youth programs such as YouthUprising and Youth Radio, both in Oakland, Calif., and a similar YMCA program, Youth Institute, in Long Beach. Those visits motivated Mr. Brown to pursue his vision of establishing a Creative Youth Center at the Homewood-Brushton YMCA that would house and expand Lighthouse programming. The Endowments supported the idea with a \$1.5 million dollar renovation grant, followed by a three-year, \$375,000 grant for operating support.

The Creative Youth Center now serves as a model for youth engagement that draws not only Westinghouse students but also those from 14 different schools throughout Pittsburgh's East End. It features professional recording studios; sound booths; state-of-the-art production equipment; and a live recording space packed with electric keyboards, guitars, a piano and drums. In the same wing as the sound booths and studios are a designated performance area and digital media labs. The downstairs kitchen was remodeled to be a functioning commercial food preparation space.


The expert-level equipment might appear to be a bonus, but the upgrades were necessary for the program to fulfill its workforce development aspirations in the most effective way, Mr. Brown explained.

Students were taking advantage of the chance to take music production and studio recording classes for college credit through the CCAC partnership, and some were making their way through apprenticeship programs. Giving them daily access to the tools they would use to build and maintain careers was the best possible way to reinforce the idea that they're more than capable of finding work and building careers in these industries.

"There are a lot of young people of color from the area who wouldn't have the opportunity to have access to that level of production equipment without this partnership," Mr. Brown said.

"The YMCA's Creative Youth Center brings together all the elements of a quality arts experience for youth," said Janet Sarbaugh, the Endowments' vice president for Creativity.

"James Brown crafted a program model that offers multiple entry points—which he calls 'casual, connected and committed'—that allow youth to enter into programs on a continuum, from casual participation all the way to workforce connections. The center is



**GRADUATION RATES FOR LIGHTHOUSE STUDENTS REACHED 87 PERCENT, A STARK CONTRAST TO WESTINGHOUSE'S OVERALL RATE OF 50 PERCENT.**

still young, and I know that it is going to make a difference in lives of more and more youth in Pittsburgh as it continues to develop."

Tyree's main connection to music before Lighthouse was a talent for beat boxing he picked up after mimicking a scene in the movie "Men in Black II." The idea of producing music or doing an album would never have occurred to him on his own, he said. But after only a few weeks in the program, he ended up beat boxing in a performance for the program's final show last year.

Last summer, Tyree completed a music-focused entrepreneurship project through the eight-week youth program Startable Pittsburgh that involved creating and releasing a three-song EP under his new alias, Megatron. The Lighthouse partnership with CCAC also helped him add three college credits to his transcript through its music technology certificate program.

When Tyree returned to school following summer break, the guarded and withdrawn vibe he had carried so much of his life was left at the door. The change didn't go unnoticed in classes, said Westinghouse history teacher Sean Means.

"The work habits he developed through the Lighthouse Project—having to practice, working with his writing, meeting deadlines—have had an impact on his performance in the classroom," Mr. Means said. "Academically right now, he's inspired and competitive. He wants to get the best grade possible."

Tyree also stepped into the Lighthouse Project last fall brimming with pride because of his accomplishments and ready to share his enthusiasm with anyone who was receptive, which as it turned out, was a lot of people.

"[One day] he had to leave early, and everybody was really disappointed because he's one of those guys who brings that energy," Mr. Brown said. "They were like, 'Why you got to leave?' They really wanted him to stick around and work on a project."

This response didn't come as a complete surprise to Tyree, who calls his peers in the program—the students he once walked past without a second thought—his "dysfunctional family." The admiration is mutual, and he no longer hesitates to tell anyone he encounters how he feels.

"[Lighthouse Project]'s the only thing I do, that is my other family," he said. "Sometimes I'll loop it into casual conversations that this is what I do for fun. Ever since I opened up, a lot of people realized that I'm a lot more interesting than I seem." **h**

Members of Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers, Allegheny County Conservation District and Phipps Conservatory, along with local volunteers, meet at a Homewood lot to plant two large pollinator gardens with flowers that will attract pollinators such as hummingbirds, bees, beetles and butterflies, which will help sustain the plant growth cycle.

**ENVIRONMENTAL  
ACTIVISM IS TAKING ROOT IN  
PITTSBURGH'S HOMEWOOD  
NEIGHBORHOOD AS  
RESIDENTS SEEK HEALTHIER  
OPTIONS FOR THEIR HOMES,  
FOOD AND COMMUNITY**  
BY CHRISTINE H. O'TOOLE  
PHOTOS BY SAM FAIRCHILD







# **GROWING GREEN ACTIVISTS**





Tinashe Chitiyo helps plant a welcome garden in the front of a lot on Monticello Street in Homewood.



