
off
the
bluff
EAST
LIBERTY
CHARACTER
CHANGE
HISTORY
CULTURE
FOOD

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Spring 2015

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Letter from the Editor

Of all the neighborhoods we've featured in *Off the Bluff*, East Liberty is by far the most promising.

Take a look around; you'll no longer see graffiti-laden buildings, run-down businesses and rampant crime. Instead, you'll see a revitalized neighborhood that is on the cusp of a new cultural renaissance.

Since the turn of the century, East Liberty's revival has been well documented by newspapers in Pittsburgh, which point to development and planning as the main instigators for progress.

Though both were vitally important, there's more to the narrative. The story of East Liberty starts and ends with the people: the father and son who served pizza during the riots in the 1960s, the barber shop owner who prides himself on showing respect to all of his customers and the artist who gives people a canvas to express themselves in the sky, to name a few.

As a student at Duquesne University who grew up in the South Hills of Pittsburgh, I had no idea any of these stories existed before I took over this project more than eight months ago. Actually, I had never stepped foot in East Liberty until then.

But now, I feel like a part of the community, which has been more welcoming to me than I ever could have imagined. When you're in charge of a magazine, you can expect a few problems along the way, but in East Liberty, it was almost as if the community was part of my staff.

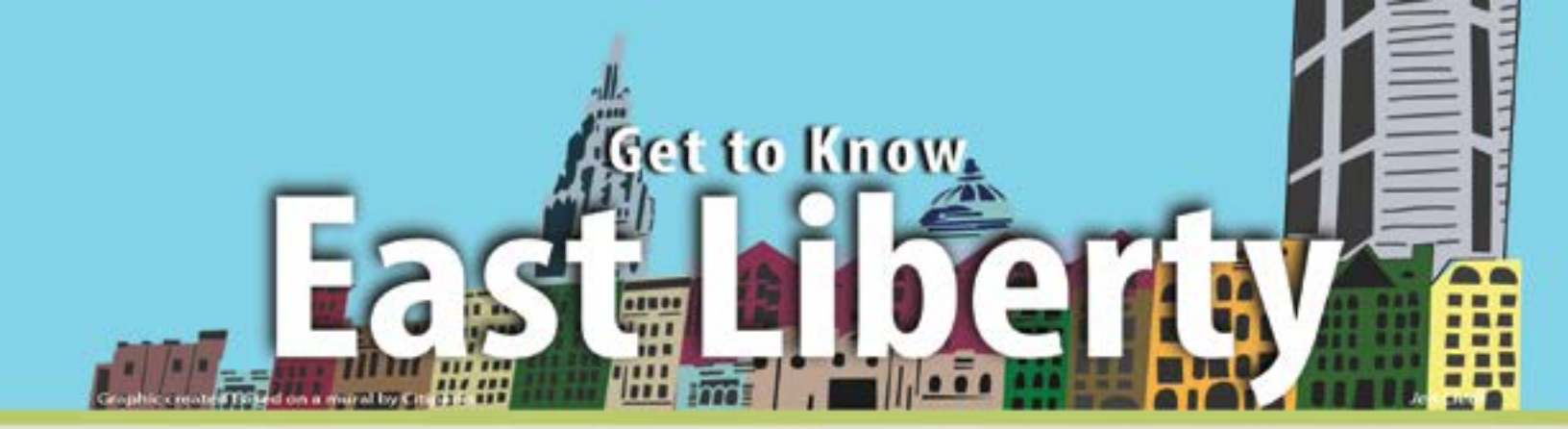
Off the Bluff was created by Dr. Mike Dillon of the Duquesne Journalism and Multimedia Arts Department in 2005. In 2007, it took form as the Pittsburgh Neighborhoods Project, which showcases a different neighborhood each academic year.

In the fall, students in Dillon's magazine journalism class took to the streets of East Liberty to capture its culture, history and trends. They brought back stories about individual characters, institutions and businesses, which are in the pages of this magazine.

I'd like to thank Dr. Dillon for his unwavering support of this project, as well as the writers, photographers, editors and contributors for making this possible.

Enjoy. See you in East Liberty.

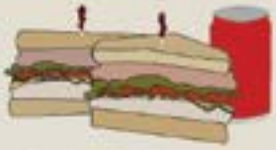
- Julian Routh



Get to Know East Liberty

WHAT IS EAST LIBERTY BEST KNOWN FOR?

24% of people said **Food & Restaurants**



30% of people said **Shopping**

Target, ***Trader Joe's*** *and* ***Giant Eagle*** *were the top favorite places to shop in East Liberty.*

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE IN EAST LIBERTY?

Restaurant - 35%

- Capri's
- China Buffet
- Jimmy John's
- Patron Mexican Grill
- Panera Bread
- Pizza Sola
- Plum
- The Livermore
- Union Pig & Chicken
- Vento's Pizza

Coffee Shop - 9%

- Zeke's Coffee Shop

Shopping Area - 30%

- CVS
- Giant Eagle
- Goodwill
- Jamil's
- Petland
- Rainbow
- Trader Joe's
- Target

Gym - 7%

- Club One Fitness
- Fitness Factory
- LA Fitness

Population of East Liberty

28,436 PEOPLE

http://www.point2homes.com

"It's an up-and-coming neighborhood."
- Male, 50-60 yrs old

"It has gotten a lot nicer over the past 10 years."
- Male, 18-24 yrs old

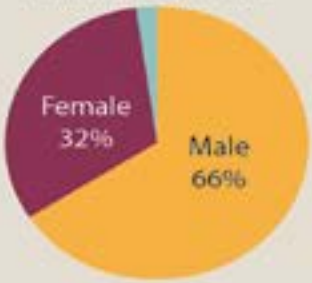
"It's good to see new developments coming to the area."
- Female, 30-39 yrs old

"It's improving but slowly."
- Female, 50-60 yrs old

"Great place to live, but the cost of living continues to go up and up. And property is (getting) too expensive."
- Male, 30-39 yrs old

GENDER

Prefer not to answer - 2%



AGE

WHAT IS YOUR MAIN PURPOSE FOR BEING IN EAST LIBERTY?

35% of people said **WORK**

20% of people said **LIVING**

11% of people said **PASSING THROUGH ON MY WAY TO SOMEWHERE ELSE**

The information for this infographic was collected between the dates of Nov. 3 and Dec. 12, 2014. Responses were gathered in the field and by a survey that was posted on SurveyMonkey.com. The results are based off of 50 survey respondents.


PERI UP

Photo By Fred Blauth

Alberto Vento Jr., also known as Little Al, prepares to put a pizza fresh from the oven into a box. He serves as owner and cook at Vento's Pizza.

Vento's serves slices through years of progress

By Talia Kirkland

Opening the door to a small pizzeria on 420 North Highland Avenue in East Liberty is like opening a time capsule. A pungent smell of garlic fills the small dining room. Photos of Frank Sinatra, Franco Harris, the late Mayor Bob O'Conner and Pittsburgh icons from many eras line the walls. There is a continuous clack from the lottery machine. And infusing it all is the boisterous conversation of the regulars and the warmth from the stoves, where pizzas bake to perfection.

Vento's is a 63-year-old tradition in East Liberty, one of the few family-owned establishments still thriving. While the pizzeria has remained unchanged in its values, the community has not been as fortunate. In fact, when the East End began to develop, it was actually a patchwork of smaller neighborhoods, now long-forgotten. Vento's owner Alberto Vento (Big Al to all) remembers, though. He remembers opening his first shop in the area of Friendship once known as Frog Town.

"I never left," Big Al says. "We were all poor in the '50s. When I returned from the Korean War and decided to open my first shop at 204 St. Clair Street in Frogtown, [it was] a small section dominated by 60 percent Whites, and 40 percent Negros, but the love and respect we had for one another was immense — a tight knit community."

East Liberty is just recovering from decades of flight and civic neglect. The area lost more than one million square feet of commercial space and half its population by 1980. A long period of ill-fated "urban redevelopment" spread blight throughout the community and crime rates soared.

But during Vento's infancy the community was booming, one of the leading commerce centers in the state of Pennsylvania.

"If you didn't do it in East Liberty then you didn't do it— on any

given Saturday night Penn Avenue would be filled with five to six hundred people," Big Al says.

But with the turn of the decade the community hit unimaginable lows. The redevelopment came first, forcing Vento's and several other surrounding shops to the other side of town.

"They moved me in 1954 to Maragarette, a side street with about twenty other little shops, putting me right in between a deli and television repair shop," he says. "It didn't last long and by 1960 I had moved to Highland Avenue."

While still adjusting to the move, the riots of the 1960s hit East Liberty like a wrecking ball. Racial discord between Italians and blacks reached a fever pitch in April 1968, in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King.

East Liberty's African Americans vented their frustrations against white homes and businesses in the area, many of them Italian-owned. Rioters busted windows and stole from the shops they once supported – leaving many businesses in shattered ruins.

"I was the one and only shop that stayed here to feed the community," says Big Al. "Ain't nobody broke none of my windows. They came, they eat and they leave."

The dark years would leave the neighborhood barren. According to some estimates, East Liberty was home to roughly 575 businesses in the 1950s, and by 1979 only 98 businesses remained. Businesses remained closed, and lots vacant for much of the decade.

Yet during the turmoil, Vento's established itself as more than just a pizza shop and grew into a neighborhood institution. Feeding the shop's reoccurring customers and friends was the easy part for Big Al; successfully running a business in a once thriving area that has gone through decades of urban redevelopment and growing racial tension proved to be the greatest challenge.

By the close of the 1970s, the East Liberty Italian business district was on steady decline.

Big Al, along with local business owner Tony Stagno, found a cause that would reinvigorate Italian pride back into the community without offense. Both devoted Steeler fans, they took an immediate liking to Franco Harris, the Steelers' rookie fullback. Franco was an African American who also shared their Italian heritage due to his mixed-decent. They decided to recruit an Italian "army of support" to cheer on Franco and the team on game days at Three Rivers Stadium. "Franco's Italian Army" was born (Sinatra later became an honorary member and posed for a famous photo with Harris while wearing a helmet emblazoned with the name of the Army).

Throughout the 1972 season, Franco's Italian Army became famous for its antics on and off the field. The group would station itself at the 40-yard line, wearing helmets and parading around the field.

"To this day some of the brothers I helped still reach out from time to time, their kids too, and it's all sincere stuff, no humbug – that's my pay day, my hug and kiss on the cheek," says Big Al. "I just feel really blessed to have survived this community." So did Franco's Army: It is memorialized in Vento's popular "Italian Army Sandwich."

Big Al also begat Little Al, who strolls in as his father reminisces. "When I was in college, me and my two sisters worked here," Little Al says. "The neighborhood was different during that time – it was mainly Jewish, Black and Italian but everybody knew Vento's: Home of the Italian Army."

Little Al, 58, runs the small rectangular kitchen which consumes the back of the pizzeria; he serves as owner, cook and community leader. Regulars who enter the pizzeria know both him and his father by name.

"The bond between establishment and community remains tight throughout the years," says Little Al.

Vento's, forced to move three times in the name of progress, now sits in the shadows of the sprawling Home Depot.

The shop fills up. Orders are made. Time to get back to work. Little Al heads back to the kitchen and stirs a fresh pot of tomato sauce and preps garnishes for sandwiches.

Big Al chuckles as he collects a pizza from the counter and walks out of the cramped, cluttered back office. "East Liberty is getting back to normal, and I'd like to be here, God willing, to see it when it turns again."

PHOTO BY JULIAN ROUTH

On the outskirts of East Liberty, Bakery Square is home to several technology-driven stores and corporations, including Google and TechShop.

Former Nabisco plant holds key to innovation

By Julian Routh

Jennifer Kwiecien is working diligently at a machine that requires both a steady hand and creative mind.

If it was 1964, she would be using a drill press in an industrial factory to make cookies and snacks for Nabisco.

But a half a century later, she is computing vector numbers into a laser cutter, which stamps an intricate design onto a glass cup.

"I'm 57 years old. I spent the last 35 years working: 15 in analytical chemistry and 20 in IT," she says with a smile. "I'm tired of working. I want to learn the stuff I never had time to learn."

Kwiecien, of Carnegie, isn't a factory worker, but a member at TechShop Pittsburgh, a community-based technology workshop in Bakery Square.

On the outskirts of East Liberty, Bakery Square has evolved from a gritty Nabisco factory to a hub of technological and cultural innovation in just five years, doing so through the undeterred will of a real estate company and its tenants, including one of the most influential corporations in the world.

