RIGHTS OF PASSAGE
A two-year-old initiative offers encouragement and support to foster care youth approaching adulthood.
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 which 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 thrive as a whole community—economically, ecologically, educationally and culturally—while advancing the state of knowledge and practice in the fields in which we work. Our fields of emphasis include philanthropy in general and the disciplines represented by our five grant-making programs: Arts & Culture; Children, Youth & Families; Education; Environment; and Innovation Economy.

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 grant-making 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 Bannon, Linda Braund, Donna Evans, Carmen Lee, Douglas Root, Robert Vagt. Design: Landesberg Design

About the cover For too many foster children in Allegheny County, turning 18 used to mean venturing into the adult world like this young girl—alone and with few possessions. That’s changing now because of a foundation-supported program that helps these youth learn how to live on their own.
Taking Root

A program to plant trees in Pittsburgh’s urban neighborhoods is designed to ensure that residents of every community can enjoy a place in the shade.

Independence Day

Thanks to a county initiative, foster children who turn 18 in the Pittsburgh region no longer have to face adulthood without guidance and support.

Living Building

The latest construction project at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens is part of a national competition to take green building to new heights.
Community Building
Andrew Peters’ story “Community Building” painted a wonderful picture of the vibrant ministries of The Pittsburgh Project. From its after-school programs and neighborhood pool to its community garden and homeowner assistance initiatives, the Project is one of the most effective Christian community development ministries in the country. Former Executive Director Saleem Ghubril and his staff truly adopted the principles of “reconciliation, relocation and redistribution” that I have championed in the past four decades. Through their faithfulness over 23 years, they have seen real, tangible, lasting success in their neighborhood.

As a civil rights activist and foundation president, I have devoted my life to promoting the use of biblical principles and practical resources to aid struggling communities. So I was greatly encouraged to read about all the young people who were headed down the wrong path and had their lives turned around by the love and compassion of Pittsburgh Project staff and volunteers. That is the beauty of the Project: It’s not about the buildings and facilities; it is about the people who love and care deeply for their troubled neighbors of the Perry South area. The most encouraging thing about the Project is that Saleem’s recent departure did not create a leadership vacuum. Throughout their faithfulness over 23 years, they have seen real, tangible, lasting success in their neighborhood.

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John Perkins
President, John M. Perkins Foundation for Reconciliation and Development
Jackson, Miss.

Bond Shelter
The staff at the Rhode Island Small Business Development Center at Johnson & Wales University in Providence is keenly aware of the financial constraints facing minority contractors in our region. The entrepreneurial challenges presented in Jeff Fraser’s article “Bond Shelter” are quite familiar to me and to my colleagues who are in the business of helping a diverse network of entrepreneurs. The statistics on the minority contractors’ market share in Rhode Island are consistent with Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, where researchers found that minority businesses accounted for only 3 percent of the prime contracts worth $25,000 or more that local governments awarded in 2004.

As the Rhode Island center’s state director, I am responsible for building the service infrastructure that can respond effectively to entrepreneurs’ needs for technical assistance. We are years away from creating a service system required to level the playing field as the Minority & Women Educational Labor Agency’s program in Pittsburgh has done. It provides a model of collaboration that I plan to replicate. Thank you for sharing how a sheltered bond program combined with a community loan fund and a six-month curriculum in business basics and strategic growth can transform 25 participating contractors and their employees into true success stories.

All small business development centers offer business counseling, training and education. What is uniquely powerful is that the Minority & Women Educational Labor Agency’s program ventures into the arena of helping minority- and women-owned firms secure bonding. The agency’s comprehensive approach is an inspiration for the nation’s economic developers and entrepreneurs.

John Cronin
State Director, Rhode Island Small Business Development Center
Johnson & Wales University
Providence, R.I.

In Good Health
When I am in the company of women empowered to take on significant issues, it is clear to me that change is coming. Such meetings bring to mind the adage, “What women want, God wants.” In the story “In Good Health,” Christine O’Toole described how Pittsburgh’s two regional Women’s Health & Environment conferences provided what women wanted: an opportunity to exchange information that can positively affect our lives and those we love.

Still, as an African-American member of Women for a Healthy Environment, a network convened by The Heinz Endowments and Magee-Womens Hospital, I long to see more black women at these “green gatherings.” Their missing presence perpetuates the myth that black people are indifferent to environmental problems.

In fact, public opinion data show no significant “green gap” between black and white Americans. What is true is that African Americans, who are disproportionately affected by environmental risks, are much more likely to care about “green issues” that directly affect their lives. That’s why through my work at the Center for Victims of Violence and Crime and with support from the Endowments, I direct the EVE—Enlightened Voices for the Environment—Project. The initiative is designed to increase awareness of environmental risk factors among African-American women and their families in the Pittsburgh region. The connections between violence and the environment also will be noted in our efforts to educate and inspire women to initiate action that will make a difference.

LaVerne Baker Hotep
Director, Community Arts & Education Center for Victims of Violence and Crime Pittsburgh, Pa.
I
n a packet of research collected to help guide the Endowments’ response to the most serious economic setback in decades, there is a Time magazine cover that offers as much sage commentary as the most detailed reports on stock market plunges or unemployment surges.

It is a clever merging of two photographs. One side is a color shot—that could have been taken last week—of an unemployed man selling apples on a street corner. The other side is a bleak, black-and-white scene from the Depression-plagued 1930s in which a passerby, dressed in suit and fedora, seems to be reaching into the color photograph to purchase one of the apples.


As many families in southwestern Pennsylvania begin to feel the pain of this current recession, considerable assurance may be taken from the reminder captured in that photo—that we as Americans have been in this situation before. For residents of our region, it reminds us that we have not only survived national recessions; we have rebounded from one of the most wrenching economic upheavals in our history—the collapse of the steel industry in the 1980s.

In representing this region in the Senate during that terrible period, my late husband worked tirelessly to secure funding for programs and services to help people make it through the economic transition. We often talked admiringly of the “Pittsburgh Character,” that mix of individual initiative and determination—and community caring—that has been key to this region’s ability to surmount so many trials.

After my husband’s death, I took over in 1991 as a leader of the Endowments in the midst of a recession, and I was proud to see Pittsburgh’s large foundation community reacting quickly to help the most vulnerable. Like my late husband, I also was determined that philanthropy would be equally committed to continuing its long-term investments in essential, quality-of-life improvements.

As local philanthropy once again steps to the front lines in this current recession, we at the Endowments are focused on those two core responsibilities. To do justice to both, we must be prepared to make emotionally difficult decisions. As I told the national Women in Philanthropy organization in a speech after the recession of the ’90s, the harsh reality is that some grantee organizations which do perfectly wonderful things in good times, may not be able to justify their survival through the bad.

Like many large institutions with significant investments in the stock market, the Endowments has suffered a sharp decline in investment returns. While we will have to reduce our grants spending, we intend to do everything possible to assist our affected grantees in meeting the economic threats to both their organizations and the communities they serve. In a letter sent out recently to our grantees, the Endowments cites a number of areas in which our foundation might be of assistance. Implicit in the offer, though, is the message that nonprofit managers and board members should be acting now to take those steps required to survive and thrive in the difficult months that still lie ahead.