**A**t a happy hour reception on a windy March evening in Pittsburgh's East Liberty section, experienced public health researchers met 26 new allies: neighborhood recruits in the fight for safe, healthy communities.

The researchers from the national Cancer Free Economy Network came to study how Pittsburgh is confronting the deadly health effects of air pollution and lead exposures in its poorest neighborhoods. At the closing conference event, they met local volunteers with their own ideas on how to reverse their communities' odds.

The most recent graduates of the Homewood Children's Village Leadership Institute, a boot camp for budding activists, pitched three ideas to enlist their neighbors in healthier habits. They suggested trash cans in business districts, public education on cancer and obesity among adults, and information on childhood cancers. The presenters won small grants from the Cancer Free Economy group to implement their projects: an acknowledgment that progress in civic engagement begins with partnerships and concrete goals.

Chemical exposures and disease have been clearly linked. Regions with polluted air shoulder disproportionate levels of chronic illnesses like childhood asthma, diabetes and heart disease. The burden of disease is shockingly higher among African Americans than in whites. In one recent study, Dr. Sebat Erqou of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine found that African Americans in the region face higher average exposures to fine particulate matter and black carbon in the air. He correlated the exposure to a 45 percent higher risk of cardiovascular disease.

Now, hard local data and community partnerships are helping neighbors in Homewood claim their rights to cleaner air, water and fresh local food. Air quality engineers, energy conservation experts, horticulturists and teenage activists are all part of the team.

The new partnerships are a natural extension of the work of the Homewood Children's Village, said Walter Lewis, the organization's president and CEO. Since 2010, the Village has developed a two-generation approach to renewing the eastern Pittsburgh neighborhood, with programs designed to advance solid education, strong families, good career opportunities, and improved child and community health.

**HARD LOCAL DATA AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ARE HELPING NEIGHBORS IN HOMEWOOD CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS TO CLEANER AIR, WATER AND FRESH LOCAL FOOD. AIR QUALITY ENGINEERS, ENERGY CONSERVATION EXPERTS, HORTICULTURISTS AND TEENAGE ACTIVISTS ARE ALL PART OF THE TEAM.**

Environmental health underlies all those goals. The results of a local 2014 report funded by the National Institutes of Health proved that children exposed to Pittsburgh's industrial pollutants had high rates of chronic untreated asthma. One child's recurring asthma attacks can ripple through a family, causing siblings to miss school and parents to lose daily wages.

"It proved that many of our challenges aren't a matter of personal choice," Mr. Lewis said. "So we all have to be part of the solution."

Homewood's new environmental activists range from neighborhood matriarchs to high school students in the Junior Green Core. They have learned that heavy local traffic, train diesel exhaust, industrial toxins and crumbling homes challenge the whole community. Individuals can't clean the region's outdoor air quality overnight, but they can learn how to protect themselves from mold,

lead, radon, and pollutants that waft in through windows and crevices or leak in from pipes and cracks.

Rev. Dorothea Hall, one of the Village's leadership program graduates, grew up in Homewood. Now 64, she has returned to an apartment in a senior living complex, Homewood Station. The five-year-old building has new amenities like the street-level Everyday Café, but it's also close to fumes from the East Busway.

Building on the skills gained from the Leadership Institute, Rev. Hall has enrolled in a new citizen-science program to find out more about her indoor air quality. For three weeks, she will observe data from monitors recording her home's levels of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, radon, temperature and humidity. The low-cost equipment is loaned by ROCIS—Reducing Outdoor Contaminants in Indoor Spaces—a regional initiative supported by The

Heinz Endowments.

Rev. Hall won one of the three Cancer Free Economy grants for her ideas on bringing cancer prevention tips to residents at local senior high-rises. She says the ROCIS project is a natural extension of that interest.

"I suppose I did it because I'm curious, especially since we have so many other health issues here—lead in the water, higher rates of cancer," she explained. After training to interpret her results, she plans to share her findings with resident councils in other senior living buildings and with her church community.

Other efforts to help make Homewood homes healthier include Grassroots Green Homes, which was launched in Homewood this

To extend the gardening season, Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers organized volunteers to build a hoop house on a Monticello Street lot in Homewood. Wadjet Mentuhotep, right, helps with constructing the structure of large hoops, which is later covered with heavy greenhouse plastic to protect young plants and to enable plant growth into the winter.