Built in 1918, the Nabisco plant occupied the space for nearly 80 years before closing in 1998 as part of a "broad restructuring program designed to cut costs and increase spending on advertising," according to a 1998 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article.

A year later, the plant was turned over by the Regional Industrial Development Corporation to the Bake-Line Group, which had to sell the property in early 2004 after declaring bankruptcy.

That made way for Walnut Capital, a Pittsburgh real estate development company that was in need of a shift in focus. The group wanted to put more money into the East Side and less into Downtown, Walnut principal and CEO Gregg Perelman remembers. With Bakery Square, the opportunity was there.

"We wanted to have an opportunity to do a lifestyle center that had office, retail and housing,"

Perelman says. "And we wanted to be able to take an old facility and bring life back into it. To be honest, it all started with the revitalization of East Liberty."

If it were a few years earlier, Walnut may have been hesitant to build in East Liberty, but a wave of retail openings less than one mile from the site in the early 2000's made the neighborhood more appealing to developers and consumers. With the addition of Home Depot in 2000 and Whole Foods in 2002, East Liberty and the East End were finally coming together after a decade of near collapse.

After purchasing the property for $5.4 million, Walnut began construction in 2007 with a single vision: "Build it right and they will come."

"That's really what drove this development," Walnut president Todd Reidbord recalled at a press conference for new construction in April 2014. "Building it right meant carefully putting the pieces of a quality-of-life mixed-use development together. That included building innovative urban office space with an industrial feel."

Walnut was right; they did come. Several high-tech companies flocked to the new development, including the UPMC Technology Development Center, Carnegie Mellon University Software Engineering Institute and Google, which formerly housed its offices in a much smaller space at CMU.

"[Google] wanted to be in a cool space close to Pittsburgh's universities," Perelman says. "A lot of the times, universities don't have room on campus to house some of these companies."

PHOTO BY JULIAN ROUTH
Jennifer Kwiecien holds a glass cup she created at TechShop Pittsburgh in Bakery Square.

The proximity to university labs, especially those at CMU and the University of Pittsburgh, created a culture of innovation at Bakery Square, Perelman says. This was during the same time that Pittsburgh was experiencing a cultural renaissance of its own, evolving from an industrial steel town with smokestacks and smelters to a technological hub with esteemed engineering talent.

Google noticed so much potential in Pittsburgh and Bakery Square that it nearly tripled its occupancy to 115,000 square feet in 2011, a year after opening its doors.

To give Bakery Square more of a campus feel for Google workers and other employees, Walnut launched Bakery Square 2.0, a project that features 400,000 square feet of new office space, more than 90 townhomes and 450 apartments across from Penn Avenue on the site of the former Reizenstein Middle School. Officials broke ground in April and are almost finished with construction.

"Bakery Square 2.0 gives our tenants a home neighborhood to do everything in," Perelman says.

But Bakery Square isn't only for Google workers and cutting-edge engineers. It's also for people like Kwiecien who are looking for new things to experience in Pittsburgh, and new places to shop and eat.

For the shopping fanatic, there's Anthropologie – a women's apparel and accessory shop – and Learning Express Toys – a specialty toy store. For the hungry, there's Social, a hip restaurant and bar that has as many beer specials as it has menu items.

And of course there's TechShop Pittsburgh, where Kwiecien can learn what laser cutting is and how to operate a $250,000 Waterjet.

"It's about time I pursue my creative endeavors," Kwiecien says, lifting up her glass cup with pride.

From TechShop to Google, creativity is encouraged at Bakery Square. Now that the crumbs of Nabisco crackers have long blown away, the small square in East Liberty is poised to create big things.

Man with a Camera: Chris Ivey's East Liberty

By Jessica Nath

PHOTO BY JESSICA NATH

Filmmaker and resident Chris Ivey poses for a photo in East Liberty. Ivey started documenting the changes happening in the neighborhood in 2005 after the demolition of the East Mall high rise.

There's two sides to every story, and East Liberty is no exception.

Chris Ivey walked into the neighborhood on May 6, 2005, camera in hand, to cover the East Mall high-rise's transition from public housing to public "art." He was hired by a redevelopment company to document the changes happening in East Liberty, and what he saw that day was unforgettable.

City of Pittsburgh officials had decided to tear down what the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* called East Liberty's "Berlin Wall" but wanted a celebratory farewell, so they put together an event in which people used slingshots to hurl paint-filled balloons at the high-rise.

But the high-rise was not a canvas; it was a home, and what the officials called "art," the residents called disrespect.

"I guess the way they were doing the celebration was very offensive to a lot of people who were living there at the time," Ivey says.

Thistle Elias, a public health professor at the University of Pittsburgh and resident of East Liberty, agrees. She says she saw what she called a "solicitation" in the newspaper asking for ideas of how to turn the demolition into a celebration.

"What struck me when I saw that was a sense that I was very sure that not everybody was celebrating," Elias says. "And there was something very well intended and casual and cavalier, and I felt very naïve about that solicitation."

But Ivey didn't feel naïve that day shooting the "celebration." He felt the same emotion he had for years – the same emotion the residents felt while watching people splatter their home with paint – anger.

And that's when Ivey's short assignment turned into years of documenting East Liberty, its residents and the changes that loomed over all of them with the arrival of development.

Ivey grew up in the North Carolina town where "ultra conservative" Jesse Helms came from.

"Where I grew up, Klan activity was really out in the open," Ivey says. "You'd have the Klans outside of the K-Mart trying to sell their newspapers and stuff."

After a stint at community college in North Carolina, Ivey enrolled in Pittsburgh Filmmakers and worked as a commercial director in the early 2000s. But he says he found this line of work unstable.

"At that time, I was like the youngest director at that level, I guess people weren't used to working with someone who is young," Ivey says.

Ivey says his friend in the advertising business described Pittsburgh as "a city in transition" – but Ivey wasn't willing to wait for the city to change, and he almost left.

But then-councilman, now-mayor Bill Peduto hired Ivey to work on the commercials for his

2005 mayoral campaign, keeping the director in the city.

As Ivey's first documentary began to take shape, the filmmaker immediately ran into a roadblock – few people wanted to speak with him.

"At first people are really apprehensive about talking to the media, especially in that neighborhood," Ivey says. "Because whenever you see East Liberty on the news all the time, it's always in regards to somebody getting shot, somebody O.D.-ing, you know, it was always negative."

But a previous client of Ivey's says he wanted to help with the documentary as soon as the filmmaker brought it up to him.

"Come on, press 'record,'" Justin Strong says, recalling his reaction. "There's East Libertys in Harlem ... in Detroit ... in D.C., in the Bay area. The story's played out over and over again, and the neighborhoods for the most part all look the same."

Strong was the founder and owner of Shadow Lounge, a popular venue in East Liberty – one in which rappers Mac Miller and Wiz Khalifa played some of their first sets. He later set out to create AVA, a bar and lounge, also located in East Liberty.

Ivey helped create the venue's first commercial, and Strong wanted to help create the documentary.

"What happened between 2000 and 2013 in East Liberty was pretty magical with Shadow Lounge and AVA," Strong says. "And Ivey was able to document and tie a lot of that into the changes that happened."

But the Shadow Lounge and AVA went from defying the odds to becoming victims of gentrification, and Ivey's three films – spanning 2005 to the present – captured their rise and fall.

"He actually got to witness me typing my email announcing the closing of AVA and the moving of AVA," Strong says.

Strong shut down Shadow Lounge in 2013, and AVA moved and then closed soon after – just two examples of the sacrifices made for progress, and all of which were captured by Ivey's camera.

Ivey's camera has captured the changing landscape of East Liberty, the pile up of issues heaped on its residents and the building of tension. His documentaries follow storylines filled with people losing their homes and their businesses, all leading to, well, *nothing*.

"One of the things that I've heard from a lot of my students after [watching] his films is that they're really grateful to the additional exposure to perspectives that they've never even considered," Elias says. "But they're also frustrated because they don't know what to do – they don't know how to make things different."

That's because Ivey's films haven't reached a climactic moment yet – there is no epiphany about how to solve all the issues he presents to his audience. Instead, the viewer is left with a cliffhanger.

"A lot of people look at me for answers to a lot of the things that happened," Ivey says. "And I don't have the answers, and I feel like I'm not supposed to have the answers – the community is supposed to come together to find the answers."

"A lot of people look at me for answers to a lot of the things that happened ... the community is supposed to come together to find the answers."

Ivey's intention was never to provide solutions, but rather to show the problems in a realistic way. That's why his first film lacked an abundance of B-roll and "beauty shots," something he says offended some residents.

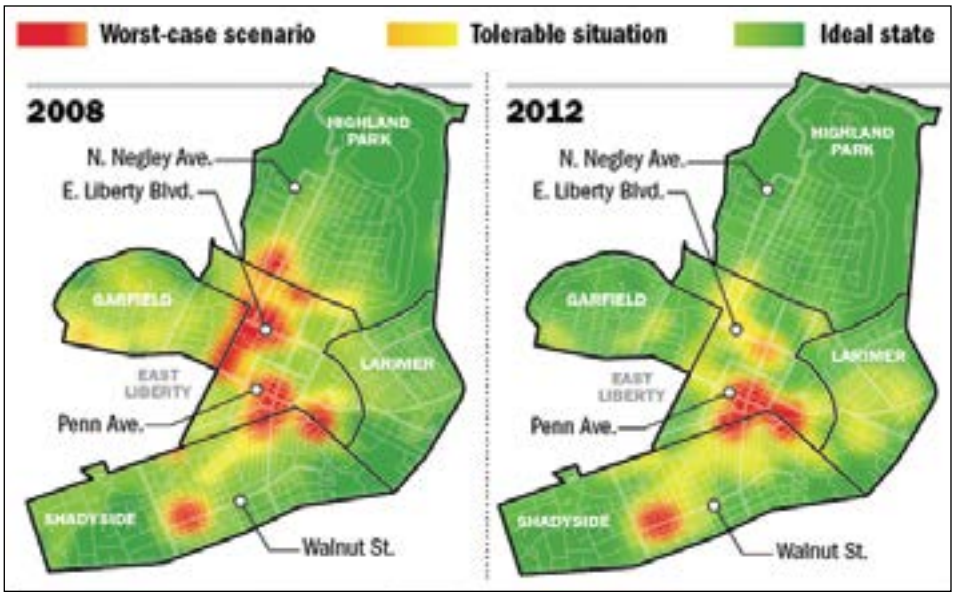
"I try to tell them, the story that we're trying to tell right now – it doesn't deserve beauty," Ivey says.

Ivey is often left with the same frustrated feeling his audience experiences. However, his films have opened up conversations within the neighborhood of East Liberty and also within the outside population.

"It's really important for the next generation who has to go over this all over again," Ivey says. "So it's more for history's sake."

East Liberty battles crime, negative spotlight

By Julian Routh



GRAPHIC BY PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

These maps, based on data from East Liberty Development, Inc., show the changing levels of crime in East Liberty from 2008 to 2012. In that period, crime declined in most parts of the neighborhood.

In the 1990s, every crime in the city of Pittsburgh happened in East Liberty.

At least that's what some people believed; and it was hard not to, especially when they would frequently hear television anchors read the grizzly details of violent crimes before signing off with, "Reporting live from East Liberty."

But that was only because the live reports were coming from outside of the city's Investigations Bureau and Zone 5 police station, which were both housed in the neighborhood.

"We had to call stations and tell them to not say, 'Live from East Liberty,' every time there was a rape in Pittsburgh," says Lori Moran, board president of the East Liberty Chamber of Commerce.

The community's attempts in ridding the news of the signoff represented the first of many battles to change the stigma of East Liberty; a stigma that has plagued community organizations and developers in their attempts to revitalize a once-booming area. Over the past decade, these organizations and developers, in collaboration with Zone 5 police, have worked tirelessly to change the perception, and the results have shown.

The perception of violence in East Liberty was at its worst in the late 1990s, even though the crime rate wasn't alarming. In 1999, there were 911 Part I crimes – including robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, murder, rape and larceny – in East Liberty.

According to a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* story in May 2000, criminology experts at the time believed a neighborhood would be considered a problem area if more than 6 percent of the city's total crime happened there. Crime in East Liberty amounted to approximately 4 percent.

But that didn't mean there weren't problems.

In the early 2000s, gang warfare was prominent in the neighborhood, according to former ELCOC director Paul Brecht.

"About ten years ago, you couldn't wear gang colors or things of that nature in certain areas," Brecht says. "East Liberty was safe, but only if you didn't wear those colors."