We at the Endowments want the most positive outcome for every organization we fund; but, during this significant downturn, our giving priorities likely will shift primary focus from individual groups to communitywide human service efforts—those that provide primary assistance to individuals most directly hurt by this economy, and those important groups most likely to see their own donor base dwindle—all the while not losing sight of the long-term needs of the region.

The three stories in this issue are excellent examples of that mix of strategic prioritizing, and they argue for the importance of protecting that principle through a rattled economic period. Our cover story, “Independence Day,” sheds light on a hidden constituency in Allegheny County’s human services system—the few hundred teenagers in foster care each year who take the huge leap toward independence. The other stories highlight strategies for achieving the long-term goals of improving the natural environment in urban neighborhoods and creating a new standard for green design and construction—absolutely essential in good times and bad.

As we at the Endowments work diligently next year to make appropriate funding decisions with the resources available to us, we have a renewed appreciation for the impact of community represented so powerfully in these stories.

In thinking about the Great Depression photograph on that Time magazine cover, I am reminded of a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt, who helped millions of Americans get through that bleak period. “You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really have had to stop to look fear in the face,” she said. “You are able to say to yourself, ‘I lived through this… I can take the next thing that comes along.’ ”

I can’t help but believe that her words are extending her hand into the picture of where we are now to remind us of the power of our Pittsburgh Character.
It’s no small task to plant a tree. From left, volunteers Pete Kyne, Chris Wildfire and Bruce Barcic join Eisler Nursery foreman Jamie Colteryahn in what will be an all-day project of planting saplings on traffic islands in Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood. About 150 volunteers participated in the work.
A tree may grow in Brooklyn all on its own, but an innovative planting program in Pittsburgh depends on foundation resources, scores of volunteers and government maintenance to bring leafy rewards to urban neighborhoods. By Carmen Lee  Photography by Renee Rosensteel
It’s Election Day; the skies are sunny and clear, and steadily rising temperatures are taking the edge off the morning chill. Westinghouse Park in Pittsburgh’s North Point Breeze neighborhood is fairly quiet, and unlike other city polling places that are surrounded by crowds, only a handful of people can be seen walking toward the squat, cement-block community center in the middle of the park to vote.
The scene’s serenity makes it easy to spot two elm-like Japanese zelkova saplings that stand on one side of a pathway leading to the building. Their trunks are held straight by taut green straps that attach each young tree to pairs of wooden stakes placed securely in the ground. A cluster of three pin oak saplings that are similarly supported has been planted a few feet from a large, elaborate green-and-red jungle gym.

The young trees are dwarfed by several taller ones in the small neighborhood park, which is surrounded by large, stately homes—including those carved into apartments—and modest, neat houses. The community has a mix of working-class and professional families, and the occasional problems with violent crime seem incongruous with the attractive setting. And while the park has trees, it’s apparent that shade is sparse on this square, mostly grass-covered patch. The saplings will one day help expand the tree canopy, a fact not lost on Christina Springer, 44, and Norman Nunley, 36, who have just cast their ballots and are playing with their 5-year-old son, Winston Ives Nunley, on the jungle gym.

“This play equipment gets hot. That’s why we like to go to Highland Park, where it’s more wooded and has more shade,” says Springer, referring to a larger neighborhood park a few miles away.

Neither she nor her husband is familiar with TreeVitalize Program—supported program responsible for planting the saplings, TreeVitalize Pittsburgh, but Springer rattles off some benefits trees bring to urban communities as if she’s read the brochure: increased oxygen in the air, more shade that helps cool down asphalt-laden cities in hot weather.

“I grew up in Wisconsin around a lot of trees,” says Nunley. “It’s nice to see that they’re increasing the number of trees here. It will help people feel more positive about the neighborhood.”

Restoring tree cover in the Pittsburgh region is the primary objective of the nearly one-year-old TreeVitalize Program, a joint project of the City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Other groups that support the project include Friends of the Pittsburgh Urban Forest, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and Friends of the Riverfront.

Under the initiative, 20,000 trees will be planted in the region by 2012, starting with 1,150 the first year. At the same time, the program is promoting environmental justice by trying to help modest- or low-income urban neighborhoods enjoy the same benefits of tree-lined streets and well-shaded parks as tonier sections of the region. TreeVitalize also educates public officials about the importance of maintaining urban trees, and works with other organizations to encourage local residents to participate in creating a healthier and more attractive urban landscape.

“When I say what I do, people regularly respond, ‘We have so many trees and we have such green hillsides. Why do we need to plant trees?’ ” says Director Marijke Hecht, a petite, energetic woman with wavy, neck-length black hair and an infectious enthusiasm. “And I think that’s true. We have great green hillsides, but when you drive through the city streets of Pittsburgh, you don’t see green equitably distributed. There is this big disparity among neighborhoods, and, not coincidentally, it overlaps with income levels … The reason we want to plant so many trees in the next five years is to bring the benefits to all our neighborhoods around the region.”

Endowments Chairman Teresa Heinz talked about the consequences of such green space disparities in a speech during the International Urban Parks Conference in September: “Too many children are being raised in isolation from nature. The only
sense of belonging and adventure many children get is in front of a computer, wandering through malls or, worse, when they take advantage of our parks to prey on the innocent. This lack of connection, this isolation and indifference, separates them from their world … Every effort—a simple neighborhood garden, Three Rivers Park, a playground in a city—every effort strengthens our connection to this natural world.

Author and columnist Richard Louv, who has written several books on family, nature and community, calls this lack of connection to the natural world “nature-deficit disorder.” In his 2006 book, “Last Child in the Woods,” Louv cites numerous studies showing a variety of benefits from quality time in nature such as improving children’s resistance to depression, stimulating their imagination and creativity, and calming those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

“Deficit is only one side of the coin. The other is natural abundance,” he writes. “By weighing the consequences of the [nature-deficit] disorder, we also can become more aware of how blessed our children can be—biologically, cognitively and spiritually—through positive physical connection to nature.”

The Endowments supports several groups dedicated to improving southwestern Pennsylvanians’ connections to nature through a broad range of initiatives. The programs advance the foundation’s vision for the region’s ongoing environmental transformation, and tackle issues such as green building, green spaces, recreational amenities, land use and smart-growth policy, air- and water-quality improvement, environmental health, environmental enterprise and environmental education. Increasingly, these projects are being integrated, with the organizations working collaboratively toward sustainability for the region. TreeVitalize is an example of how planting trees in neighborhoods lacking them can create a green infrastructure that enhances livability and increases property values while improving air and water quality.

Currently, the project is focused on planting trees in neighborhoods and parks within Pittsburgh, with plans to expand the program to other Allegheny County communities over the next few years. Individuals and organizations can apply to have trees planted in their communities. The city’s urban forester evaluates the sites to make sure there are no impediments to planting, such as sewer pipes or utility lines, and to determine what species of tree would thrive in those areas. City public works employees, contractors or volunteers dig the holes, plant the saplings or do both. The Endowments–supported Friends of the Pittsburgh Urban Forest provides staff to help with the site evaluations, and supplies “tree tenders,” community volunteers who assist with planting and are trained to prune, weed, mulch, water and otherwise take care of the trees.