## ALONG WITH AGING INFRASTRUCTURE, HOMEWOOD CONTENDS WITH MORE THAN 700 VACANT LOTS, MORE THAN ANY OTHER CITY NEIGHBORHOOD. COMMUNITY GARDENS CAN FIGHT THE BLIGHT, AND GROUPS LIKE THE BLACK URBAN GARDENERS (BUGS) HAVE STEADILY INCREASED THEIR ACREAGE IN THE PAST FEW SEASONS.

spring with aid from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. The program has enabled residents in several Pittsburgh neighborhoods to save energy and remedy aging, unhealthy homes. The Heinz Endowments, which has helped to fund the Village's trainings for residents in environmental health and justice action, underwrote an overview of health policy issues related to homes for the group's parent, Conservation Consultants Inc., and provided support for the diagnostic, testing and mitigation tools that can be used inside living spaces.

Grassroots Green Homes puts those ideas into practice.

The initiative, funded by the Richard King Mellon Foundation, McCauley Ministries, PNC Charitable Trust and the Endowments, has been successful in the Pittsburgh neighborhoods of Oakland and Uptown. Three hundred Homewood households will receive small stipends to monitor energy use, while 20 will welcome contractors for weatherization and retrofits.

Along with aging infrastructure, Homewood contends with more than 700 vacant lots, more than any other city neighborhood. Community gardens can fight the blight, and groups like the Black Urban Gardeners (BUGS) have steadily increased their acreage in the past few seasons. BUGS' work has received funding from The Pittsburgh Foundation and in-kind support from the Allegheny County Conservation District.

This summer, Phipps Conservatory specialists helped BUGS members in expanding their efforts with help from an Endowments grant. They developed a business strategy and maximize their productivity on vacant lots on Monticello Street, a few steps from Pittsburgh Westinghouse Academy in Homewood. With a goal of eventually reclaiming 31,000 square feet on both sides of the block, the group farmed half the site—seven lots—this season, said project director Raqueeba Bey. The volunteers started seedlings in February for a cash crop of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and greens.

“Our farm stand onsite sells produce at low cost, and we want to start another farmers market, possibly at the local YMCA, once a month,” Ms. Bey said. “We have a hoop house [to protect young plants]. We have an herb garden, a pollinator garden, and even a chicken coop.”

Also nurturing the partnership between Phipps and BUGS is a new Pittsburgh program called Adopt a Lot, which permits residents to farm vacant lots owned by the city and the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Director Shelly Danko+Day said that Homewood has adopted 28 lots in the community—“the most of any neighborhood in the city,” she asserted proudly. The new guidelines for the city's 30,000 vacant lots provide gardeners with a guaranteed right to maintain





gardens over multiple years and allow access to Pennsylvania Water and Sewer Authority water for irrigation.

Because lead levels in the soil are unacceptably high, BUGS farms in raised beds. Meanwhile, teen members of the Junior Green Corps planted sunflowers on the unfarmed Monticello lots to naturally decontaminate the soil. Supported by grants from the Endowments, the Corps also has planted 59 trees in Homewood over the past three years. The tree canopy mitigates pollution. The Green Corps meets year-round, earning stipends to work in afterschool learning programs as well as community gardens. In conservation classes, students from different areas as well as Homewood learned to use leaves as biomarkers in planning where the saplings were most needed.

Davon Crosby of Wilkinsburg joined the Corps at age 14, following his sister into the program. “She thought I’d like it,” said Davon, who will join the U.S. Navy this fall.

She was right. He particularly enjoyed the program’s field trips, including a visit to the Philadelphia Eagles’ home field. There, groundskeepers demonstrated how they maintain its natural turf and generate sustainable power from wind turbines.

The greening initiatives complement school and community-based efforts to address the scarcity of healthy food in Homewood.

Helen Faison Elementary and Westinghouse Academy participate in the Learning Gardens program. The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh’s Healthy Cooking, Eating, and Growing Program (HCEG) brings young people and elders together to grow and cook food, and Westinghouse Academy offers culinary arts job-training curriculum.

“One of the key components of environmental justice is getting people to the table to speak for themselves,” explained Dr. Robert Bullard, a distinguished professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University in Houston and regarded as a founder of the environmental justice movement.

With youth, families and partners engaged in such efforts in their own neighborhood, Homewood is finding its voice. **h**

# STATE OF THE **ARTS**

Pittsburgh's arts heritage is filled with giants, each with a neighborhood to claim them as their own. Internationally acclaimed artists with Homewood roots include writer John Edgar Wideman and jazz pianist-composers Billy Strayhorn and Ahmad Jamal. Adding to this legacy today are musicians, choreographers and other performing and visual artists whose work is bringing new energy to the community's creative landscape while contributing to the neighborhood's revitalization and economic future. Among them are some Heinz Endowments grantees featured here.