At the time, crime and gang activity were mostly concentrated in "hot spots," most of which were abandoned properties or slumlord, according to a 2013 crime data analysis report.

Many of the crimes occurred in high-rise public housing units, which were built in the 1950s and 60s to lure residents away from the suburbs.

"The high-rises, they were a war zone," Moran says. "When you have a 30-story apartment building of all low income people, after a while, if it's not managed properly, it goes downhill."

Down the hill the complexes went, and with them went the feeling of safety in East Liberty. The perception of danger in the slums masked the moderate crime rate, prompting the community to act.

The first action was taken by

East Liberty Development Inc., the largest development corporation in the city. The ELDI purchased more than 200 "hot spot" units and assigned new property managers to regulate conduct.

Community organizations also moved forward with plans outlined in a 1999 restoration report called A Vision for East Liberty, which called for traffic studies, tree plantings, bicycle plans and land use plans. It also proposed that East Liberty phase out the aging storefronts and bring in new tenants to attract shoppers.

"As you put good tenants in, the hoodlums standing out front aren't comfortable anymore," Moran says. "When you fix it up, keep it clean, put a trash can out there, they don't want to hang out in your alcove anymore. As we replace these nasty storefronts with newly decorated, well-lit storefronts, and we start filling them, the hoodlums go away."

When retail giants Home Depot and Whole Foods opened along North Highland and Centre avenues in the early 2000s, they paved the way for other developers to confidently invest in East Liberty. The influx of commercial development positively impacted the crime rate, Zone 5 Commander Timothy O'Connor says.

"We're trending down in crime in East Liberty," O'Connor says, "and that decline is due to the effort to revitalize the neighborhood. You no longer have abandoned buildings, properties or an absence of vitality."

Crime in East Liberty is steadily declining. From 1999 to 2008, there was a 46 percent drop in the total number of crimes committed in the neighborhood. Since 2010, total Part 1 offenses are down more than 17 percent, and the neighborhood actually has a lower number of crimes than Shadyside, which isn't perceived as a high-crime area.

It's still not entirely safe to walk outside in East Liberty at night, O'Connor says, especially after a disturbing murder on Chislett Street in early 2014. On Feb. 7, sisters Susan and Sarah Wolfe were found dead in their home. They were shot in the head.

But that shouldn't stop residents from feeling "relatively safe" in their neighborhood.

"Even though crime is trending down, there's always the potential," O'Connor says. "We still do have some street crimes, particularly cars being broken into overnight and some people who are robbed on the street later in the evening. It would be best to walk in a group and use vehicle transportation if possible."

Looking to the future, Moran says her organization is working with the community to develop a comprehensive system of surveillance cameras around crime-ridden areas in East Liberty. Also in the works is a strip of decorative lighting along Highland Avenue into Shadyside, funded by a $420,000 grant from the city.

The cameras and lights will symbolize yet another step forward in the war against a stigma of violence.

"It's been a long road," Moran says. "But it's really coming along. We want this to be a community for everyone."

PHOTO BY JULIAN ROUTH

This house, on the 700-block of Chislett Street in East Liberty, was the sight of the grisly murders of sisters Susan and Sarah Wolfe in early 2014. Allen Wade, 44, was charged with two counts of homicide in relation to their deaths. His trial was postponed in Nov. 2014, and still hasn't been rescheduled.

LGBTQ ministry preaches inclusivity, progress

COURTESY PHOTO

The LGBTQ ministry of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church marches in the 2014 Pittsburgh PrideFest.

By Kelsie Bianco

About a decade ago, Wil Forrest strode through the corridors of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church and settled into a pew. On his left sat a homeless man. On his right, a man in a dress.

Forrest, founder of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning ministry at the church, says that experience encapsulates the heart and soul of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church. With the addition of the LGBTQ ministry, the church has demonstrated its commitment to worship and prayer in ways that go beyond boundaries of race, class, ability, culture, age, gender and sexual identity.

Forrest, 43, started the LGBTQ ministry in 2013 because of the church's inclusivity, and because he had a desire to be a catalyst for change.

The ministry grew out of an already existing belief structure and practice.

"East Liberty Presbyterian is mid-hurdle over this issue and our community is one that wants to embrace God's love," Forrest says. "We believe that God's love is for everyone."

The ministry strives to spread awareness, and help members of the LGBTQ community in their struggle to be open with God.

"There have been generations of LGBTQ folks who have been told that they are awful and abominations, and just because we wave the wand and say, 'Oh, now we love you,' they're not going to be coming and knocking on our door," Forrest says.

Eric Rhodes, a member of the LGBTQ ministry, believes his spirituality helps him cope with challenges and sadness that he has faced throughout the years, rejection being the most difficult to endure.

"It is crucial that faith communities welcome and affirm people from every background," Rhodes says, a gleam of hope in his eyes. "Faith communities benefit from diversity and grow because of inclusion."

The stories told during the meeting are "the life blood of what pulls this group together." Forrest says.

"Some stories are heart-wrenching and some are hilarious, but they are what allow us to understand and grow with one another," he says.

Forrest's office, on the second floor of the church, is lined with pictures, gay pride flags and stickers, all exemplifying his passion for his community.

As he looks at the LGBTQ memorabilia on his bulletin board, he reflects on moments that have made the organization what it is today. From National Coming Out Day, to attending the Renaissance City Choirs, exposure has been key.

"I think the events are more for the people who are watching us to remind them that not every church is against us," Forrest says.

For Forrest, there are two defining facets that make this ministry effective and special, the first of which is the visibility of the group in the church.

"The other piece is what happens at the meetings," Forrest says. "That's the other win for me. I just feel really good each Saturday we meet."


CULTURE

Photo By Aaron Warnick

The Last Billboard project sits a top the former Walffle Shop in East Liberty. The project was created by artist and CMU professor Jon Rubin.

The Last Billboard: Expression on display

By Julie Pawlikowski

Steel frames. Hand-crafted letters. A 36-foot-long board. A spark of artistic expression. All of these things seem to float in the sky above the Livermore building in East Liberty. They come together to form a unique billboard that stretches beyond its function of advertisement. No companies are trying to catch the attention of consumers, no events are being promoted and no business's slogan is displayed for all to see.

Instead, messages, ideas and questions are displayed.

Some are funny: *intellect versus emotion / intellect wins / emotion starts crying*

Some are a mystery: *? / (323) 541 6361*

Another is touching: *the person standing / beside you, point at this / billboard, has brought you / here because it was too hard / to say "I am sorry" out loud.*

One is from an 11 year old girl: *questions for my new blog: / who invented tape, / how were feelings discovered, / when did "skinny" become / fashionable.*

Some are just a list: *photo / food / beauty / liquor / rx.*

Others make you think: *i wonder some days / if facebook isn't a broad / all encompassing / cry for help.*

The man behind the Last Billboard is Jon Rubin, an artist and professor in the art school at Carnegie Mellon University. What brought him to East Liberty was the desire for his students to create outside of the classroom. This desire led Rubin to create the Storefront Project. It was a class in which Rubin rented a storefront in a neighborhood where he and his students could create culture based on what was already present there.

"When I was looking for a storefront, I actually was driving around East Liberty and that space had been empty for three years, right on the corner," Rubin says. "And it was a really interesting area, it was next to the Shadow Lounge and the Ava Lounge which are very dynamic spaces, especially late at night, and I just felt like it already had a kind of a constituted community that assembled around there and that if we were on that corner we could … figure out a way of working with that community."

Thus the Waffle Shop was born. Located at South Highland and Baum, the Waffle Shop was a place

where people could eat and participate in a live talk show produced by Rubin and his students.

"Many customers who walked in could be a guest on the show and the restaurant was a way of coaxing in kind of a diverse set of the public and involving them in what was like a bizarre stream of consciousness talk show," Rubin says.

The advertising company that sponsored the billboard above the Waffle Shop building "had pulled out from the ad space up there and what was left was just a steel scaffolding," he says. "And I just thought, it seemed like a really great potential space to do something on." Together with friend and architect Pablo Garcia, he worked "to design a structure, a handmade letter system that could be put up on the billboard and changed, in a very clunky old fashioned model," the artist explains.

The billboard quickly became a thought bubble, featuring noteworthy quotes from the customers above the shop. It evolved into its own autonomous place when the Waffle Shop closed in 2012. Rubin used the funds from the Waffle Shop to help keep the billboard running. When the shop closed, he renamed it "The Last Billboard Project" and paid out of pocket until he received a grant from The Rita McGinley Fund, which is administered through the Pittsburgh Foundation.

And so the conversation continues. Now artists and everyday people from around the country can send their material to Rubin to be hung in the sky. Their words become something the people of East Liberty can look forward to and interpret in their own way. This interpretation is what first appealed to Rubin when he started the billboard: "I think of this space as just kind of a publishing space, a sort of curated exhibitionist publishing space in East Liberty for writers and artists and people who I think just have interesting things to say," he says.

With the billboard, Rubin can give life to the words of anyone who has a unique and interesting thought. Artist Matt Shain's work was displayed on the Last Billboard from January to March 2014. The complex functions and dynamics of billboards, along with an admiration for Rubin's work, attracted Shain to the project.

"the person standing / beside you, point at this / billboard, has brought you / here because it was too hard / to say 'I am sorry' out loud"

"It is strange and captivating how something so large as a billboard can be so easily ignored, but as soon as someone displays an unconventional message on one, it stands out and demands attention, which, ironically, is exactly what a billboard is supposed to do," Shain says.

photo / food / beauty / liquor / rx were the words Shain chose to display on the billboard. "I had always thought there was something kind of dumb and funny about those words that are displayed on the outsides of Walgreens/CVS/Rite-Aid type drug stores. As if those five things are all one really needs to get by, bare essentials," he explains.

Another group of artists who have had their work displayed on the billboard are Benjamin Kinsley, Jessica Langley and Jerstin Crosby. They created the Janks Archive, a collaborative project in which they investigate and collect insult humor, known as 'jank' to Alabama-native Crosby. Kinsley, Langley and Crosby all taught as adjunct professors in the art school at Carnegie Mellon University. There, they met Rubin and collaborated on projects together.

"We had been following the Last Billboard project, and we really love it, so when we were invited for the Pittsburgh Biennial we contacted Jon to see if we might be able to feature text from the Janks Archive during the month of September," Kinsley says. They chose the following insult/compliment from Belfast, Northern Ireland that reads: you're so ugly that / you should be in a / museum of modern art.

Without the billboard, there wouldn't be a way for artists and everyday people to share their thoughts, questions and art in the sky. Without their words, the people of East Liberty and Pittsburgh wouldn't be able to ponder the mysterious phrases and statements. But ultimately, without Jon Rubin, there would be no billboard, no art, and no magic. But as Rubin says, "It's not my words. They really are the words of other folks."

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

An artist at the Spinning Plate Artist Lofts prepares for a new exhibit. In addition to housing 37 apartments, the building has a first floor gallery.

Spinning Plate offers home, canvas for artists

By Zach Brendza

Spinning Plate Artist Lofts is a complex with apartments, but it's not an apartment complex. It's like saying Woodstock was a musical festival. Describing either with such conventional phrases cheapens their essence — they're worth more than that.

5720 Friendship Ave. has two doorways, one on Friendship that connects to the foyer, one on Baum Boulevard that transports you from gridlock to gallery. You can choose to exit or enter the 55,000 square foot former Chrysler dealership, but the majority frequently choose the latter. And seldom the former.

The wait list for Spinning Plate is six to eight months, although a resident can leave the complex with 30 days' notice — but that doesn't happen much. Once a person turns into a tenant, they don't leave, says property manager Jennifer DeCerb. The facility is comprised of 37 apartments. Like those who inhabit the living work spaces, each unit is unique, according to DeCerb, ranging from a one room 600 or 700 square foot studio to a 2,000 square foot three bedroom spread through three floors.

The complex is devised between three floors, the first floor sharing purpose between displaying work of non-residents and residents in the gallery and living quarters for those that do reside there. But while they each have their own looks and quirks, each floor is an extension of the first floor showroom, decorated with paintings, sculptures and the like.

The target tenant demographic are those with low income, with an "artist preference."

DeCerb says 95 to 99 percent of the occupants are from the art world. The artists' residence was started with a commitment to provide housing and workspace for artists in Pittsburgh and was "one of the first projects in the city that specifically targeted artists,"

according to Linda Metropolis, one of Spinning Plate's founders. Developed with low income housing tax credit, the facility is obligated to keep below 60 percent of the median area income.

"Right now, if [one person] moved in and made 27 or 28 thousand, they would make too much to qualify. People's income can move up when they live in, but must be considered low income when moving in," Metropolis says.