TreeVitalize came to Pittsburgh after Caren Glotfelty, director of the Endowments’ Environment Program, learned of Philadelphia’s initiative three years ago through conversations with Michael DiBerardinis, secretary of the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. DiBerardinis told her the project was moving briskly toward its goal of planting 20,000 trees in the Philadelphia region in five years.

“I thought, ‘Wow, we ought to do something like that in Pittsburgh,’” Glotfelty recalls. She believed the program would complement grants that the Endowments already had awarded to improve the region’s green landscape, such as $200,000 to support the tree preservation plan developed in response to a city Shade Tree Commission report. The 2005 inventory found that Pittsburgh had 31,524 street trees, nearly 30,000 less than anticipated, and thousands were in poor condition. The species varieties were limited, and the city had one tree for every 11 people—in some low-income neighborhoods one tree for
every 22 people—while the average for more than 20 other comparable cities was one tree for every three people. The results exposed the paltry attention given to street trees in the last decade as the city grappled with financial crises.

“TreeVitalize seemed like a comprehensive approach for addressing the situation that would achieve a larger scope and scale—tens of thousands of trees rather than a few hundred,” Glotfelty says. She organized a meeting during which DiBerardinis spoke to about 30 people from 10 local organizations that were involved in tree planting as part of their revitalization or ecosystem restoration work. After confirming the group’s interest, state officials provided a $250,000 grant to get TreeVitalize off the ground, and later awarded another $250,000 to support the work. The Endowments gave the project $250,000 in the spring, and, more recently, the Home Depot Foundation granted the program $50,000, which bumped up the number of trees that could be planted the first year from 1,000 to 1,150.

Still, expanding the tree canopy in an urban environment is no simple matter. Only the hardiest saplings can survive in that setting. The minimum size at planting is 250 to 350 pounds, a cost of $150 to $185 per tree. Site preparation usually involves removing concrete so that at least a 30-square-foot patch of dirt is available for a hole about 14 inches deep and 40 inches around. Factor in expenses such as soil, mulch, wooden stakes, tools, staff time and contractors, if they are used, and the total cost of planting a single tree can be nearly $400 to $600. Despite the expense, DiBerardinis announced in October plans to expand TreeVitalize statewide, with a goal of planting 1 million trees in metropolitan areas in five years.

Trees are worth the cost for a number of city dwellers, especially the enthusiastic volunteers who become tree tenders, setting aside time in their often busy schedules to learn about trees and care for them. When Molly Dimond-Stephany, an insurance broker with two young children, moved to Pittsburgh 10 years ago, she maintained her love of nature from growing up on a farm and, later, in a suburban subdivision. She found like-minded souls among her fellow tree tenders and neighbors on Fisk Street in Pittsburgh’s Lawrenceville neighborhood. Residents there submitted so many requests for trees that Fisk, with its closely built houses that sit only a few feet from the curb, was the site of the first 18 TreeVitalize plantings when the program kicked off in the spring.

“We have so many people who want trees. It’s really an exciting time,” says Dimond-Stephany. “It makes a huge impact, even though there’s not a large canopy yet. People are noticing them. They’re so little, but they make the street look so nice … It’s great to see some nature separating the concrete.”

Real estate agent Alice Vaday, who acknowledges having 60 house plants, says she loves her Carrick neighborhood but has become concerned that it is starting to look rundown. That’s why she has walked a two-mile stretch of Brownsville Road, the main drag through the community, knocking on doors to see who would be interested in having
...about 26 trees were planted on the street by the end of the year, with the possibility of more being added in the spring.

“We had two business owners sign up to become tenders. We had one business owner put a spigot on his building so he can water his tree,” notes Vaday. “We anticipate that people will want to do other things to beautify the neighborhood.”

In fact, studies indicate that the presence of trees can give people a sense of well-being, which can have a variety of positive effects. Researchers at the University of Illinois at Champagne-Urbana found that residents in a low-income Chicago housing community socialized more in areas with several trees compared to those living in sections with little or no vegetation. And buildings in the study that had more greenery had 56 percent fewer violent crimes and 48 percent fewer property crimes. A study by Columbia University found that children living in New York City neighborhoods with more street trees have a lower incidence of asthma.

On the economic front, shoppers who were surveyed by the University of Washington’s Center for Urban Horticulture reported that they were willing to pay 9 to 11 percent more for goods and services in shaded business districts because they believed the quality was better and the merchants more responsive. Researchers at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania found that planting a tree within 50 feet of a house increased its property values by about 9 percent.

Linda Doman, executive director of Vintage, a senior center in Pittsburgh’s East Liberty section, believes the 115 trees, including maples, oaks, horsechestnuts, cedars, red buckeyes and cypresses, that were recently planted on traffic islands in front of the center will help attract the type of economic development that occurred a few blocks away where...
Before planting, care must be taken to ensure enough distance between the tree and the street or sidewalk. In some cases, this means cutting away a portion of the sidewalk. Ultimately, a proper amount of space — usually at least 30 square feet — must be provided to allow room for the tree’s roots to take hold.

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The site is evaluated to determine what type of tree would thrive in that environment.

What does it take to plant a tree? More than some people might think. Here are some of the steps that require careful consideration in the planting process.

Trees are purchased from a local nursery and tagged with their species identifications.

Wooden stakes are used to keep the saplings straight. As part of the TreeVitalize program, the stakes are milled by Urban Tree Forge, a local company that uses salvaged materials.

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Green space in all of the region’s neighborhoods is a necessity rather than a luxury.

“It may seem somewhat frivolous to be spending money on planting trees when, in this economy, people are losing their health insurance and using food banks in record numbers. But trees are an investment in health, safety and hope for the future,” says Glotfelty. “We depend on trees to make oxygen for us to breathe, clean our air and water, give us shade. They save us money on our utility bills by reducing cooling costs in the summer and breaking chilly winds in the winter. And the spiritual relief they give us from the dehumanizing effects of concrete and asphalt is priceless.”

Customers flock to a six-year-old Whole Foods Market and neighboring stores.

“Once the trees grow, they’ll look beautiful. They’ll make using the bike lanes more pleasant, and it will be good for the Peabody students to see improvements in their community,” says Doman, referring to the high school across the street that’s had problems over the years with gang violence.

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Working on a school paper in her dorm room, Shataja White looks like a typical college student. But typical would not describe Shataja’s experiences as one of the more than 200 young adults who leave the Allegheny County foster care system every year. She’s attending a Penn State University extension thanks to a foundation-supported program for youth who “age out” of the foster care system.
Each year, 240 Allegheny County teens in foster care reach “emancipation” on their 18th birthdays. For some, it’s a promising threshold to college or work. For many, it’s a trap door that leaves them homeless, traumatized and broke. New foundation-supported programs are creating bridges to help these youth reach healthy adulthoods outside the traditional family structure. By Christine O’Toole Photography by Terry Clark
“I GOT REJECTED AT FOUR COLLEGES. I WAS A TRADE SCHOOL.