**STAYCEE PEARL DANCE PROJECT**

From left to right, dancers LaTrea Remert, Jessica Marino and Mamiko Usuda of Staycee Pearl dance project & Soy Sos (SPdp + SS) perform during the NewMoves Contemporary Dance Festival at the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater in Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood. Led by choreographer Staycee Pearl and sound designer Herman "Soy Sos" Pearl, SPdp + SS is focused on interpreting and mirroring culture and community — often inspired by social and political world issues — through dance and dance-centered multi-media experiences.



**VANESSA GERMAN**

In addition to being known for her colorful Art House in Homewood and elaborate sculptures, Vanessa German is a well-regarded spoken word artist. Here, she performs a spoken word poem in front of one of her sculptures at Concept Art Gallery in Pittsburgh.







#### **RADIANT HALL**

Julianne McAdoo is a textile artist based at Radiant Hall in Homewood. Housed in the neighborhood's 7800 Susquehanna building, Radiant Hall is a nonprofit organization that creates and preserves art studio space for working artists. It has two other locations in the City of Pittsburgh in addition to the one in Homewood.



#### **SANKOFA VILLAGE FOR THE ARTS**

Toddja Thornhill, youth dance instructor at Sankofa Village for the Arts, leads students in an energetic performance. Sankofa Village is an African-centered nonprofit organization that promotes self-esteem, self-discipline, self-determination and self-sufficiency through a unique fusion of African drumming, African dancing and martial arts.

**AFRO-AMERICAN MUSIC INSTITUTE**

The Afro-American Music Institute not only provides music instruction to local students, it also hosts musicians from beyond Pittsburgh's borders. A lively performance by Dikki Du and the Zydeco Krewe of Church Point, La., prompts dancing by Jeff Everett and Martha Raak, foreground. James and Pamela Johnson began the Afro-American Music Institute in 1982 in an East Liberty church and then moved six years later to Homewood, where its music education and performance groups have nurtured self-confidence, self-esteem and creativity among all ages.



Photo courtesy of The Legacy Arts Project, Inc.

**LEGACY ARTS PROJECT**

Students in the Legacy Arts Project's Camp Bara Makono participate in a yoga session that concludes with meditation. Founded by Linda "Imani" Barrett, the Legacy Arts Project uses education, instruction and other interactions to preserve the history and traditions of African art as represented across the African diaspora. The organization presents various forms of African art throughout Pittsburgh to inspire and uplift individuals within city neighborhoods.






THE

WRITE

City of Asylum provides sanctuary for writers who have been persecuted in their home countries and