That program that keeps Spinning Plate's rent at a low rate is one of its largest assets. It keeps 16-year resident Richard Claraval around. The artist thinks his neighbors feels the same, as well.

"If we lost that, I would say almost all the residents would be gone. Our rent would go up three times, at least," Claraval said. "We have a great situation here."

Claraval was the first resident to sign up for Spinning Plate when it opened back in 1998. He had the lay of the loft: whatever one bedroom was to his liking. He settled on Apt. 208, a 24 x 20 space with 14-foot ceilings, five huge windows, a large studio and an L-shaped entryway. In his space, he creates sculptures, charcoal drawings and an array of paintings. A brief tour of the building will introduce you to Claraval, not by a formal meeting but his work which decorates much of Spinning Plate's quarter's, from his "The Prison of My Youth" sculpture in the foyer, to his wall-sized paintings on the second floor.

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

The Spinning Plate Artist Lofts reside on Friendship Avenue in East Liberty. The building houses 37 work spaces that double as apartments, in addition to a first floor gallery that showcases art.

But one of the biggest amenities for him isn't in his own personal space, it's the gallery. Claraval has been manager of Spinning Plate's galley and has at least one solo and one group show of his own in the space. When his art isn't center stage, someone else's is the focus.

"[The] gallery is becoming a pretty well-known spot" in Pittsburgh for art, Claraval says, having an exhibition booked every month, year-round. It's something that he and co-manager and resident Donnie Polmeroy work hard to keep running.

The hard work of many keeps the loft running and got it started. What was a $5 million project in the late '90s would be somewhere around $12 million today, according to Metropolis. The building wasn't expensive and no one wanted to be in East Liberty at the time, she said. When Whole Foods came to the neighborhood, they saw what Spinning Plate was doing. They took it as "a positive sign" that artists were in the neighborhood.

"Artists usually are recognized as being the first risk takers," Metropolis says. "If you find artists in the community, you can assume a positive future that's coming for that community."

As the artist loft continues to grow up, turning 17 later this year, the main goal for Spinning Plate is to continue its mission of providing a haven for those creating art in whatever way that might be.

"[We're going to] keep it operating and full," Metropolis says. "[We're] going to continue do exactly what we're doing."

Taizé service pushes boundaries of worship

By Jen Cardone

Silence.

It is so quiet that any slight movement, or even a cough, could easily interrupt worshipers as they meditate. A woman adjusts her scarf when it comes undone and her shuffling movement interrupts the silence like a clap of thunder. A man slightly twists his back and the wooden bench supporting him makes a loud crack that echoes throughout the chapel.

East Liberty Presbyterian Church has a one-hour Taizé prayer service every Wednesday at 7 p.m. The Taizé worship invites people of any denomination to gather in a close-knit community to develop spiritually through meditative prayer and sacred silence.

The atmosphere is quaint and introspective. The front of the chapel is decorated in six reddish amber curtains that form a point at the top and drape out and down to brush the floor. Two lone chairs sit off on the side, waiting for anointers. An icon of Jesus on the cross stands at the center with other religious icons surrounding it in picture frames. Candles dot the sanctuary and illuminate the front of the worship space.

In Taizé practice, icons represent the beauty of worship. They represent windows to see the Kingdom of God and symbolize the incarnation and coming of Christ to the world.

Rachel Luckenbill, who has attended the service for three years on-and-off, says she is overcome with peace when she sees the worship space.

"It facilitates visualizing God and creates immediacy," Luckenbill says. "I feel like I'm in the presence of Christ when I walk in and see the amber fabrics at the front, candles and iconography."

Since last year, the Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan has led the prayer service, which has been a part of the church for more than 20 years.

Callahan was a minister in small churches, but over time, she felt a desire to work with spiritual growth in the ministry. When she was asked to head Taizé after the previous minister retired, she was ecstatic.

"I was thrilled. It's something that I feel very strongly about," Callahan says. "I think it opens people up in a way that traditional worship really doesn't."

Taizé, as a community, was founded in the 1940s in the French village of Taizé as a men's organization and ministry. Brother Roger Schütz developed the style of worship, which includes melodic scripture readings or prayer that are chanted or sung repeatedly.

Schütz, a Swiss native, worked to unify different religions by forming prayer circles during World War II to seek peace.

Prior to his death, Schütz asked Brother Alois Löser to take his position as his health deteriorated. Löser still serves today and leads the community of brothers and worshippers around the world.

> ***"We try to give them some spiritual strength and make them know that God is with them and they can depend on God to help them through this."***

Today, in East Liberty, gospel hymns and chants fill the side chapel, echoing all the way from the cathedral peaks down to the marble floor. The songs fill the space after long silent pauses, which are used as opportunities to reflect.

Taizé music director Jennifer Gorske, who attends weekly, says she believes Taizé meshes with her spirituality and passion for music.

"What drew me in was it is music and spirituality mixed together," Gorske says. "I thought it was

PHOTO BY JEN CARDONE

Icons reside at the front of the Taizé prayer service. They represent the beauty of worship and serve as windows to see into the Kingdom of God.

perfect to practice music therapy."

Callahan says no two Taizé services are identical. Each has about eight different songs and readings spoken in different languages. Although songs are repeated, repetition is intentional because it develops the worship mantra.

"[The songs] become part of how you breathe," Callahan says. "When you've sung them enough times it becomes almost a part of the fiber of who you are and the words just kind of mingle in with the thoughts that are in your head."

Callahan, who recently returned from a trip to Taizé, says East Liberty puts its own stamp on the tradition.

"Ours is different because of the racially mixed congregation of East Liberty," Callahan says. "We often sing songs at the end that are good old-fashioned gospel songs."

Other than singing, some people choose to light candles or kneel on the carpet in front of the icons. Attendees can ask for a blessing or prayer and to be anointed.

Kay Shissler, 53, anoints Taizé worshippers. Her education taught her how to walk beside people during tough times.

"People come up with serious problems and they don't know what to do," Shissler says. "We don't try to solve the problems because we can't do it in five minutes. We try to give them some spiritual strength and make them know that God is with them and they can depend on God to help them through this."

Even though some attend the service consistently, Callahan says it is more common to see young people come on-and-off for several months.

"It is designed to be open to everyone," Callahan says. "No one will ask you why you weren't here."

Luckenbill is one of these occasional attendees. She also works with congregants at Upper Room Presbyterian Church in Squirrel Hill.

"It enriches the experience I have with my own church, and I will use some of the music we sing at Taizé [there]. It helps to create cross-cultural core values," Luckenbill says.

The Taizé service ends as a woman sways in a meditative dance at the front of the chapel. Her arms are spread apart and above her head, allowing the spirit to come to her in her dance. After being anointed, she hums and dances to the melody of "The Lord Is My Light."

Library branch symbolizes community revival

By Joey Sykes

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH
The Labs provide children with an opportunity to learn about art and technology in the Carnegie Library.

The East Liberty branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh has one distinct similarity as the neighborhood it is based in: a promising future.

Located at 130 S. Whitfield Street, the library has undergone a resurgence thanks to its new look, with translucent book shelves and additions like The Labs, an area for children to learn about art and technology from staff mentors.

Caralee Sommerer, the branch's Senior Children's librarian, has seen firsthand the rise of both the library and its neighborhood over the past 14 years.

"This is a great community to work in because we are probably the third or fourth busiest branch and the community is so diverse," Sommerer says. "There are so many different types of people [entering] through the doors.

Founded in 1905, the branch has undergone radical changes in both location and architecture. The original structure for the library was located on Station Street, close to the border of neighboring Larimer, and was around until 1964 before being lost to encroaching urban development.

It didn't take long before the second incarnation of the branch was founded in its current location. In 1968, officials broke ground broke on the library, and since then, it has been on the rise. Recently, from 2009 to 2010, renovations were done that brought a modern look to the library both on the outside and the interior.

Clerical Supervisor Anthony Harty, who has worked at the branch for more than seven years, remembers the renovations as a turning point in the library's history.

"We closed for 14 months back in 2009 and they basically gutted it and built it up from scratch. It's always an adventure, though," Harty says. "I've worked at the main and at some of the smaller libraries, but this one is nice because it's not too busy and it's not too quiet. Being small, it adds character."

"We lost the original building, which is probably a more historic facility," Sommerer adds. "It was closed because development occurred in East Liberty in the '60s, which changed and forced out a lot of people from their homes. This incarnation, however, is special because of the new look. It's kind of a symbol for the neighborhood and what it's becoming."

As the library is helping to get East Liberty back to its feet, the small parts that keep the branch moving can't be forgotten. Frantz believes each branch has done a fine job feeding their patrons the knowledge they crave, but that the East Liberty branch is something unique.

"[The workers are] very friendly, the information is very succinct and they address your particular question very well," Frantz says. "Even through the hardships the neighborhood has been through, they have stuck with it well."

The branch is something more than just a library. To Frantz, it's something special to both the patrons and the neighborhood.

"It's one of their jewels," Frantz says.

Barber shop owner blends customer appreciation with quality service

By Addison Smith

It's a Saturday afternoon and there's not an empty seat in Bat's Barber Shop, not in the waiting room nor in front of a barber. Owner and barber Kevin Andrews, a.k.a. Bat, is singing along to a Rihanna song blasting out of the speakers. Customers see friends outside and wave them in to say hello. Clearly, Bats Barber Shop is a community environment, and Bat is its spokesman.

Not one person walks into the shop that Bat doesn't recognize. He greets everyone who walks in by name and with a smile, no matter who is sitting in the barber chair in front of him. It's something Bat prides in himself and in his staff.

"Being a people person, you knock all the edges off at the door," Bat says. "You come in, you don't smile, we'll mess with you. We'll tell them 'you have to smile when you come in here,' things like that. We break the ice for them. Some people get scared coming in, especially single moms, they get kind of nervous in a shop full of men, but we break the ice with them early so when they come in the door, they feel comfortable. It's just communicating with them."

The shop has been open for 11-plus years in East Liberty with a consistent customer base and friendly barbers ready to cut hair, arch eyebrows or trim facial hair with all services under $20. However, it's not the services at the shop that draw people in, it's the warm sense of community conjured by Bat and his staff.

Inside everything is black and gold, and Bat will claim his blood matches the Pittsburgh-centric theme to anyone who will listen. Some members of the staff don Steelers shirts, Pirates shirts or Penguins shirts, including Bat, who is wearing a customized Steelers shirt with "BATS" embroidered on the front and on the back. He sees a customer wearing a signed shirt and begins to poke and prod her, saying how much he needs it. The customer doesn't back down and shrugs, saying it's hers. It's this type of exchange that is typical to the shop; an environment that is conducive to relaxing and talking.

The barbers all have the same friendly demeanor as their boss. There is

"Being a people person, you knock all the edges off at the door. [If] you don't smile, we'll mess with you. We'll tell them 'you have to smile when you come in."

not a customer who isn't greeted. There's not a goodbye that isn't exchanged. Handshakes and hugs are a common thing here at Bats Barber Shop, and it's because of how Bat picks his staff and expects them to act.

"I'm good with evaluating talent and character," Bat explains. "You have to be of high character to work for me, that's what I like. If you say you're going to do something, I need you to do it. If you say you're going to be somewhere at a certain time, I need you to be there ... I wouldn't tell them to do something I wouldn't do."

Two barbers, Horace Topeck Jr. and Tye Pritchare are taking advantage of a rare lull in customers and are sitting down, playing a game of chess in the back of the shop and bantering over what they enjoy about working at Bats Barber Shop and the shop's contribution to the East Liberty community.

"[Bats Barber Shop] brings a sense of respect where the youth is concerned," Pritchare explains. "The total experience is a respectful experience. The environment is not rowdy or ratchet, it's respectful for the elders and the youth, which I think is important ... That's what makes it so special. It gives everybody opportunity."

While contemplating his next move in the chess game, Topeck quickly looks up and adds, "There's a lot of diversity. It's networking, all different types of people. There's doctors, lawyers. Then you have the regular average person, children. It's a vey diverse environment too."

As Topeck and Pritchare are relaxing in the back, playing chess, Bat is still at work on six-year customer James Goings in the chair in front of him. The 83-year-old walked into the shop with his cane and waited patiently to sit in front of Bat. His gray hair is still on his head and needs to be cut roughly once a month. He and Bat quickly begin a conversation as soon as Goings sits down.