No longer living in foster care, Shataja White, shown here in a campus library, is studying to become a pharmacist.
After leaving an abusive home, Shataja White finished high school while living with her aunt. Separated from her three brothers, she coped with the unfamiliarity of a new household and three younger male cousins. “It’s sad sometimes,” she admits. Varsity sports offered a release and a path forward. Her Woodland Hills High School soccer coach became the catalyst who helped her plan a future after foster care. That future arrived in September, when Shataja entered college south of Pittsburgh at the Pennsylvania State University Greater Allegheny campus in McKeesport.

Coleman Smith prepared for his enrollment at Penn State Beaver in August with the usual paperwork and packing, adding a flourish of freshman spirit: the Nittany Lion logo carved into his hair. It was a surprising flash of bravura for the quiet, controlled basketball player. For the past three years, while earning a high school diploma and competing on a championship team, he’s lived in group homes, separated from his birth parents. Of the three young men at his last placement, he is the only one who has been able to make the leap to higher education. The others, he says, are in “boot camp”—programs for juvenile offenders. “I stay focused. I try hard,” he says softly.

For Dwan Allston, enrolling at Indiana University of Pennsylvania meant finding a new apartment and day care for her 3-year-old son, Keshunn. After spending her high school years shuttling among family members in Pittsburgh and Tennessee, Dwan is now on her own. That means supporting her son with a frenetic schedule, working 40 hours a week at part-time jobs at Baker’s Shoes and a Chuck E. Cheese restaurant while earning her degree in criminal justice. “I sleep as much as I can—but I can never sleep when Kee’s around,” she says fondly. “My grandma says I can’t do it all, but I don’t want to live off the system.” If her energy and funds hold out, she’ll earn her B.S. next year.

These three Allegheny County teenagers aim to beat astounding odds. If they complete their degrees, they’ll be among a mere 3 percent of youngsters placed in substitute care for reasons including abusive, neglectful or absent parents—or their own defiance—and yet manage to graduate from college.

Each year, 240 children leave the Allegheny County child welfare system with dreams that mirror those of any other teenager: independence, achievement and support from people who care. But the road to those goals is daunting for these adolescents. They’ve lived in foster homes, group homes or residential treatment programs an average of 16 months. About half run away at least once. They repeatedly switch schools. Their grades suffer. They graduate at half the rate of other students. Lacking the skills and maturity to support themselves, they may turn to crime. When child welfare experts looked at Allegheny County jail inmates under 25, they found that one-third had spent time in the child welfare system, an indictment of a
well-intentioned agency that dismisses children from care when they need adult guidance the most.

Pennsylvania Secretary of Public Welfare Estelle Richman sees the train wreck that follows when teens choose to leave the foster care system. “They hit their 18th birthday. At that point, the foster parent says, “Good luck.” The Medicare program that has provided their health insurance says, ‘I hope you stay healthy.’ [The students]often don’t know about things like child care, aid for utility payments and food stamps,” she says. “They’re out on their own, frequently with nowhere to live—just directions to a shelter.”

Now child welfare workers are reaching into high schools as well as homes to intercept foster care youth before age 18, connecting them to resources that can stave off coming-of-age disasters. Pennsylvania’s foster teenagers can opt to continue in the system and receive support when they choose post-secondary education. Allegheny County’s Department of Human Services offers two separate programs that help older youth make the transition to living on their own.

Within the Independent Living Program, five regional agencies provide homes and an array of services to teenagers separated from their families. Reflecting the department’s philosophy of giving consumers—even youth within the child welfare system—a voice in decisions affecting them, the panel that awards contracts to the agencies includes youth receiving those services. Another example of involving young people in the process was the department’s first workforce development symposium in May, which included current and former foster youth as well as social service providers and staff from workforce programs. Among the ideas that emerged from the session were new opportunities for job shadowing and peer mentoring.

The department’s other transition program for foster youth is the two-year-old Independent Living Initiative, which guides teenagers through college and job training decisions. The program includes the work of two “educational liaisons,” who are funded by a $300,000 grant from The Heinz Endowments. They serve as mentors, academic counselors and cheerleaders for students in the program.

“Forty-six percent of foster children in Pennsylvania are 13 and older.… Our primary goal should be a permanent family for each one,” says Joan Benso, president and CEO of the Pennsylvania Partnership for Children, a policy advocacy group. “But we must explore other solutions. Voluntarily extending services till 21 is an important ingredient.”

The partnership’s Porchlight Project advocates support for teenagers as well as younger children removed from their families because of abuse or neglect.

“We want kids to spend less time in the foster care system. That’s the beginning point,” says Richman. “That said, we [also] need a system of guidance or transition.”

Marc Chern, the director of human services for Allegheny County, agrees.

“I often say, my own children would not be able to live on their own at 18. [Our transition program] is all about the life skills we take for granted,” he says. “We have not lived up to our responsibilities [to prepare foster children]. We need better outcomes for all.”

Cherna’s drive to beef up support for adolescents who “age out” of the foster care system is part of a national trend based on compelling research by the University of Chicago. Compared to other Midwestern states that close children’s foster care cases at 18, Illinois, which offers support until age 21, sent more teens to college and job training programs.

“Because of the economy and the cost of living, it is almost impossible to have people live independently at 18,” acknowledges Howard Knoll, an expert on job-readiness training of foster care youth for the Seattle-based Casey Family Programs, a national child welfare organization. “The question becomes, what options do they have? If they hang on in care, they have a place to go.”
The Casey Family Programs’ goals include improving the quality of foster care while providing more permanent homes for children so that the number served by agencies is cut in half by 2020. For older foster youth, this means collaborating with other organizations to provide the teens with a supportive community and vocational and academic programs that will help in their transition to adulthood. Casey is working with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to expand and enhance local workforce development programs available to the department’s young clients. The organization is providing the agency with technical assistance for those efforts as well as for other initiatives to improve its services.

Support from the local foundation community, including the Endowments, has enabled the agency to strengthen research, record-keeping and data analysis, and to develop a new independent living focus. Over the past five years, the department has received national accolades for its programs.

The Endowments’ strategy of funding the salaries of the two educational liaisons for the Independent Living Initiative complements both the agency’s efforts and the foundation’s historically strong focus on education. Recent examples of the Endowments’ education emphasis include its support of high-quality pre-kindergarten throughout Pennsylvania and education reform in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. The foundation is partnering with the Department of Human Services as a way to prevent unemployment and other poor outcomes for older foster youth who often get overlooked in education and training initiatives, says Marge Petruska, the Endowments’ senior program director for Children, Youth & Families.

“We will redouble our efforts to build the same bridges to opportunity for these teens as we have done for other vulnerable youth,” says Petruska. “It’s an exciting and hopeful time, now that the public sector and foundation community have joined forces to focus on this issue.”

And research findings confirm that there is desire among foster youth for productive adult-hoods. Most teens in the welfare system want to attend college, according to a 2004 study by the University of Chicago’s Chapin Hall Center for Children. With that goal achieved, Shataja, Coleman and Dwan seem poised for success.

“BECAUSE OF THE ECONOMY AND THE COST OF LIVING, IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO HAVE PEOPLE LIVE INDEPENDENTLY AT 18. THE QUESTION BECOMES, WHAT OPTIONS DO THEY HAVE?”

Howard Knoll, Casey Family Programs

But they will continue to need emotional and financial support—not to mention basics like a driver’s license, a bank account or a place to live during semester breaks and summer vacations.