PLACE

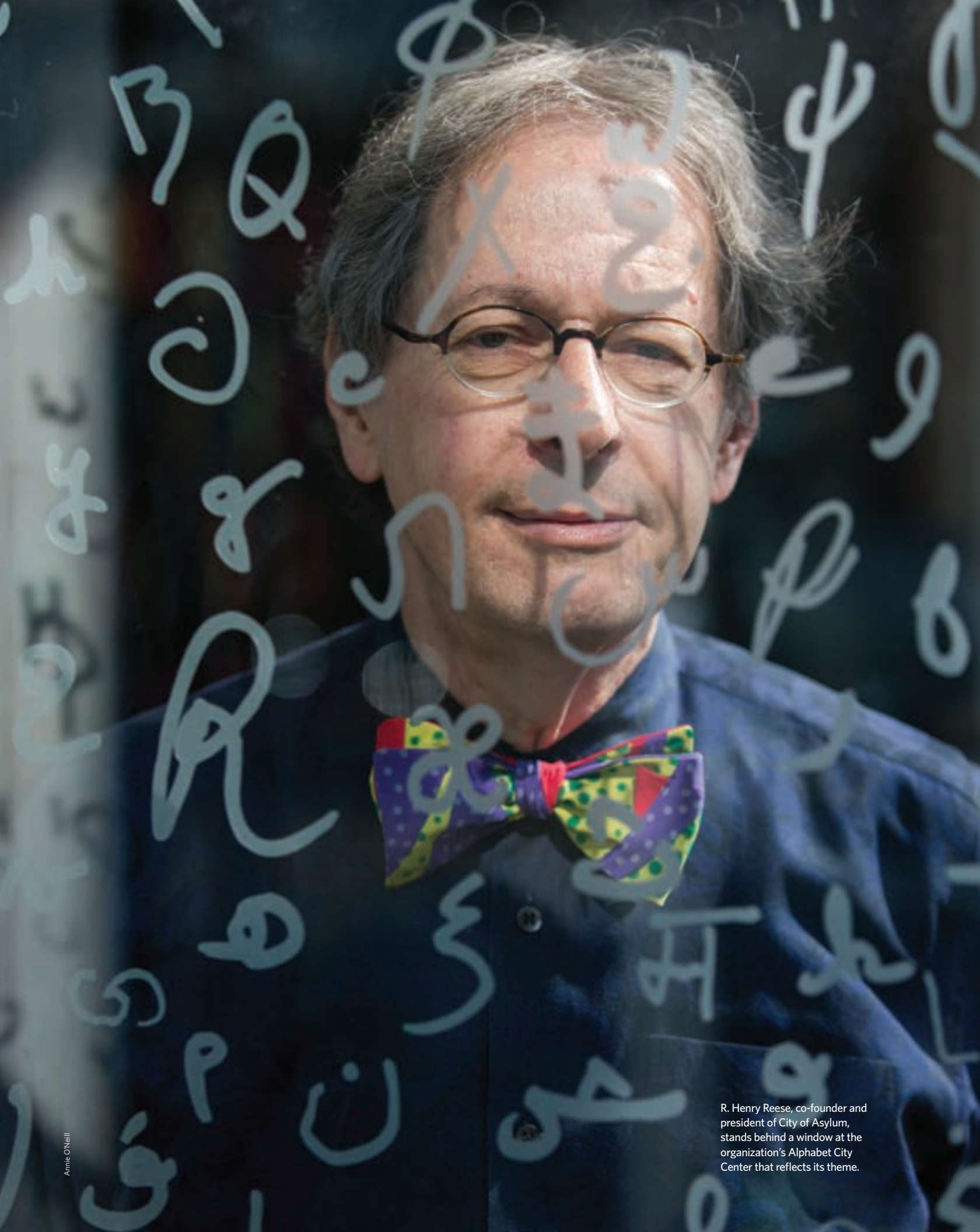




"The Beast" was a poem created by Huang Xiang, the first exiled writer in the City of Asylum residency program. Mr. Huang painted the words on the house where he was staying to celebrate his arrival to Pittsburgh and his freedom to publish without persecution.

creates community for those who want to explore art from around the world. by Jeffery Fraser





R. Henry Reese, co-founder and president of City of Asylum, stands behind a window at the organization's Alphabet City Center that reflects its theme.



The idea first came to Henry Reese one evening in 1997 while listening to British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie speak of a movement to offer writers in exile, like himself, a place of sanctuary and freedom to continue their work.

Mr. Reese, founder of a telemarketing company, was intrigued. His love of the arts, literature in particular, dates to childhood. His wife, Diane Samuels, is a visual artist.

Why not Pittsburgh as such a place, he thought.

The North Side couple owned a second house on Sampsonia Way, a former crack den they had bought and rehabbed, and were renting as reluctant landlords. “My wife and I sort of kicked each other at the same time,” he recalled of that night.

Some 8,000 miles away in Barisal, Bangladesh, Tuhin Das was beginning to take his writing seriously.

Through his teenage years, childhood rhymes turned to more studied poetry. He began writing editorials and magazine articles often critical of government corruption and the inequities endured by minorities, himself among them, in the overwhelmingly Muslim nation. It was a direction that put him in the crosshairs of fundamentalist militants whose influence was growing and whose tolerance of views that ran counter to their own was less than zero.

And his standing as a marked man would lead to his exile.

“Whatever city I went to, my picture was there on the television and in the newspapers,” said the 32-year-old poet, novelist, editor and blogger. “Whenever there was a murder of a poet, a writer or an artist, the pictures of other writers would come up. I did not have any options left.”

His path crossed with that of Mr. Reese and Ms. Samuels when in 2016 Mr. Das became the sixth writer in exile to find sanctuary in Pittsburgh through the City of Asylum. By that time, the venture had grown from a creative use of the couple’s spare house to a catalyst for cross-culture exchange in a city where barely 8 percent of the population is foreign born.

Mr. Reese spent nearly six years getting City of Asylum off the ground, raising support and working with the International Cities of Refuge Network, the movement he’d heard Mr. Rushdie speak about. Today, Pittsburgh joins Ithaca, N.Y., as the only U.S. cities to offer writers such a sanctuary.

Unlike other sanctuaries funded by institutions, such as governments or universities, Mr. Reese saw Pittsburgh’s entry as a grassroots organization supported by individual donations. “We thought it would be important that they be part of a community they could make a new life with, that it would help teach them how to make that new life.”

Resources were found to guarantee support for one writer over a two-year residency living in the Sampsonia Way house, which Mr. Reese and Ms. Samuels offered to the program. What remained unclear was whether the program could be sustained, whether it could become part of the community fabric and how to go about doing that.

### Building community through art

The first writer offered sanctuary was Huang Xiang, considered to be China’s pre-eminent post-cultural revolution poet. It didn’t take him long to get noticed. He covered the Sampsonia Way house with his poem, “The Beast,” which he painted in Chinese calligraphy.