"[Bat] cuts my hair good," Goings says with a quick smile while Bat takes the razor to Goings's head. "He's the owner and he takes care of everything. If children come in, he tells them to sit down. 'Don't mess with the seat' or 'don't put your shoes in the seat'. There's no language. No bad language is being taught. He's good. I like that."

Outside the shop, Rachel Johnson is lounging in a chair, reading a book during her break. There's no music blasting outside, making it more peaceful. To her, Bats Barber Shop is related back to the community, but in a bigger way to shape the children of East Liberty.

"I believe it's everything that you would want a black barber shop to be," Johnson says, looking back at the shop as she speaks. "It has a core group of men that try to influence the young men in the environment. They have chess and debates and they encourage people to carry themselves a certain way. [These children] don't have to be a product of their environment, they don't have to be oppressed, they can come here and be men amongst men."

Photo By Aaron Warnick
Kevin Andrews, known affectionately as Bat, runs a barber shop in East Liberty.

Thomas West: From news briefs to boxer briefs

By Jen Cardone

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

Thomas West, co-owner of Trim Pittsburgh, worked in the television business for 15 years before following his lifelong dream to open his own store. Trim offers 27 different brands of men's underwear.

"I'm still a news junkie, but I just wanted to do something else."

These are the words of an old television producer who decided to follow his lifelong dream and open his own business, which just so happens to be a men's underwear store. Thomas West created his startup from scratch and chose the up-and-coming neighborhood of East Liberty to make it happen.

During his time at Lyndon State College in Vermont, West bounced between majors, but one thing stuck with him: sometimes, the best business people are the ones who don't go to school for business.

West was a television producer for 15 years at stations in Minneapolis, Columbus and Pittsburgh. One day, he simply decided to open his own store. He co-owns Trim Pittsburgh with his partner Adam Childers.

West has always liked underwear. He believes there is a pair for everyone and for everything. The name Trim was derived from a pair he wore one day. The pair had blue trim around the edges. He turned to Childers and said, "Why don't we just call it Trim?"

He smiles. His blue eyes sparkle and bring warmth to the shop while rain pours on the store window. West, now in his thirties, is wearing a burgundy sweater and dark jeans, faded at the thighs.

West says one reason he decided to sell underwear is that men are not typically catered to in this area like women are.

"There's fun underwear out there for guys, and I think part of the learning curve is trying to figure out how to let guys know there's all this underwear out there for them," he says. "It's not in their mind-frame right now."

Trim Pittsburgh offers 27 different brands. West believes it is important to shop locally, and that he provides an experience not offered online.

"You walk into here, you can feel the fabric. You walk into here and you can see things that maybe you wouldn't be able to see online because there are some underwear brands that only sell to boutiques," he says.

He laughs and says people call it a Victoria's Secret for men, but Victoria's Secret is different because it makes its own products.

West drums on the desk with his knuckles as he thinks back to his time in the television business.

"My time in television was fun. It was great. I did a lot of big stories," he says, "but at a certain point ... I wanted to do something else."

He recalls working during Y2K in Minneapolis, when everyone thought their computers would melt and planes would fall from the sky. From Sept. 11, 2001 to

the explosion of the space shuttle Columbia over Texas in 2003, West helped document turning points in history during his producing days.

At his most recent producing job at WTAE, he was in charge of the entire rundown for the evening newscast. He wrote the show like a book and told the reporters, anchors and news team what to do.

He was part of the coverage when three officers were shot in Stanton Heights, when the G-20 summit took over Pittsburgh and when there was a mass shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007.

WTAE anchor Michelle Wright worked with West while he produced the show. She says he was always plugged in to the heartbeat of Pittsburgh.

"He loves keeping up with the current events so any time I need a restaurant recommendation or am curious about a new art show or want to know a cool concert to attend, Tom is the person to ask," Wright says. "When he produced a newscast, he loved informing people of interesting things happening around Pittsburgh. It's so exciting that now he's actually a part of making things happen."

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

Trim Pittsburgh, on Baum Boulevard, offers men several types of "fun underwear," according to West.

Partner Childers calls West a man of multiple layers.

"You have the serious Tom side, you have the energetic Tom side, you have the family guy Tom side with his nephews and you have the business Tom side," Childers says. "You're lucky if you get to see him at all of them, which I am lucky enough to see."

"My time in television was fun. It was great. I did a lot of big stories, but at a certain point ... I wanted to do something else."

Childers said the day the store opened, it hosted two bachelorette parties. West dealt with tipsy girls while Childers waited on customers who weren't there to party. Because of West's experience in the television industry, he was able to multitask and deal with every customer at once.

West's childhood was one in the footsteps of a preacher's kid. He had to exemplify perfection because he was always under constant scrutiny. His father told him to watch his p's and q's, and it taught him self-discipline.

One of his role models is Rick Werner, the owner of Stone Pizzeria. West appreciates people who take a chance on their dreams because they inspire him to follow his desires. He often asks Werner for advice because he, too, started his own business.

"You find the best advice from the most unexpected people. I feel like you always meet someone for a reason," West says.

Theater director ushers East Liberty into future

By Talia Kirkland

If it weren't for the electric blue neon sign, it would be entirely possible that someone could amble past the Kelly Strayhorn Theater without a second glance. But that attention-grabbing sign is there and the residence it adorns does deserve a closer look.

Named for East Liberty performing arts great Gene Kelly and Homewood composer Billy Strayhorn, the Kelly Strayhorn Theater aims to preserve and nurture Pittsburgh's cultural excellence.

On the front-line of that charge is Janera Solomon, executive director of the theater. Solomon has made her life's work to reclaim East Liberty's lost culture.

"We still want to be the place that is recognizable as East Liberty. The place that helps reconnect people to the East Liberty of the past and the East Liberty of the future, and what that means, to us, is being a place that reflects the diversity of the community," Solomon says.

On the edge of East Liberty's shopping district, the theater shares the distinct 20th century architecture that characterizes the neighborhood. However, instead of repurposing the aged property for apartments, shops or a restaurant, the Kelly Strayhorn is a reincarnation of the structure's old host, the Regent Theater.

Passing under the building's facade is like passing into another time. The lights and adornments that populate the entry fade the world beyond the nearby sidewalk and bring the Kelly Strayhorn's patrons back several decades. Back to a time when going to theater was something significant to the community and not just a place for two people to spend too much money on popcorn and the fourth installment of a Michael Bay movie franchise.

COURTESY PHOTO
Janera Solomon, executive director of the Kelly Strayhorn Theater, is from South America.

During Solomon's six years with the Kelly Strayhorn Theater the neighborhood of East Liberty has grown and changed. "Keeping up with the times" – as Solomon puts it – is essential to the prosperity of the community. The theater's operating budget has grown from approximately $300,000 to more than $1 million. Roughly 20,000 people attend events there each year. The organization has tripled its programming and now supports a robust co-producing program with an additional venue, Alloy Studios. The organization's activities include rehearsals, community meetings, luncheons, workshops, master classes and family/youth activities.

Sixty percent of the theater's audience and participants are residents of the East End. As executive director, Solomon finds that the mixture of class, educational background, race, sexual orientation and nationality that she observes in her attendees is encouraging. The Kelly Strayhorn Theater is truly a cultural hub.

"We've built our program on the foundation that having art in your life every day is possible, you don't need a special occasion to go to the theater," Solomon explains. The organization strives to be the place in the neighborhood where people want to come to everyday because they feel welcomed.

Moving to the United States from Guyana, South America as a young girl, Solomon would discover her passion for art through the lens of an old camera. For her, art knew no color, class or creed.

Around the age of nine, Solomon began questioning the world around her. She can vividly recall one of her first experiences at a museum in the United States.

"Oh I must have gone on a school field trip, and I can remember staring at the artwork,

PHOTO BY JESSICA NATH

The Kelly Strayhorn Theater, formerly known as the Regent Theatre, has been a staple in the East Liberty community for more than 100 years.

and thinking I don't see any black works of art, or even artwork done by a black artist," she says.

Solomon, who began playing the steel drum when she was big enough to hold a mallet, told her father, a steel drum maker and artist, about her museum experience. "You know what he told me? He told me to make some artwork of my own," Solomon says with a huge grin.

At the time she had never even attempted to draw let alone create what she considered art, but the very next day her father brought home an old camera from the thrift store. It was in that moment that she found her inner passion and, more importantly, her drive. Solomon believes that everyone deserves that moment.

"My parents taught me like Frederick Douglass' famous quote, 'If there is no struggle there is no progress,'" she says.

A mother of four, she credits her thirst for artistic expression to her parents. "They came to the United States with no money, and four young girls," explains Solomon. Being the daughter of immigrants she was taught to never allow obstacles stand in the way of her dreams.

East Liberty faces a number of challenges, but Solomon is confident that despite growing educational and economical gaps, there still remains a sense of hope. "I personally believe that it is when you are at your worst that you need art the most."

Solomon and theater members like Londen Malloy are aware that not everyone is fortunate enough to have their artistic impulses nurtured.

"I get people all the time who can't afford to attend one of our productions, and if they come to us and let us know we are more than willing to give them a ticket, or work something out where they too can participate in our activities," Malloy says.

Malloy and Solomon agree that the Kelly Strayhorn benefits from the rich artistic community in the East End. "We have events going on all the time at both the theater and the Alloy studios. We have an entire showcase dedicated to local artists," Malloy says.

The Kelly Strahorn is also committed to fostering the work of returning artists as they grow.

"What we are doing is making people feel good about themselves — letting them know that they are worth the very best," Solomon says.

Jasiri X: Freeing minds one rhyme at a time

By Robert Loveless

COURTESY PHOTO
Jasiri X performs at the Pittsburgh Steelers's annual charity fundraiser fashion show in 2014.

Emcee and activist Jasiri X says there is almost no support for hip-hop in East Liberty, but that hasn't stopped him from becoming one of the most popular and important rappers in Pittsburgh.

The 32 year-old rapper, who has lived in East Liberty since 2007, produces music that examines social issues, which is especially important in a time when there is growing distrust between police and the black community.

"There's not enough people making music about social justice issues, things that I feel affect people on a day to day basis," Jasiri X says. "I feel like that's where I come in, as an artist that speaks to these issues, around social justice issues like police brutality, mass incarceration, things that are affecting us on a day to day basis."

Jasiri X released his first song in 2007 in response to a 2006 incident in Jena, Louisiana, where six black teenagers were convicted of assaulting a white teen. The song, called "Free the Jena Six," addressed the Jena Six movement that resulted, which believed that the six teenagers were charged excessively for their crimes.

This was when Jasiri X realized that people wanted to hear socially conscious music. To follow up on the success of the song, he released a mixtape titled "I Got That X," and then another single called "Enough's Enough," which shed light on the 2006 shooting of a black man, Sean Bell, and his two friends by New York City police.

"Enough's Enough" was featured on WORLDSTARHIPHOP and led to Jasiri X appearing on BET Rap City. Despite the newfound fame, Jasiri X worried that he wasn't releasing music frequently enough. One of his influences, Crooked I of the hip-hop group Slaughterhouse, was releasing a different freestyle rap every week.

"I said 'Man, that's a great idea. I want to do something like that but I want to do music with a message.' So I said 'You know what? I can rap the news, like every week I can rap the news," Jasiri X remembers.

That's when "This Week with Jasiri X" came to life on YouTube. Each week, the artist produced a two-minute video in which he chose a different topic to rap about, and it certainly wasn't easy. His wife, Celeste, remembers "a lot of sleepless nights."

"It was very, very hectic," Jasiri X recalls. "A lot of times Sunday night I'd be up all night editing the video and then go into work Monday."

In 2010, the rapper released the song, "What If The Tea party Was Black?," which garnered national attention and more than 300,000 views on YouTube.

"That's when I think people started to take me more serious-

ly as an artist," he remembers. "And when I did that song … one of the producers I was working with—his name was Rel!g!on—had this connection to the co-owner of Body Works Entertainment. He hit me up and said, 'Hey, let's do an album.'"

That album, Ascension, was released in March 2013 and shifted away from the rapper's usual socially conscious music. Jasiri X wanted the album to have a theme and focused more on aspiration rather than politics.

"At the time, I just went through a darker time in my personal life, so I started writing my way out of that. Ascension to me represented me coming out of darkness into light," he reveals. "I always say if hip-hop is dead, then where does it go? So we're taking hip hop up spiritually and lyrically."

The activism in his music has caught the eye of several people outside of the hip-hop industry. Norman Conti, a professor at Duquesne University, invited Jasiri X and other artists and activists to perform on campus in October 2014.

Conti says Jasiri X is engaging with the Pittsburgh community and that messages in his music are appealing to young adults.