Pennsylvania counties differ in their approach and funding for transition programs, but all have access to substantial federal support. In 1999, the national John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program more than doubled previous funding for those over 18. It gives annual room and board stipends of $5,000 for post-secondary education or training—payable to the institution—to teens up to 21 who have left foster care, and permits states to extend Medicaid coverage to the same age. Combined with other sources of financial aid for job training or college—from state tuition aid to monthly stipends to free laptop computers—the support is enough to help every child who qualifies for higher education.
“Money is not the barrier for our kids,” says Cherna. What requires more effort for him and his staff is inviting children who are about to leave the system to start a conversation about their rights and choices.

Connecting to Help

For Shataja, the conversation began at soccer practice, when Assistant Coach Jen D’Amico befriended her. Last September, D’Amico joined the Children, Youth and Families division of the county human services staff as one of two Endowments-supported educational liaisons, and began visiting students in high schools and institutions. Shataja, her former player, turned up as one of D’Amico’s 150 clients. The teen’s good grades convinced D’Amico that she had college potential, and D’Amico encouraged Shataja to bolster her SAT scores and apply to four colleges.

Meanwhile, Shataja’s legal advocate was cheering those efforts. Bethany Schumacher, an attorney for KidsVoice, a child advocacy group, also was studying ways to support Shataja’s future.

After winning a lawsuit against Allegheny County in 2005 on behalf of a former foster child who sought continued support through her college years, KidsVoice collaborated with the Department of Human Services in addressing similar cases. When the agency inaugurated its Independent Living Initiative the next year, KidsVoice crafted a new conciliation process tailored to each teen’s individual situation. If he or she is accepted to post-secondary education or training, advocates and department caseworkers meet to discuss the supports that will help them succeed: stipends for daily living, payments for books or bus passes, or alternative housing for those who have no place to live during school breaks. Individuals can debate, accept or reject those offers. They may opt to keep their case open and subject to periodic review, or they may choose to close their case. Even with their cases closed or
transferred within the system, post-secondary students receive financial support. To date, Shataja is one of nearly 100 youth who have participated in the process.

This concerted effort behind Shataja kept her motivated. “I got rejected at four colleges. I was going to apply to [a trade school],” she recalls as she relaxes outside her dormitory in T-shirt, jeans and fuzzy pink slippers. “But Jen said no. She kept pushing me.” A last-minute acceptance at Penn State Greater Allegheny allowed her to enroll in pharmaceutical studies and land a place on the school’s volleyball team.

For Coleman, a University of Pittsburgh summer workshop introduced him to forensics science after his sophomore year. An excellent athlete, he aimed to combine his interest in forensics with a chance to play college ball.

Wilkinsburg High School basketball Coach Heath Bailey encouraged his ambition; so did his cousin and teammate, A.J. Poindexter. KidsVoice advocate Bill Petulla prepared his conciliation arrangements. D’Amico drove him to college visits. By August, plans were in place: Not only would Coleman enroll in forensics at Penn State Beaver, he would join the basketball squad and room with his cousin.

After she graduated as a 17-year-old mother from Pittsburgh’s Oakland Catholic High School, Dwan’s Children, Youth and Families caseworker introduced her to D’Amico. Dwan had little support from her mother, now living in Atlanta; she bounced among high schools in Pittsburgh and Tennessee, but returned to Pittsburgh for her senior year after Keshunn’s birth. Her paternal great-grandmother provided shelter and assistance. But Dwan’s goal after community college — going on for a bachelor’s degree — meant she needed additional encouragement. D’Amico guided Dwan’s apartment search in Indiana, Pa., 60 miles east of Pittsburgh, nixing leases that were too expensive. She also found a place for Keshunn in on-campus day care while his mother attends class at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

D’Amico and her co-worker, Monte Robinson, knew that among their job responsibilities as educational liaisons would be College Admissions 101. The staffers compiled workbooks to distribute in classroom seminars and developed one-on-one sessions to simplify the mysteries of computing grade point averages and paying tuition.

“Some kids are average students. You don’t want to derail their dreams. If a kid has a 1.5 GPA and wants to go to Pitt, he has to get ready for the classroom. They need to know the sequence and the steps,” explains Robinson, a burly 31-year-old. “That means open your mail! Understand your transcript!”

But the pair also confronted the lax school record-keeping that dogs foster care children who move frequently. “One of our kids attended eight different high schools between ninth and 11th grade,” D’Amico says, recalling frustrating hours spent tracking clients’ transcripts for college applications. “In other cases, whole school years [of records] were missing.”

Percentage of youngsters nationally who are placed in substitute care for reasons including abusive, neglectful or absent parents — or their own defiance — and yet manage to graduate from college:
Unfortunately, such examples are not uncommon because foster children and youth are so transient. Courts may move them in and out of communities, counties or even states. Some youngsters run away, or they may leave a conventional school to attend a residential one or a mental health facility. If they attend a school for less than nine weeks, often no transcript is issued. Other students’ experiences proved that the devil was in the details. Two students with university acceptances did not know how to supply the housing deposits demanded before enrollment and consequently lost their places. D’Amico says it was a lesson learned as the program moves into a second year.

As September began, the liaisons tried to be unobtrusive but supportive. D’Amico’s secret weapon is a quick text message to the students’ cell phones. “It’s just a way to check in—to ask how was your day,” she says. But the added responsibility to keep in touch with the freshmen, as well as introduce high school seniors and juniors to the initiative, means that the two liaisons’ caseload will steadily increase. Joann Heffron-Hannah, program director for the Independent Living Initiative, welcomes that challenge. “Now we are able to reach kids younger. We can work on their deficits and increase our numbers,” she says.

Plans for adulthood can falter without support, both practical and emotional. A third of the teens studied by the University of Chicago received help for behavioral and emotional issues. Myra Powell, director of The Hub, a drop-in center for homeless youth, says the reason is clear: “Hurt people hurt people.” For volatile teens, a connection to services can be elusive. Occasionally, she says, she has visited job training offices. When asked what she needs to move forward, she sounds perplexed: “I’m not sure. I don’t ask for too much.”

Though giving disaffected teens like Shannon a hopeful vision for the future is a goal shared by the child welfare system and workforce development programs, bureaucratic barriers have kept the two efforts apart. But now, more than a dozen local programs are working to change that. Caseworkers visit foster children in their homes. Mentors—college engineering students, young professionals from Leadership Pittsburgh and fellow foster care alumni—offer a glimpse of future careers. A downtown drop-in center for foster care teens, The Bridge of Pittsburgh, offers a broad, casual array of services that cover the basics: daily living skills, workforce development and higher education. KidsVoice assembles ongoing county support when teens enroll in post-secondary education. An annual resource fair, co-sponsored by KidsVoice and the Department of Human Services, provides advice on everything from driver’s license permits to college admissions.

25:

Percentage of teens nationally who became homeless for one day or more after aging out of foster care.