Mr. Reese was photographing Mr. Huang painting his house poem one day when three teenage girls from the neighborhood stopped on their way home from school to ask what the poet was doing. He explained that Mr. Huang was a famous Chinese poet and asked if they wanted his autograph. Mr. Huang climbed down off the ladder and wrote Chinese characters on their hands with a Sharpie.

“They looked at me and said, ‘That’s not English,’” Mr. Reese recalled. He was surprised they only then seemed to realize there were languages other than their own. “I said, how about if he performs his house poem, reads it? They looked at me with that kind of sassy challenge and said, ‘Sure.’”

Mr. Huang got nose to nose with one of the girls and let out a scream. She jumped back. He dove to the ground and rolled around, reciting his poem in Chinese.

“He does it for about 30 seconds, gets up, brushes off, takes a little bow,” Mr. Reese said. “That expression, ‘jaw drop,’ is literally



Photo courtesy of City of Asylum

true. The three of them were standing there, jaws dropped. Then, one of them said, ‘Can he do another one?’

“With great clarity, it registered with me at that moment. We had just seen a gap I had no understanding of, and we saw a way to close that gap. Art was the way.”

City of Asylum has blossomed far beyond anything Mr. Reese had envisioned. After Mr. Huang painted his house poem, people slipped their own poems through his mail slot. They came by to hear him read. Authors’ readings became regular events in Mr. Reese and Ms. Samuel’s living room, under outdoor tents, on the street, in gardens the nonprofit cultivated in vacant lots, and in the gardens of North Side neighbors, who competed to host them.

Mr. Huang’s impromptu performance that enthralled the middle school girls inspired a free jazz-poetry concert in 2005 that proved to be so popular that it became an annual event.

“What we learned from that is that people in the community, who often walk by one another, began to engage as neighbors,” Mr. Reese said. “It had the identity as the arts event of the neighborhood, and the audience was very diverse.”

In all, the nonprofit’s calendar includes some 120 events a year.

## Finding hope through asylum

Mr. Das grew up in a Hindu family, a minority in Bangladesh, where Islam is the state religion. He said he doesn’t identify with any religion. He considers himself Bengali and Bangladeshi first. That mattered less as religious intolerance spread.

His work also marked him. He wrote poetry. He started a magazine, *The Wild*, giving voice to writers like himself who spoke out against corruption and discrimination against minorities. At one point, he was editing nine magazines.

In 2013, protests spread across Bangladesh, initially seeking a harsher sentence for an Islamic leader convicted of war crimes. Mr. Das joined, speaking against religious persecution and for a more secular nation.

He received threats. Murders of writers and others who had spoken out began to mount. A close friend who had written songs of protest disappeared. Mr. Das went to police to request security. Upon arriving, he was told he might be arrested under a law that prescribed stiff prison sentences for writings deemed harmful to the state or religion. He saw copies of his work on the detective’s desk, certain passages highlighted.

“He told me, ‘I don’t think it’s safe for you in Bangladesh,’” Mr. Das said. “They told me I should go to India.”

He recounted that when he ignored the advice, he began to be followed, no matter what city he moved to. He appealed again for police protection, but was denied. An excerpt from his poem, “It is Midnight in My Bangladesh,” speaks to the experience:

I don’t know how I can express myself  
As feelings become obtuse from fear.  
Soldiers of darkness caught me like an animal  
And butcher me in dreams.  
You know the feelings of dreams are like reality.  
It is midnight in my Bangladesh.

With help from a friend, Das contacted the International Cities of Refuge Network and began the journey that brought him to Pittsburgh.

## Using art to welcome the world

The model for building community through the arts that evolved piecemeal has attracted broad support, including from federal and state government, local companies, and national and Pittsburgh-based foundations.

Last year, City of Asylum @ Alphabet City opened as the nonprofit’s new home in a former Masonic temple with a café, auditorium, bookstore and ambitions of becoming a hub for writers, music, artistic experimentation and diverse voices from around the world. This year, City of Asylum is looking for an executive director to whom Mr. Reese and Ms. Daniels will pass on leadership responsibilities





Renee Rosensteel



Tuhin Das, opposite page, is a Bangladeshi poet, activist, political columnist, short-story writer and essayist who fled his country in 2016 after being targeted by fundamentalist militant groups who were murdering secular writers and activists.

Above left, children and their families enjoy activities during Kids Without Borders, a program at City of Asylum's Alphabet City Center designed to connect youth from all backgrounds to positive forms of expression such as slam poetry and photography while providing a Know Your Rights workshop for immigrants and refugees.

Above right, the City of Asylum organization is housed in the Alphabet City Center — known together as City of Asylum @Alphabet City — which had been a Masonic temple.

for the organization as it further expands its reach and programming.