"It was a chance for our students to see issues of race or justice from a different perspective and it's equally as important to hear it in the music that they're familiar with: modern rap music," Conti says.

Other supporters of Jasiri X and his music include the employees of the Kelly Strayhorn Theater in East Liberty, where Jasiri X performs with his hip-hop group, 1Hood. Jasiri X says the theater is one of the few places left in his neighborhood that supports social justice rap music.

Courtesy Photo

The 32 year-old rapper speaks at a rally for Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York in 2014.

"Outside of the theater, I don't really see any real support happening for hip-hop artists in East Liberty," Jasiri X says. "In fact, quite the opposite."

Jasiri X cited the 2013 closing of The Shadow Lounge, a former bar and music performance space in East Liberty, as the end of support for hip-hop in the area.

"Hip-hop had a home in East Liberty when the Shadow Lounge was here," Jasiri X said. "It was a place where artists could meet, perform and build. Hip-hop was evicted in East Liberty with new developments that do not cater to our demographic."

While it seems like the East Liberty resident has already accomplished much, he doesn't appear to have plans of slowing down anytime soon. Jasiri X is currently working on two projects — a politically focused record titled P.O.W.E.R. (People Oppressed Will Eventually Rise) and another album that is still socially conscious, but also fun.

"If it wasn't for social media, I wouldn't have a career," Jasiri X says. "The cool thing about the internet is, what do you want to learn? It's there. Get involved. Educate yourself about the issues you want to get involved in. This is the time, this is the get off the couch time."

Additional reporting by Julian Routh and Kaye Burnet.

Yates heals East Liberty with unique methods

By Kelsie Bianco

Dana Harris Yates is truly a guru in the art of healing. Dana, 49, owns Cultural Oasis, a shop on Sheridan Square that offers therapies for people with physical ailments including arthritis and multiple sclerosis. The store, which opened seven years ago, is one of the only places in Pittsburgh that uses reflexology, compression therapy and homeopathic treatments.

But people don't just come to the store for treatment; it is also a place to talk, given Dana's motherly nature.

"My shop can often be seen as a meeting place for young and old people throughout the community," she says.

As Dana takes a moment to look around her store, a man enters seeking advice and attention. She looks at him with soulful eyes and says, "What can I do for you, baby?"

Dana proudly scans the shop and tells the stories of unique products that were made by her. "That's what makes me exclusive and sets me apart," Yates says.

Dana, of Native American and African descent, was born and raised in Lincoln, Larimer, Homewood and East Liberty – the neighborhood she now calls home.

With culture written all over her wardrobe, from her bandana to her beaded necklace, Dana radiates heritage and tradition. She explains what her job entails with a serious, yet captivating tone: "From a cultural and ancestral perspective we use nature in a different way than people view nutrition." The treatments focus on nature, where people view what vitamins and minerals do in relationship to the types of food they eat.

COURTESY PHOTO
Dana Harris Yates, owner of Cultural Oasis, was taught the art of natural healing at a young age.

From a young age, Dana was taught the art of healing with fruits and herbs by her grandmother. "When I first realized that people actually went to the doctor, I was about 16 years old," she says. "I mean, that's the way things were with us. I knew how to take care of myself with natural remedies because of my grandmother's teachings."

Madea, Dana's grandmother, taught Dana a lot of what she knows by finding lessons in nature. "She was a wonderful, brilliant, passionate woman who I have always looked up to," Dana remembers.

Dana also recalls growing up in East Liberty. She remembers a close-knit community of churches, playgrounds and "Mom and Pop" stores. A memory of fruit trees resonates in her mind.

"I can remember going from one house to another with the other neighborhood children and picking our fruit off these delicious fruit trees and that's what we ate," she says. With so many resources in East Liberty, Dana felt like she had everything she needed.

Although Dana does believe that a doctor is needed in certain circumstances, she believes natural healing has much to offer.

"Things come full circle. All this information from my culture's perspective that we took for granted is now being used in a purposeful way and being reintroduced to the society at large," Yates says with conviction.

Although "Natritional Healing" is important to her, it isn't the only thing that makes Dana who she is. Aside from being a loving wife, mother of six, having a master's degree in psychology and owning a store, Dana was once a rap artist under the name "Paradise Grey" and, later, "Jene-sis."

"We rapped about meaningful things that we believed in, not that stuff you hear today," she remembers.

Dana has taken several different paths in her life, all of which led her back to her roots at the doorstep of the Cultural Oasis in East Liberty.

HOME

From Montana plains to Penn Avenue: Great Harvest puts fresh bread on table

Photo By Aaron Warnick
Tom Katsafanas owns the Pittsburgh location of Great Harvest Bread Company.

By Julie Pawlikowski

It begins in Montana and ends in Pittsburgh. The wheat is harvested from the flowing plains of Montana where it is ground into fresh flour, shipped across the country to Pittsburgh and then baked into bread at 6401 Penn Avenue in East Liberty.

It is there that the Great Harvest Bread Company proudly stands. Owned by Tom Katsafanas and his wife Erin, it is the only Pittsburgh location of the Dillon, Montana-based Great Harvest Bread Company franchise. According to the company's website, its philosophy is "about customer experience and the promise of phenomenal tasting products made with freshly-milled whole grain and pure and simple ingredients." And that's just what you'll find when you enter the bakery.

There is a sense of wellness in the air that can be felt from your first step inside the building. Familiar tunes mix with catchy alternative music, and hanging spherical lights give the shop a sophisticated feel. The walls are complimentary shades of purple and green and artwork produced by young children and professional artists adorn them. The nose is confused—but in a good way. It can't tell if the aroma wafting from the kitchen is sweet like cinnamon or tart like yeast. In the end, the nose just knows that something smells good. Though the space may seem small, it is designed cleverly: a low wall separates the ordering area from the sitting space and patrons can either sit at it or at the tables along the big windows.

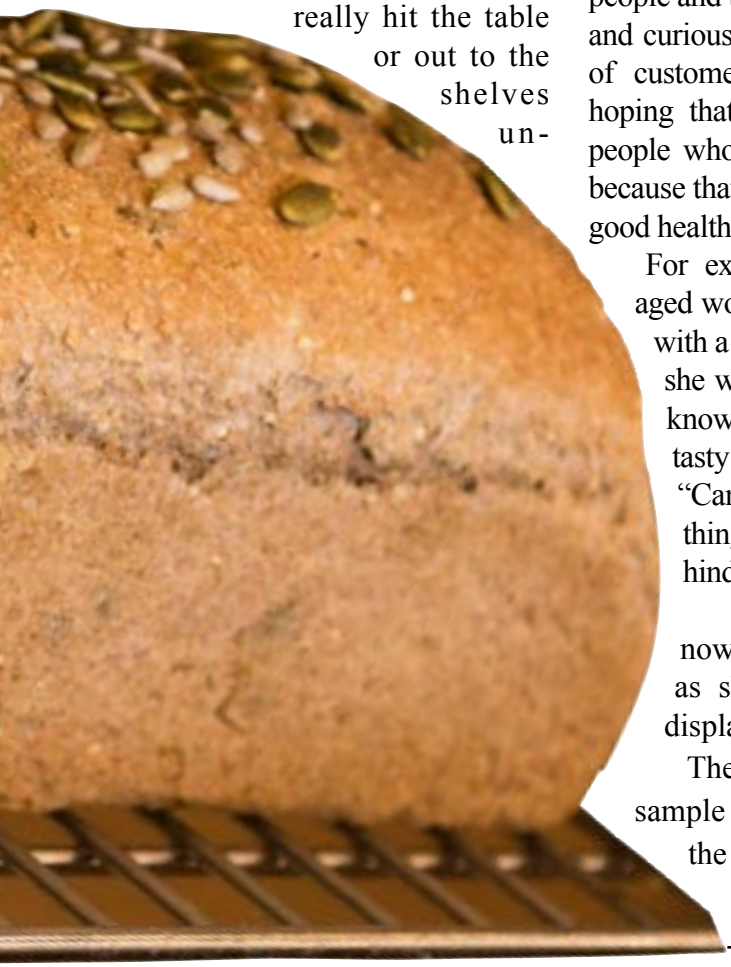
As you approach the counter to read the menu, you might be able to catch a glimpse of the man behind the operation, Tom Katsafanas, as he bakes or works in his office. Tom grew up in East Liberty before moving to New England where he worked for an ad agency. After looking at buildings in Mount Lebanon, Squirrel Hill and Lawrenceville, Tom settled on East Liberty as the site for his store. His decision was based on East Liberty's redevelopment, its growth and its energy: "The changes that are occurring in this market with the growth potential, with the opening of the East Liberty streets, it just looked like a win-win for anybody who wants to establish a business here," he says.

Many factors drew him to the Great Harvest Bread Company. "I actually like the concept of the franchise. It's a freedom franchise. You can kind of do whatever you want to do with your operation; you're not restricted in any way." For example, some franchises require stores to look and run the same so that you could be in any city in the U.S. With the Great Harvest franchise, however, Tom has the ability to style the store

to his taste and sell products he's proud of.

The health consciousness of Great Harvest and its attention to real foods also influenced Tom and Erin to buy the franchise. According to their website, greatharvestpittsburgh.com, Tom and Erin "decided that we should share the Great Harvest experience with Pittsburgh, an awesome city with a growing food scene and a focus on fresh, locally made food." While living in Manchester, CT, they bought bread from Great Harvest and when they learned that it was a franchise, they thought, "Why not? Let's buy a franchise," says Tom.

"From start to finish, it's about a five-hour process," says Tom about making the bread. "We start around a quarter to five in the morning and the bread doesn't really hit the table or out to the shelves until 10, 10:30." The long process to ensure the quality of the bread doesn't stop at the end of the day: "We donate all our product that we have left over to a variety of different charities, church groups and so forth," says Tom. "We find that giving back to the community helps a lot."



East Liberty's community is a varied one. According to Tom, his customers are a mix of health conscious people and those who are just hungry and curious. "We get a wide variety of customers," Tom says. "We're hoping that we do attract a lot of people who do want to eat healthy because that's what our focus is on, a good healthy all-natural food."

For example, when a middle-aged woman walks into the store with a puzzled look on her face, she walks away with a greater knowledge about bread and a tasty sample.

"Can I help you with anything?" asks the worker behind the cash register.

"I'm just looking, for now," mumbles the woman as she eyes the menu and display shelves.

The worker offers her a free sample and after going through the list of different breads, the woman selects the Dakota — a honey wheat dough mixed with sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and sesame seeds. The woman leaves the shop, munching on the bread slice and carrying a menu in her hand.

Tom hopes to reach more of these people by meeting with the East Liberty co-op where he will do a couple of slicing events. Another marketing move Tom made was dropping a basket of bread samples off at the Belmont Market where Tom hopes to someday sell bread at.

"I actually enjoy the whole process of running my own business and making a product that I'm proud to serve to people. I really enjoy that, I think it's fun," Tom says. His products are what give the Great Harvest Bread Company in East Liberty its appeal and character. If the store could be personified, it'd be a combination of that super health nut friend you had in college that always pushed you to exercise more and eat right and your grandmother whose recipes and meals made your mouth water just thinking about them. It's a place any person, regardless of age or gender, can go to get a reasonably priced and wholesome meal.

Photo By Fred Blauth

At 130 South Highland Avenue in East Liberty, Casa Rasta combines the many flavors of Mexican and Caribbean cuisine in a uniquely rich environment.

Casta Rasta serves a taste of funky fusion

By Robert Loveless

Enter Casa Rasta and you immediately notice the cozy lighting and bright red walls with palm tree siding. The walls are lined with potted palm trees and Mexican/Caribbean trinkets. Green, red and yellow fluorescent bulbs light up various portions of the restaurant and the music toggles between reggae and Latin. Sahaar Turner, the friendly hostess, stands behind the desk in the back with a wide and welcoming smile. Sit wherever you'd like.

Casa Rasta gives off a warm, tropical vibe that greatly contrasts with the brisk winter weather outside. A man with waist-length dreadlocks tied back with a navy, skull-decorated bandana walks out of the kitchen.

"Hello, Chad," he says to a patron and waves, revealing a black tattoo that peeks out from beneath the cuff of his green sleeve and extends down his forearm. This is Antonio Fraga, the chef and owner of the Mexican/Caribbean fusion restaurant.

Fraga opened Casa Rasta on a whim.

"I had always had the ambition for many years to open my own space so I can do my own cooking," he explains. "Working for other people is a service. You cannot do what you like to do. So one day, I don't know if I was tired or if I was prepared for it, but the anxiety just took over and I was like, 'Okay, I'm gonna do it.'"