Sharlene Gray, director, The Bridge of Pittsburgh

“IF THEY DECIDE TO LEAVE TURN BACK A DAY OR A WEEK LATER

Shannon Hagen, 18, has lived at a shelter for homeless youth for seven months and doesn’t give a lot of details about why she left the foster home where she had been staying. Though she completed high school while living in the shelter, she has no plans for the future. “I accomplished one thing. I graduated,” she says in a conversation at The Hub. She says she would like to attend community college, but “procrastinated” about applying. About the foster care system, she says, “They care about us when we’re little. Why aren’t they showing it now?”
“We surround them with people. It’s a wide array of services,” says Heffron-Hannah of the department’s Independent Living Initiative. Jen Staley, a KidsVoice attorney, agrees that there’s no shortage of assistance. “There’s an immense amount of resources, but they must navigate the maze,” she says.

Making More Options Available

For those looking for work after high school, the Casey Family Programs’ Knoll wants an immediate introduction to existing employment programs. “Where are there opportunities to create more effective partnerships with the local workforce development effort? Anyone who’s 18 in the welfare system should be registered at Career Links,” he suggests, referring to the local jobs agency. “In Allegheny County, that should be an immediate thing—it’s all free.” Knoll also wants to see other training programs re-invigorated. “The apprenticeship system for trades has broken down,” he says, while noting that local trade unions have recently met with county officials to examine apprenticeship programs.

The Bridge of Pittsburgh attempts to address some of these employment and educational challenges that the youth face by providing job readiness classes, SAT preparation, tutoring and daily guest speakers. Thursday afternoons always bring higher-ed admissions representatives. Once a month, advocates from KidsVoice conduct a raucous “know your rights” Jeopardy-like game. More than 400 youth have visited, with 232 opting to become regular members.

“If they decide to leave the foster care system, they can’t turn back a day or a week later to change their mind,” Director Sharlene Gray emphasizes. “That’s why it’s critical to communicate with them so they can opt in for job training or school.

Pending Pennsylvania legislation would allow foster youth to opt for a trial release, rather than permanent emancipation at age 18, and re-enter the system if they wish. The Pennsylvania Partnership’s Benso is among those who welcome the shift.

“We all know that not every decision that a young person makes works out. They need support to give them room to grow and mature to take the next step,” she says. “Let’s give them the benefit of every doubt to get there.”

The Foster Care System, They Can’t To Change Their Mind.”

At The Bridge of Pittsburgh, which takes its name from the region’s many spans, foster care teens can receive job readiness assistance and tutoring services. Above, group leader Brian Scott, left, talks to Keith Young, middle, and Christen Coleman, right, during a Boys 2 Men workshop on the roles and responsibilities of being a man in today’s society.
The environmental sophistication of Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens’ lush Tropical Forest Conservatory was a precursor to the “living building” design of the new Center for Sustainable Landscapes.
PITTSBURGH’S PHIPPS CONSERVATORY AND BOTANICAL GARDENS IS GOING TO THE OUTER LIMITS OF GREEN IN CONSTRUCTING ITS NEW EDUCATION-AND-RESEARCH CENTER. PLANS ARE TO CREATE A “LIVING BUILDING” WITH A SELF-CONTAINED ENERGY AND WATER SUPPLY. THE AMBITIOUS PROJECT IS ATTRACTING FOUNDATION SUPPORT AND A RANGE OF DESIGN CHALLENGES.

BY JEFFERY FRASER PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSHUA FRANZOS
hey gather just beyond the edge of the Thailand forest where mango, lotus, strangler figs, teak and Bodhi trees thrive, protected from a temperate, decidedly untropical Pittsburgh climate by the most energy-efficient conservatory in the world.

It is not the two-year-old Tropical Forest Conservatory’s “greenness” that staff, trustees and influential friends of Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens have come to celebrate. Nor is it the LEED-certified Welcome Center, nor plans to replace natural gas with methane generated from organic matter on site, nor the fact that the conservatory has abandoned its lawn irrigation system in favor of drought-resistant grass and 100 percent organic lawn care. The attraction isn’t even the awards and industry accolades Phipps’ existing environmental accomplishments have earned.

They’ve gathered to mark a more ambitious undertaking on this September morning. Phipps, led by an executive director and a board of trustees given to questioning convention, is breaking ground on a “living building”: the 20,000-square-foot Center for Sustainable Landscapes. The new home for the conservatory’s administrative offices and education and research programs is being designed to meet all energy and water needs without drawing a single watt from the grid or tapping city water.

It’s a dramatic step in an evolution of thinking at Phipps that has led it to fully embrace the notion that the built environment must be one with its natural surroundings. “One of the problems I think we have in the world today is that we’ve become so disconnected from nature,” says Richard Piacentini, Phipps’ executive director. “We don’t know where our electricity is coming from, how it is made, where our food comes from or how it is produced.” And Phipps officials believe the new building could help in finding answers to those important questions.

Jeff Fraser is a Pittsburgh-based freelance writer and a frequent contributor to h. His last article, published in this year’s Annual Report issue, was about a foundation-supported program to help minority and women contractors acquire the bonding needed to bid on construction projects.
Above from left, Chris Minnerly, lead architect, The Design Alliance; Sutter Wehmeier and Jose Alminana of the Philadelphia-based landscape architecture firm Andropogon; and Phipps Executive Director Richard Piacentini engage in a hands-on discussion about the still-evolving model of the Center for Sustainable Landscapes. Below left, Kelly Ogrodnik, Phipps’ sustainable design and programs manager, listens to another conversation about the new center during the meeting. Below right, a close-up of a model of the center reveals how detailed the miniature replica has to be.
Also inspired by the building’s potential are guests at the groundbreaking, who include Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl; Heinz Endowments Chairman Teresa Heinz; and Gil Sperling, program manager of energy efficiency and renewable energy for the U.S. Department of Energy. Teresa Heinz notes that one goal of the Endowments’ environmental philanthropy is to support pilot projects and innovative models that will attract attention and change architecture and construction around the world. The foundation has awarded a total of $2.6 million in grants to help make the Center for Sustainable Landscapes a living building.

“What would it be like if every building in the world were built like a tree — using energy from the sun to power all its internal systems; capturing, using and treating its own water; and making it available for others to use?” she asks. “For one thing, not only could we avoid the cost of building new power plants, we could begin to shut down the least efficient and harshest polluters, reducing the coal-generated soot that puts Pittsburgh on so many cities-with-the-dirtiest-air lists and leaves a legacy of asthma, heart disease and other serious health problems … You are earning international attention — and keeping this city at the forefront of the green design movement — with a building that will set new standards in green design and construction.”

Then, with a ceremonial turning of soil in a wheelbarrow, Pittsburgh’s competition to produce a building with a level of sustainability never before achieved is officially begun.

It won’t be easy. The sustainability criteria for the Living Building Challenge were written by the Seattle-based nonprofit Cascadia Region Green Building Council to exceed those required for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum certification, the most demanding standards on the books today.

Although no prize is involved, monetary or otherwise, some 60 nonprofits, developers and others across the United States and Canada have accepted the challenge to take projects ranging from single-family homes to apartment buildings; education centers; and large-scale, mixed-use structures to the loftiest heights of sustainability. Work is under way in places such as Portland, Ore.; Rhinebeck, N.Y.; and Vancouver, B.C., though no project has been completed. Reaching the goal of constructing a living building will be an impressive individual achievement for Phipps or any of the others in the competition. But
success also will have broad implications in areas such as energy and water usage, building materials and design. By demonstrating the potential of sustainable construction, the projects could revolutionize how buildings across the globe are developed in the future.