“Hosting City of Asylum is something Pittsburgh should be very proud of. It exemplifies our welcoming nature,” said Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto. “Pittsburgh was built upon the backs of those seeking new lives here, and our present and future will be built the same way.”

Less certain is the welcoming nature of the nation.

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the legality of a Trump Administration travel ban. The order restricts or bans visas for people in seven nations, including five predominantly Muslim-majority countries. City of Asylum programs have not yet been directly affected. But, Mr. Reese said, “we’re concerned, as many persecuted writers come from countries subject to the ban. And, generally, we are concerned that inviting people from other countries is now viewed suspiciously.”

However, Janet Sarbaugh, vice president for Creativity at The Heinz Endowments, one of the City of Asylum’s foundation supporters, insisted that there has never been a more important time for the organization to exist.

“In a contentious, politicized, isolating world, City of Asylum stands for global understanding, common humanity, and authentic connections,” she said. “What it represents is something we all should aspire to every day.”

Mr. Das arrived in Pittsburgh knowing no one and little English. His first impression, he confessed, was that “everyone looks the same.” But he took comfort that water embraces the city much like it does in

his hometown of Barisal. He has found inspiration from the people he’s encountered, the city’s parks and its rivers, and has written 40 poems since arriving, including “Exile Poem” translated from Bengali by Nandini Mandal:

The cold has intensified.  
People are saying that  
winter is finally here.  
I pull the cap down on my forehead,  
cheekbones tighten;  
I look straight—far ahead.  
Steel cold, full of confidence.  
Solitude is perfect for my writing.  
My neighbor, who all summer long  
burst fireworks, where has he gone?  
At 2:00 in the morning,  
fireworks went off below my window,  
startled and alarmed, I woke up,  
But I am looking for him now.  
Where has he gone?

The internet enables Mr. Das to stay in touch with writers in Bangladesh and others in exile. Still, he longs for family and homeland. Bangladesh, he fears, will sooner experience a cleansing of its minorities than a rebirth of tolerance, leaving him no choice but to make his home elsewhere.

For the moment, he’s pinning his hopes on Pittsburgh. “I don’t feel isolated. I feel part of something here and that’s important. This is the equivalent of freedom to me.” **h**

## DRUE HEINZ, A TRUE PATRON OF THE ARTS

This spring, The Heinz Endowments joined the Heinz family in commemorating the remarkable life of Drue Heinz, who died on March 30. Mrs. Heinz was the widow of the late H.J. Heinz II and stepmother of the late Sen. H. John Heinz III. She was widely respected in the United States and Great Britain for her imaginative and generous support of the literary and visual arts.

Mrs. Heinz endowed the Drue Heinz Literature Prize at the University of Pittsburgh, a national prize that supports publication of collections of short stories. She also sponsored an ongoing lecture series, which continues to bring prominent authors to Pittsburgh to speak. She co-founded Ecco Press; was publisher of *The Paris Review*; and served on the boards of a number of arts institutions and organizations in the U.S. and Europe, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the MacDowell Colony, the American Academy in Rome, the Royal Academy of Arts, and Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Art.

Among Mrs. Heinz's many achievements were her involvement in the development of Heinz Hall as the home for the Pittsburgh Symphony and her participation in the creation of the city's Cultural District in Downtown Pittsburgh, initiatives propelled by the visionary leadership of her husband in partnership with the city's corporate, cultural and political leaders. In 1973, she joined the board of the Howard Heinz Endowment, which later became The Heinz Endowments, and was named a director emeritus in 1994.

"We each in our own way find how best to remember and honor those who have touched and been a part of us," said Endowments Chairman André Heinz. "For my part, I feel I shall continue to discover her presence in the world that informed her zeal for life, and to which she gave back in return."



## SECURING THE VOTE

The University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Cyber Law, Policy, and Security (Pitt Cyber) has created an independent, non-partisan Blue Ribbon Commission on Pennsylvania's Election Security. The 21-member commission, which was formed with support from The Heinz Endowments, is researching the cybersecurity of voting machines; tabulation and storage; and voter registration, rolls and databases. It also is examining the resiliency and recovery of Pennsylvania's electoral system following a potential breach. The co-chairmen of the commission are David Hickton, founding director of Pitt Cyber and former U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, and Paul McNulty, president of Grove City College, former deputy attorney general of the United States, and former U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. Endowments President Grant Oliphant is a member of the commission.