Fraga opened his first Casa Rasta location three years ago in Beechview and expanded to East Liberty in September. However, his journey to becoming a restaurant owner was not as simple as enrolling in culinary school.

Born and raised in Mexico City, Fraga enjoyed his mother's traditional Mexican cooking as well as various foods from the northern and southern regions. By age 14, he was supporting himself and moved to Bela Cruz on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico to pursue an education—to

become a doctor.

"It was very hard. I've been on my own since I was 14. I didn't have the economical support to actually keep going with my studies," he recalls. "So the cooking has been a survival thing for me. See I needed to cook my own meals. It's what kind of pushed me to getting a little more skill."

While Fraga lived in Bela Cruz, he observed the cooking style of the Caribbean and Rasta cultures, which incorporated various fruits to achieve a sweeter cuisine. After moving around the country and marrying his wife, Fraga ended up in Pittsburgh. When the time came to open his own restaurant, he wanted to fuse the traditional Mexican food he knew as a child with the Caribbean influence he experienced in Bela Cruz.

"I put what I have learned from the Caribbean side into my mom's cooking," Fraga explains. "I mix the fruit side with the spicy." The residents of East Liberty seem to be responding pretty positively to it.

"It's different, it's not your typical restaurant. I think they got pretty creative about it," Sherra Burley says.

Diner Chad Elish, a former employee at Casa Rasta's Beechview location, agrees about the creative environment.

"I like the atmosphere here. It's really, really cool. The food is phenomenal. I think they've upped what they had since I worked there."

"And there's more options," his companion, Jenn Hyland adds. She also thinks that it's "really cool" that the restaurant combines Mexican and Caribbean food because they're her two favorites.

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

A Caribbean plant sits against a wall in Casa Rasta, where vibrant colors are abundant throughout.

Casa Rasta also provides more than just a unique dining experience – it really tries to promote its fusion of cultures in East Liberty.

"We'll have music on Thursdays. We'll have a reggae band or a Latin band and this past Thursday it was so dope. There were families that came and they got up and danced. There was an old couple that was dancing together and have been together for like 40, 50 something years," Sahaar Turner recalls. "We're about to start doing open mic nights for all artists, writers, people who are trying to find a platform to get exposure. We are welcoming that type of crowd in here."

While Casa Rasta offers a unique cultural blend, some compare it to Patron Mexican Grill across the street. However, Turner feels Casa Rasta is more intimate, which helps the restaurant to stand out from its rival.

"It's healthy competition. Pow," she laughs. "I feel like this place is a cool place for the whole family. It's a nice blend between the city and the culture because I know they're bringing a lot of cultural arts back to the city."

Whether it's the fusion of two cuisines, the rich environment or the hospitable staff, diners seem to be enjoying one of the newest restaurants in East Liberty, and Fraga has taken notice of how customers are responding. "The more people that come, the more we see them next week."

Photo By Jessica Nath

Social co-owner Gregg Caliguiri poses for a photo in Bakery Square. The 45 year-old also owns Walnut Grill, Walnut Grove and Shady Grove.

Photo By Julian Routh

Social features a number of specialty beers from seasonal kegs. The restaurant appeals to the millennial generation that works in the Square.

Social graces vibrant Bakery Square scene

By Jessica Nath

After a long day of computing vector numbers at TechShop Pittsburgh or working in the Google offices, there's nothing better than grabbing a drink at Social in Bakery Square. Wedged in a corner between a coffee shop and Google, the restaurant embodies everything the millennial generation stands for.

Collages of posters plaster the entrance, inviting customers to the next concert or to take their first Lyft ride for free. The rectangular bar inside takes center stage with four television screens – all displaying different channels, all showcasing sports. Taylor Swift blares through the speakers overhead, sure to be followed by another upbeat pop ballad. USB plugs line the underside of the bar's rusted-red granite counter, and the tops of the menus are lined with "Conversation Starters," many of which revolve around social media.

Gregg Caliguiri, one of the partners who own the restaurant, says the social media theme was partially influenced by the Google offices.

"Being 45, I don't totally understand it to be totally honest – I don't really get that involved with it ... I hate to love it to a certain point," Caliguiri admits. "But we knew that would be such a great name to take advantage of – there's a double entendre there – it definitely speaks to social media."

Because of this, it's reasonable to assume that the restaurant aims to attract the generation obsessed with "selfies" and Instagramming their food before eating it. But as the dinner rush pours in, it's clear that the significance of the name "Social" also lies in the gathering of people of all ages. A family with a little boy no older than five fills a booth near the entrance, and seated in front of the Ping-Pong table outside, a group of co-workers chit-chat over drinks. They work at Management Science Associates just down Penn Avenue.

"This is where we go pretty much when there is any work events – anytime there is a happy hour," Katrina Van Meer says, a bourbon in hand.

"Someone got promoted, someone's leaving, someone started," Michelle Schivins adds

with her drink of choice, a Miller Lite, sitting in front of her. "Because we all work down there, it's convenient for everybody."

Today they are celebrating Van Meer's promotion, but Schivins says other days she is lured to Social by the food.

"The pizzas are really good, they have different gourmet pizzas, kind of off the wall but they're really good," she says.

Dishes such as "pierogi pizza" and "mushroom bianca pizza" fill up the restaurant's menu, not leaving much space for the typical "pepperoni" or "extra cheese" pies.

"We put a lot of care into the dough, sitting for three days, it allows the gluten to relax, so it stretches very nice, and it has a very nice chew to it," executive chef Jared Lordon says.

Lordon works behind the scenes in the kitchen, a place he says is hot and loud.

"You hear all the dishes clattering, meat sizzling, mushrooms are sautéing," he says. "So there's a lot of noise, and there's a lot of confusion."

Lordon's job requires him to organize that confusion. He says it entails meticulous tasks such as making sure the peppers are always chopped exactly the same for each dish as well as making sure the workers don't get too heated.

"The kitchen is one of the few places I think where you have male, female, black, white, brown, yellow, everything, gay, straight," Lordon says. "Everybody is sort of just thrown in there, and it is very interesting and difficult sometimes to get everybody to work together."

It appears as if the servers outside the kitchen's black swinging doors have mastered this. Wearing grey or black shirts declaring them "Social Workers" and "Social Drinkers," they buzz around the restaurant, filling each customer's empty glass or carrying out the dishes.

Caliguiri says that's exactly what he wants for his customers.

> ***"I want people to get really great, attentive service, but not from an assuming or snobby attitude, but someone who's comfortable."***

"I want people to get really great, attentive service, but not from an assuming or snobby attitude, but someone who's comfortable and makes them at ease, too," he says. "And yet at the same time, the level of service is far and away exceeding their expectations."

He says that goes for the food, too, which he admits can be deceiving.

"You walk into an atmosphere like this, and you immediately think bar food, but once you see the type of plate we're using and silverware we're using, and even the look of the restaurant in terms of its atmosphere, you think 'oh it's not just bar food' and you get to taste things and you think 'definitely not.'"

Social opened in July 2013, but it's far from Caliguiri's first venture into the restaurant business. The Pittsburgh native opened his first restaurant, the Pittsburgh Deli Company, in Shadyside in 1993. He and his business partners have since then opened Walnut Grill, Walnut Grove and Shady Grove.

Though his hair and beard are flecked with white and dark grey, his striped Puma hoodie, faded blue jeans and tinted glasses give him the appearance of someone just starting in the restaurant business instead of already being in it for more than 20 years.

"He's a very unique individual to work for … he's exciting to work with," Lordon says. "We sort of feed off of each other."

Lordon says Caliguiri's energy is one of his favorite parts about working at Social. As for his other favorite part?

"At the end of the day I know that what we're doing is right so to say," he says. "The way we're doing it and how we're doing it and what we're doing I think is very right, and it feels right to me."

Photo By Addison Smith

At 344 Sheridan Avenue, the Farmers' Market Cooperative in East Liberty is Pittsburgh's only year-round farmers' market. The cooperative opened in 1941.

From farm to table: Market offers fresh food

By Addison Smith

It's a Saturday in East Liberty and people are stepping inside a pale yellow brick building, shaking the rain off from their jackets and closing their umbrellas. Once inside, they're greeted by vendors and fluorescent lighting. This is the Farmers' Market Cooperative of East Liberty, and it is bustling.

Once inside, safe from the terrible, frigid and wet weather, customers are greeted by piles of apples, a meat stand, wine and stacks of vegetables. Even around 10 a.m., when the market has been open for five hours, there's plenty of options for the wandering eye and food connoisseur.

Directly inside the entrance behind the doors are piles upon piles of apples. Shining and a perfect mix of yellow and red, the apples come from Kistaco Farms, run by Tim Hileman, a third-generation farmer. His white crew neck t-shirt is tucked into faded blue jeans, he's wearing a baseball cap over thinning sandy brown hair and his eyes scream just how tired he is, but he's still working.

He and his family arrive at the market around 5 a.m. every Saturday, right when the cooperative is set to open. They unload their signature apples and apple cider as well as a selection of other fruits and vegetables. Kistaco Farms has been coming to the Farmers' Market Cooperative of East Liberty since 1968, 27 years after it opened in 1941.

"[The market] brings local food. It's actually a nice meeting place, we used to have people come in and run into people they haven't seen for a while," Hileman explains. "They stay in, they visit. It's just a nice gathering place for a Saturday morning."

For 10 a.m. on a Saturday, the market seems to be in full swing. Not one vendor is without a customer in front of his or her stand. According to Hileman, the constant buzz hasn't always been a part of the market. His stand is busiest in the fall, he explains, because apples and apple cider are an autumn staple, but the market itself is always in a flux.

"[We're doing] pretty well,"

Hileman says with a shrug. "We have ups and downs, you know. Back when I was a kid in the '70s, this really was a busy place. Through the '80s and '90s it fell off a little bit; I think primarily because of the neighborhood.

"You know, the neighborhood had a down cycle, the Sears Building was here just sitting empty," Hileman continues, looking at the door. "There just weren't a lot of people coming into this area. They weren't making an extra trip to come to the farmers' market. Since Home Depot opened up [in 2001], it's been a lot better."

PHOTO BY ADDISON SMITH
Inside the market, customers are greeted by several stands of locally grown meat and fresh produce.

To the left of the piles of apples is a refrigerated case of glass filled with different meats. Behind the counter stands Valarie Kennedy, wearing a faded Duquesne University sweatshirt. The red fabric is no longer bright, but Kennedy makes up for that with her bubbly personality, stopping to talk about the Kennedy Meat Stand while bossing her son, Jacob Kennedy, who strikingly resembles her with the same blonde hair, round face, easy smile and blue eyes. She fumbles with her hands and rubs them down her sweatshirt.

"Some of the people who help us at the stand actually had grandparents who shopped here."

"With the USDA regulations and things that have changed over the years, the Kennedy Meat Stand is a fully USDA-inspected meat facility," Kennedy explains. "We sell to private individuals and families, as well as commercial restaurants and vendors."

The Kennedy family has been in the cooperative for five generations and they get to the market at around 3:30 a.m. Saturday mornings to begin to prepare for the crazy bustling day ahead. Even six and a half hours after unloading, the meat stand and those working behind it are incredibly busy. According to Kennedy, that's the norm and the family manages "to sell quite a bit".

"There are a level of regular customers who sustain the market, especially our meat stand," Kennedy says, wiping her hands on her sweatshirt. "We have people that have been here multi-generations, we have three generation customers, right now actually. Some of the people who help us at the stand actually had grandparents who shopped here ... I'll tell you, I have seen people who have come straight off an airplane who have been told to come to the market ... I've probably had about 10 to 20 new customers today alone."

As the city's only year-round farmers' market, the cold and rainy day isn't abnormal for customers. They bustle in and out, keeping the Farmers' Market Cooperative of East Liberty busy and lively in a neighborhood that is finally back in bloom. When East Liberty thrives, the cooperative thrives.

Asian kitchen expands East Liberty's palate

By Yen-Mei Lin

On 5996 Center Avenue sits an elegant, loft like restaurant that brings a taste of Asian cuisine to the East Liberty community.

Plum Pan Asian Kitchen serves all kinds of Asian dishes, including Japanese, Chinese and Thai. Even though the Japanese and Thai dishes are best sellers, most of the customers are Americans, as most dishes are catered to those who prefer American-Asian food.

Head chef Mike Lin, who comes from Taiwan, has been a Japanese chef for more than 30 years. Lin worked in Australia for two years before moving to Pittsburgh a decade ago.