As part of the Cascadia challenge, these living structures must be net zero energy with on-site renewable sources providing all energy needs. All water needs must be met with water captured, treated and managed on site, and without discharge of a single drop of waste water into sewers. The buildings must occupy previously developed sites. Demolition and construction waste must be reused or recycled. Interiors must be people-friendly and maximize fresh air and daylight. They must in some way serve to educate the public on sustainable solutions. The materials with which they are built cannot contain polyvinyl chloride or any of the other 12 hazardous chemicals on a materials “red list.” Even shipping distances for materials are limited to a prescribed radius from the building site.

“When we first looked over the requirements, there was both concern that it was a huge headache and excitement over an opportunity to tackle a challenge this big on a national stage,” says architect Chris Minnerly, one of the principals of The Design Alliance, the Pittsburgh-based firm selected to lead the design of the Phipps living building. Given the degree of difficulty involved and the uncharted territory that must be covered, it would be disingenuous of him, he says, to guarantee they’ll be able to meet the objectives within the budget. “But having said that,” he adds, “we’re confident we have the team around us to do it.”

The size of that team underscores the complexity of the task. A conventional 20,000-square-foot building might require a single architect and a consultant or two. With the Center for Sustainable Landscapes, it is not unusual for a design charrette to pack The Design Alliance’s conference room with upwards of 40 experts: architects; LEED consultants; engineers; storm water managers; construction management specialists; cost consultants; advisors from Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh and the Green Building Alliance; and others—all of whom have been enlisted to solve this architectural and engineering Rubik’s Cube on an $11.8 million construction and landscaping budget.

That budget found strong support among a Phipps donor base impressed with the nonprofit’s sustainability strategies that have been winning applause. Yet, asking donors to finance the living building did give trustees pause because Phipps had raised $36.6 million only a few years earlier to pay for the new Tropical Forest Conservatory, Welcome Center, Production Greenhouse and a special events center—projects that ended up being greener and more expensive than originally planned.

“There were concerns that we had just been through a major capital campaign and to take this on was a major challenge,” says Richard Soeder, a Phipps trustee. “But it also made a lot of sense because we had the momentum.”

The Endowments was among the funders that supported both, giving $1 million to the Phipps capital campaign, $150,000 for the installation of underground “earth tubes” to help control temperatures in the Tropical Forest Conservatory and, more recently, $2.6 million for the Center for Sustainable Landscapes. Several other foundations have contributed an additional $7 million to date for the living building, including the John G. Rangos Sr. Charitable Foundation, the Fisher Fund and the Richard King Mellon, Colcom, Eden Hall, Kresge and Pittsburgh foundations.

“When they came to us with the idea, we thought it was a perfect venue,” says Caren Glotfelty, Environment Program director for the Endowments. “Their board and staff understand

 looked over the requirements, both concern that it was a excitement over an opportunity to tackle big on a national stage.”

Chris Minnerly, principal, The Design Alliance
green building. They had practical experience around LEED, having built certified components within their facility. It’s not as if they were just starry-eyed about the idea. And Phipps is a place with very high visitation and a message of sustainability.”

Over the last 10 years, the Endowments has invested more than $15 million to support green building in southwestern Pennsylvania, including grants toward making Pittsburgh’s David L. Lawrence Convention Center the first green convention center in the world. The Endowments also requires nonprofits that receive bricks-and-mortar grants to build those projects to LEED certification—a policy that helped bring sustainable design to the Sen. John Heinz History Center and the hybrid Explorer education-and-research boat that now sails the city’s three rivers.

Green building in the United States has accelerated since LEED was introduced in 2000, establishing sustainable building standards and a graduated rating system for energy and environmental efficiency. Recent studies suggest an even healthier future, says departing Green Building Alliance executive director Rebecca Flora, who is leaving to join the U.S. Green Building Council.

“You start to question everything. And you can’t go back once you realize this is the way you should do things.”

Richard Piacentini, executive director, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens

“We were ahead of the curve, and it is a good thing or [the previous convention center] would be antiquated now… But this goes beyond image. The real value that came out of that project was how it served as a learning opportunity for our local designers, contractors and the products that went into it.”

With 24 LEED-certified buildings, Pittsburgh ranks fifth among U.S. cities in green construction. And any concern that Pittsburgh would grow complacent in that regard has been erased by the plans Phipps has for its Center for Sustainable Landscapes. After nearly a solid year’s work, Minnerly, Piacentini and the project team remain consumed by a challenging process during which the solution to a problem in one area of design may well create a problem in another, or push expenses beyond the limits of the budget. In fact, costs have been reevaluated at least five times as design strategies evolved—a process that will be repeated several times over in the two to three years the project will be completed. In southwestern Pennsylvania, the 2003 opening of the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, the largest LEED Gold-certified building in the nation, proved to be a watershed event in elevating Pittsburgh as a leader in green building. Flora and others point to surveys showing that the green design of the convention center, which is three times the size of its predecessor, influenced some meeting planners to select it as the site for their events.

“Basically, if it were not for green, our new convention center would not have received the level of publicity and support it has,” says Flora.
A Living Complex

Center for Sustainable Landscapes
The education, research and administration building is the signature project of Phase III of Phipps’ multi-year expansion. The center is part of the Living Building Challenge and, as a result, is being designed to exceed LEED—Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design—Platinum certification, the highest standard for green buildings. It must have net zero energy consumption, with renewable sources providing all energy needs, and all water needs must be met with water captured, treated and managed on site.

Production Greenhouses
Within a total of 36,000 square feet, the two-year-old production greenhouses include computer-controlled temperature, light and humidity levels that create 16 different growing environments. This enables Phipps to grow a wider variety of plants than the conservatory was able to do in its previous facilities. The greenhouses also include a quarantine area where new plants are kept until it has been determined that they are pest- and disease-free and therefore ready to be placed in existing gardens.

Tropical Forest Conservatory
This section helped solidify Phipps’ commitment to green technology with its revolutionary heating-and-cooling system. Passive cooling and heating techniques such as underground earth tubes, strategic use of single-pane and double-pane glass, and computer-driven ventilation and shading eliminated the need for less energy-efficient mechanical systems. A new fuel cell also was installed to convert natural gas to electricity.

Original Conservatory
Opened in 1893, Phipps Conservatory was a gift to Pittsburgh from entrepreneur and philanthropist Henry Phipps. The steel and glass Victorian greenhouse cost $100,000 and was originally stocked with tropical plants from the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which closed in November 1893. At the time, Phipps said he wanted to “erect something that will prove a source of instruction as well as pleasure to the people.”
more years that are expected to pass before the building opens.

The team also is making every effort to ensure that the center’s campus is in harmony with the existing natural and built environment as much as possible, taking into account stakeholders’ recommendations such as using trees as a canopy and border for walkways rather than concrete or metal structures. Also suggested has been to have the detailing, bricks and other materials for the center be contextually consistent with the “Pittsburgh aesthetic” of surrounding historic buildings, including the original conservatory.