## SUPPORTING THE FOURTH ESTATE

The Heinz Endowments and The Pittsburgh Foundation co-hosted the Philadelphia-based Media Impact Funders' annual Journalism Funders Gathering, which brought nearly 80 foundation representatives and media experts to Pittsburgh in June. Immediately following this event, both foundations co-sponsored a one-and-a-half-day conference, "The First Amendment in the 21st Century: Current Threats and Community Responses." Both gatherings highlighted the critical need for robust local as well as national journalism and the importance of having all sectors of the community visible and vocal in protecting the values of a just society. The events included well-respected local media leaders along with nationally known media figures such as broadcast journalists Soledad O'Brien and April Ryan.





## NEW ADDITIONS

Kathleen Keating joined The Heinz Endowments in July as the program associate for the Learning Strategic Area. Ms. Keating previously worked with the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Economic Development South and GTech Strategies. With a background in community development and education policy, Ms. Keating will work with the Learning team on policy development.

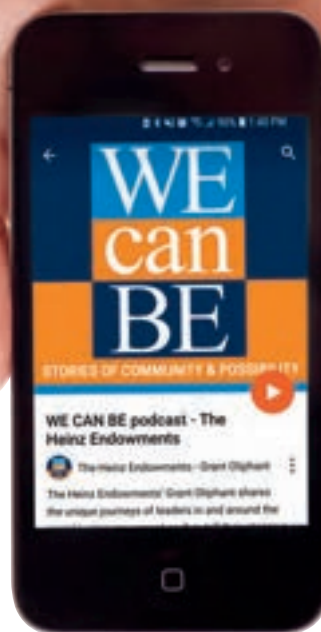
Karen Abrams, most recently the community and diversity affairs manager at the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, joined the Endowments at the end of last year as the program officer for equitable development. Her work focuses on infusing equity into the foundation's redevelopment funding initiatives in the Pittsburgh region. She also is helping the Endowments to develop and implement grantmaking that supports sustainable investments in neighborhood, city and regional initiatives.

## BUILDING ON THE GOOD

Hazelwood Early Learning Hub, below, is a program of Trying Together, a regional organization that supports high-quality care and education for young children, and one of the participants in The Heinz Endowments' expanded Hazelwood mini-grant initiative. The mini-grant program was launched last year after the foundation's Learning team met with more than 100 Hazelwood residents to explore a grantmaking collaboration with nonprofit organizations serving the community. Those discussions led to the creation of the \$250,000 program, which supports community-inspired initiatives that cost up to \$25,000 and promote family and child well-being or increase innovative education opportunities for children and youth. In response to positive mid-year updates on the mini-grant projects, the Endowments is allotting \$500,000 to support technical assistance, community engagement and additional mini-grants in Hazelwood, with the goal of expanding collective neighborhood-based and neighborhood-driven activities.



Ryan Loew



## WE CAN BE

The latest addition to The Heinz Endowments' media portfolio is the podcast "We Can Be," which joins the foundation's magazine, website, blog and social media platforms. Hosted by Endowments President Grant Oliphant, the podcast features leaders from Pittsburgh and across the country discussing local, national and international challenges. In each episode, guests describe the personal and professional experiences that have helped them to believe that citizens can and should work together to create a healthier, smarter, more creative and more just region, state, country and world. To find out more about the podcast, go to [www.heinz.org](http://www.heinz.org).

## GET THE LEAD OUT

Women for a Healthy Environment sponsored a one-day conference in May, "Creating Healthy Communities: Get the lead out," which focused on lead contamination. The event looked at ways communities can work together to address hazards created by lead in homes, schools and early learning centers. Among the keynote speakers were Dr. Karen Weaver, mayor of Flint, Mich., which received national attention when high levels of lead in the water created a public health crisis that began in 2014. Other speakers included Dr. Bruce Lanphear, a clinician scientist and principal lead investigator working to prevent a worldwide epidemic of chronic disease and disability due to exposure to contaminants such as lead.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Once known as the Almono development, the 178-acre former steel mill site in the Hazelwood section of Pittsburgh has been renamed Hazelwood Green. The Heinz Endowments and the Richard King Mellon, Benedum and McCune foundations bought the property in 2002 and dubbed it Almono in recognition of the city's three rivers: the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio. The new name is intended to complement and acknowledge connection to the surrounding neighborhood.

## AN ENVIRONMENTAL FIRST

The Frick Environmental Center, left, is a Pittsburgh nonprofit conservancy that has been recognized as the first municipally owned, free-to-the-public Living Building in the United States. The designation was awarded by the International Living Future Institute through its Living Building Challenge, a rigorous performance standard that requires a facility to produce as much energy as it consumes each year, eliminate toxic chemicals, and collect and treat its own water. The Endowments was among the funders that supported development of the center's Living Building features such as its net-zero energy and water consumption.




Denmark Photography



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WRITING ON THE WALL | PAGE 40



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