How to supply 100 percent of the building’s energy needs from on-site renewable sources is a particularly thorny problem. Here, designers considered solar to be the best renewable option. But the region’s annual sunlight is not necessarily abundant. “What that means is you need more photovoltaic cells to capture that energy,” says Minnerly. “We can do it. But we’ve been running the numbers, and the problem with photovoltaic is that the cells are expensive. The more you have to buy, the more your budget gets out of whack.”

The problem then became how to lower energy demand and find alternatives that can lessen the load on photovoltaic cells. The designers decided to coax enough natural light into the building to slash the need for electric lighting by 80 percent. That meant designing a long, narrow, window-lined rectangle of a building that will allow daylight to penetrate to its deepest interior spaces. But they’ll lose some of the energy savings earned from using more daylight because windows are less efficient than solid walls when it comes to heating and cooling a building. So, to further offset the demand on photovoltaic cells, designers added a geothermal well, which has ground coils that remain at a constant 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Air blown over the coils reduces air conditioning demand during summer months and, because the underground air is warmer than winter air, the process reduces the energy needed to heat a building when the weather chills.

And so it goes for every issue that designing a living building raises. To meet the building’s water needs, a system has been designed that involves taking rainwater from the glass rooftops on the Phipps campus, treating it on site, storing potable water in a nearby lagoon for dry months and treating sanitary water in a constructed wetland. The uncertainty here is that Phipps officials have yet to run the specifics of this strategy past city and county officials whose regulations have not been updated to accommodate such a self-contained system. But Piacentini is fairly confident of approval because similar systems have been created successfully in places such as the Powdermill Nature Reserve in Rector, Pa., and the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum in southwest Philadelphia.
Still, this was not the journey Piacentini anticipated taking some 10 years ago when he and the trustees were mapping out plans for a major expansion of the 115-year-old conservatory campus. In fact, early design of the Tropical Forest Conservatory followed the conventions of that period, which included a mechanical ventilation system with energy-hungry fans. Then, Piacentini asked a simple question: “What would happen if the design didn’t follow conventional roof venting?”

He asked for a study on the dynamics of the air flow in the conservatory. The data suggested that staggered roof vents would eliminate the need for mechanical ventilation and cooling. He asked for a study that tracked winter sunlight, which is critical to plant performance during cooler months. The original design called for using single-pane glass exclusively, which maximizes sunlight at the expense of greater heat loss. The study suggested that was unnecessary. The south conservatory wall, which gets nearly all of the direct sunlight, was then designed with single-pane glass, and double-pane insulated glass was used elsewhere to reduce heat loss.

Architects also added a novel shading system using solid cloth instead of porous cloth to trap more heat. The earth tubes were installed beneath the floor to passively cool the building in the summer and help heat it in the winter, further making a conventional heating-and-cooling system unnecessary. And Siemens Power Generation agreed to use the conservatory as a demonstration site for its prototype of a new fuel cell that efficiently converts natural gas to electricity. While such fuel cells are not in commercial production yet, the conservatory’s 5 kilowatt cell has performed well and is the second-longest running fuel cell of its kind, with only one in Italy surpassing it.

The Tropical Forest Conservatory opened in 2006 as the most energy-efficient building of its kind, with a $2,400 annual heating and cooling bill that is a fraction of the estimated $16,800 Phipps would be paying had a conventionally designed conservatory been built.

A year later, Piacentini learned of the Cascadia Living Building Challenge. It took little convincing to get the trustees’ blessing for designing the Center for Sustainable Landscapes to meet that challenge. By then, the Phipps mission had been revised to emphasize environmental sustainability. Green thinking had spread throughout the campus. Everything from the café food to the front lawn was open to reevaluation.

“You start to question everything,” says Piacentini. “And you can’t go back once you realize this is the way you should do things.”

Below left, Maureen May and Raj Narendran take a moment to soak in the verdant beauty of the Tropical Forest Conservatory’s many different plants. Below right, conservatory guests make their food and beverage selections in the café of the environmentally green Welcome Center.
Suellen Fitzsimmons

BOARD NEWS
The Endowments welcomed a new board member to the foundation in the fall and bid farewell to another.

Joining the board is Sasha Heinz, a doctoral student in developmental psychology at Columbia University and wife of board member Christopher Heinz. Before beginning the graduate program, Sasha Heinz worked in television production at Radical Media and MTV Networks, and in advertising at Ogilvy & Mather. As an undergraduate at Harvard, she developed an intense interest in the connections between psychological and physical well-being. She made that the focus of her graduate work, beginning at the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned a master’s degree in applied positive psychology in 2006. Along with her graduate work at Columbia, Sasha Heinz serves on the board of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. She lives with her husband in New York City and Bucks County, Pa.

Completing her board service at the end of December was Barbara Robinson DeWitt, shown on the far right in the RiverQuest photo above. DeWitt, who served on the board for 14 years, was a member of the Investment Committee and provided valuable counsel, drawing on her experience as a manager of the Endowment and Foundation section of The Bank of New York Mellon’s Private Wealth Management division and on her work with charitable trusts at the financial institution.

Award-Winning Map
BikePGH’s Pittsburgh Bike Map is featured in Print Magazine’s Regional Design Annual 2008 as one of the year’s best graphic design projects in the mid-Atlantic region. Print is a well-regarded, bi-monthly magazine on visual culture and design, and competition for inclusion in its annual is one of the major graphic design contests in the country. The issue was published in late October.
Conrhonda Baker, a Carnegie Mellon University graduate student in creative enterprise management, displays the Heinz College T-shirt that is a gift to Heinz Endowments Chairman Teresa Heinz, right, for her granddaughter. Also participating in the ceremony marking the renaming of the school are, from left, former Treasury secretary and Alcoa chairman Paul O’Neill; Eddie Willson, a graduate student in public policy and management; Shryansh Mehta, a graduate student in information systems management; and Carnegie Mellon President Jared Cohon. A $13 million Endowments grant enabled university officials to restructure the Heinz School of Public Policy and Management, and rename it the H. John Heinz III College. The new educational entity has added a School of Information Systems and Management.

In response to growing demand in the Pittsburgh region for a variety of pre- and post-natal services provided by specially trained individuals, the East Liberty Family Health Care Center has created a distinct agency for its Endowments-supported “doula” program. Doulas, who are usually women, help bring mothers safely through childbirth and ensure that babies thrive. Their work was featured in the 2006 Annual Report issue of h magazine.

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Endowments Interns

The Endowments’ investment in youth philanthropy continues to expand opportunities benefiting young people in the Pittsburgh region. This year the foundation increased the number of youth philanthropy interns to 29 high school graduates, up from 20 last year, and began a collegiate internship in communications. The high school students were divided into eight teams, three of which were based at the Endowments’ offices. The other interns were assigned to North Hills Community Outreach, the Forbes Funds, Pittsburgh Cares, Sarah Heinz House and the United Way of Allegheny County. Each of the eight teams completed a philanthropy project over the summer, resulting in nearly $200,000 in youth-awarded grants. More information about all the interns and the programs they funded can be found at the Endowments’ Web site, www.heinz.org.

DOULAS

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A recent Endowments-funded study resulted in a business plan that led to the creation of a separate agency responsible for doula services and finances. The agency, which continues to be housed at the center, also was formed to enable Medicaid coverage for participants.
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