Lin's style in the kitchen is a bit out-of-the-ordinary. While he cooks up sushi, sashimi and nigiri in the kitchen, he doesn't speak at all.

"I need to concentrate on making the best quality of sushi for the customers," Lin says.

Out in the dining room, several Japanese lanterns of all shapes and sizes hang from the ceiling. Upon entering Plum Pan, there is a sushi bar on the left, containing several kinds of raw fish including tuna, salmon and sailfish.

Customer Lisa Witkowski dines at Plum at least once a week.

"The sushi is very fresh, the sashimi doesn't taste fishy at all," she says, pointing to Lin. "He is really good at making sushi."

Photo By Fred Blauth

Vibrant lanterns hang from the ceiling at the Plum Pan Asian Kitchen in East Liberty. Through its decorations and cuisine, the restaurant offers a taste of Asian culture to workers on their lunch break.

During lunch time, most of the restaurant's clientele works nearby. Even though the dishes are not cheap, the customers are still willing to pay on having fresh food.

Not only is the food exquisite and fresh, but the service is excellent. Waiters are happy to teach customers about Asian cuisine and the proper way to eat sashimi.

"Now I know how to use chopsticks for eating sushi," customer Danielle Felton says after getting a friendly lesson from her waiter. "The waiter is very patient with teaching me and explains the menu."

The atmosphere is suitable for having a family party, reunion or business gathering because the dining room is quiet with enough seating for a good crowd. The room is separated from the entrance by a hallway, which keeps the vibe secluded and peaceful.

Plum also offers takeout, but sometimes, just like the dine-in crowd, customers don't always know what to order. The dynamic wait staff can help by recommending what dishes are good for a night at home.

"What dishes do you recommend for takeout?" a young woman asks.

"Sashimi is one of the good choice for takeout," the waitress Kelly says. "If you don't eat sashimi, you can have California rolls or other Thai food, such as Pad Thai."

Just another lesson from the friendly staff at the Plum Pan Asian Kitchen in East Liberty.

Dome transcends time in shadow of church

By Julie Pawlikowski

Photo From Creative Commons

Motor Square Garden on Baum Boulevard held several pop culture events in the 1920s, including the first live sports radio broadcast in 1921 and the Great American Circus' Knights of Malta in 1923.

From 1889 to 1900, the East Liberty Market House at 5900 Baum Boulevard operated as a city market. Financed by the Mellon family and built by famed Boston architects Peabody and Stearns, the Liberty Market House was bought in 1915 by the Pittsburgh Automobile Association. Renamed Motor Square Garden, the PAA used the building as a car dealership and exhibition hall for its cars. It also functioned as a host for many conventions, sporting events, and shows.

It was used intermittently as the home court for the University of Pittsburgh basketball team until 1925 when the Pitt Pavilion opened inside Pitt Stadium, according to Pitt: 100 Years of Pitt Basketball by Sam Sciullo. Circuses were held at Motor Square Garden, notably, the Great American Circus' Knights of Malta from Nov. 27 to Dec. 1 in 1923.

In addition to the circuses and basketball games, Motor Square Garden hosted many boxing matches. A first in radio history also occurred at the Motor Square Garden: "The first live sports radio broadcast between junior lightweight pugilist Johnny Dundee and Johnny Ray [occurred] at Pittsburgh's Motor Square Garden in April 1921."

The entertaining life of the Motor Square Gardens lasted until the 1980s when the American Automobile Association, or AAA, renovated the building. According to Wally Gobetz of flikr.com, "the Landmarks Design Associates of Pittsburgh redesigned it as an upscale shopping mall." Though the shopping mall failed, the AAA still occupied the building along with a second tenant, the UPMC School of Nursing.

Perhaps more interesting than the events that occurred at Motor Square Garden is the architecture of the building. Because it was completed in 1900, it does hint at the Beaux-Arts style, which relates to the classical decorative style maintained by the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. According to "Landmark Architecture Pittsburgh and Allegheny County" by Walter Kidney, "the exterior of the building features a large tin-clad, steel-framed blue dome and a yellow brick facade. The industrial interior has a large atrium with exposed steel girders and skylights above." Historian Joseph Rishel remembers walking by the auto dealership in his youth on his way to the orthodontist: "I can't recall what type of car(s) they sold, but I did notice that wonderful dome. It was green with translucent windows. In many ways it was the most remarkable architectural feature of the East Liberty business district despite the fact that the building was overshadowed by the soaring East Liberty Presbyterian Church so very nearby."

Downtown 2.0: East Liberty hit stride in '50s

COURTESY PHOTO

Penn Avenue in East Liberty was bustling in the 1920s, all the way up until the 1960s, when urban renewal swept across the city and neighborhood.

By Kelsie Bianco

East Liberty is striving to rekindle its glory years and reestablish itself as Pittsburgh's "second downtown".

In the 1940s and 1950s, East Liberty was a booming commercial area surrounded by a closely-knit community. According to East Liberty Development, Inc., the community boasted movie houses, roller-skating rinks, department stores and retail shops.

Between the 1930s and the 1950s, East Liberty's holiday parades were among the most recognizable events in the country. In 1936, the Christmas parade was acknowledged as the largest in the nation, outdoing New York and other cities. Joseph Rishel, a retired history professor from Duquesne University, says East Liberty thrived until changes in the American landscape after World War II.

"The area boomed along with the baby boom, and all the people with all those kids shopped in East Liberty," Rishel says. "The many clothing stores for men and woman were booming with traffic."

However, by the 1960s, "urban renewal" was sweeping cities and East Liberty was not spared. Renewal, in this case, meant destruction. Leaders locally and regionally thought it was time for change due to commercial vacancy and competition from the suburbs, Rishel says.

"The planners moved in and basically ruined East Liberty by their incompetent handling of the plan and restricting all traffic on Penn Ave. That really killed East Liberty as a business district," he says.

East Liberty's attempt to compete with the suburbs by reshaping its street grid was a disaster. Neighborhood streets, homes of residents and commercial properties were knocked down in order to make room for a highway-sized road called Penn Circle. According to the East Liberty Development, Inc. website: "More than 1,000 rental apartment units were built to anchor each end of the business district, replacing a long tradition of neighborhood home ownership." The history and tradition of East Liberty was lying beneath the rubble of the construction.

Billy Conn: Don't mess with The Pittsburgh Kid

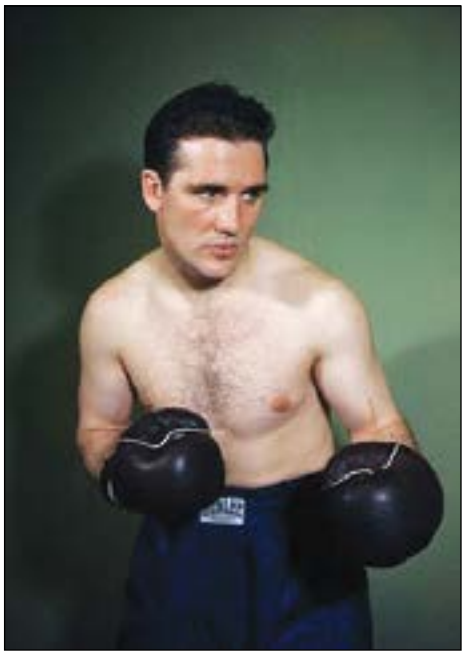


Photo From Creative Commons

Billy Conn, from East Liberty, made his boxing debut as a welterweight in 1934 at 16 years old.

Photo From Creative Commons

Billy Conn (right) lands a menacing blow in one of his two fights against heavyweight champion Joe Louis (left). The Pittsburgh Kid gave Louis a great fight in 1941, but was knocked out in the 13th round.

By Robert Loveless

Back in 1990, a 71 year-old man foiled a burglary by punching the robber. While this may seem unusual, the robber didn't realize he was up against The Pittsburgh Kid, former light -heavyweight champion Billy Conn. The thief took off, but not before the Kid could tear off his jacket –which contained his name and address.

Billy Conn, from East Liberty, made his professional boxing debut as a welterweight in 1934 when he was only 16 years old. Eventually, he fought his way up to heavyweight status and won matches against nine world champions. Although he was often outweighed in matches, Conn defeated many quality opponents, including Fred Apostoli and Tony Zale.

"When he was young he had a lot of ambition to become a fighter," his son, Tim, says. "Once he became famous and got the title, he wasn't the type of person who wanted to brag about it and show off. He was more of a quiet type person and didn't look to bring attention to himself."

While his career was filled with victorious matches, Conn will always be remembered for his fights with heavyweight champion Joe Louis. In 1941, he and Louis slugged it out for 12 rounds, with Conn determined to win.

However, with two seconds left in the 13th round, Louis knocked out Conn with one powerful punch. Nevertheless, Louis said that his opponent was the best light heavyweight he ever saw, and the match is considered to be one of the greatest fights in history.

Later that year, Conn went on to star as himself in the movie *The Pittsburgh Kid*, a story about a boxer's rising career after his manager's death.

In 1942, Conn had the opportunity to fight Louis again, but before he had the chance, he broke his hand in a fight with his father-in-law. Soon after, Conn went on a morale tour during World War II.

Finally, in 1946, he had one last shot at a rematch with Louis. However, by then, Conn hadn't fought in a professional match in years. He was older and slower and was knocked out in the eighth round. Conn soon retired and lived in East Liberty up until his death on May 30, 1993.

Mellon's Fire Escape: Burial in church was real

By Jen Cardone

Photo By Fred Blauth

The East Liberty Presbyterian Church, otherwise known as "Mellon's Fire Escape," was built in the early 1930s. It was paid for by Richard King Mellon, who requested that he and his wife be buried within.

The regal, gothic East Libertarian Presbyterian Church is known to older neighborhood wags by another name: "Mellon's Fire Escape."

Richard King Mellon's family paid for the construction of the cathedral, also known as the Cathedral of Hope and the ELPC, on the condition he and his wife could be entombed within. And so they are, in a gloomy chamber adjacent to the cathedral.

Like his contemporaries, such as Henry C. Frick and Andrew Carnegie, Mellon made a fortune in banking by steamrolling competitors and driving many hard bargains. His bank backed companies that some say created crushing conditions for laborers.

Mellon invested in his first coal property and real estate, both of which doubled in value during the 1860s, so much that he was able to open T. Mellon & Sons, a bank known today as BNY Mellon.

The Mellons had eight children, with Andrew and Richard being the most famous. Both brothers eventually founded the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research in memory of their father in 1913. In 1967, it became part of Carnegie-Mellon University.

Richard Mellon served under Andrew at the Aluminum Company of America and invested in the Pittsburgh Coal Company, known today as CONSOL Energy. He is also credited with developing land into an amusement park in 1931, known as Idlewild Park.

Construction on the Cathedral began on Aug. 18, 1931 and Richard Mellon placed the cornerstone on June 19, 1932. The project was completed on May 12, 1935.

The Gothic style masterpiece features classic pointed arches, multi-colored stained glass windows and a cruciform or cross-style floor plan.

Richard and his wife Jennie spent about $4 million on the ELPC, the equivalent of $66 million today. And, as was nearing the end of his life, some wondered if his celestial philanthropy was a salve for his guilt or a get-out-of-hell free card. In fact, he died two years before the cathedral was completed, with the Trinity Chapel reserved as the final resting place for Richard and Jennie.

"Local wags called it the Mellon's 'fire escape,' as though a church might save the family from a heated afterlife," historian and architecture critic Charles Rosenblum says.

East Liberty makes immersion simple, fun

By Addison Smith

Throughout this magazine, you have probably noticed a theme of "community." There's a certain type of social attitude that jumps off of the page and after spending time in East Liberty myself, I have to admit "a community feeling" doesn't even begin to describe it.

I went to East Liberty by myself the first couple of times. My first trip was to survey the area and find the good stories: the people, the businesses and trends that would help to bring this community to life. My second trip was to begin the reporting for my first story: a piece on Bats Barber Shop.

Although these excursions were solo trips, there was something about East Liberty that didn't make me feel alone. Right away, I felt comfortable in this area. Right away, I was willing to immerse myself in the community. Right away, I knew East Liberty was someplace special.

I could detail every little thing about East Liberty that stuck out in my mind, but that would take pages upon pages of space that I don't have and you wouldn't read. Instead, I'm going to focus on my time in Bats Barber Shop and how welcome the barbers and the customers made me feel right away.

You're always told to immerse yourself as much as possible to get the best story as a journalist. Duquesne law school Dean Ken Gormley once detailed his experiences bear wrestling to me for a piece he wrote for Rolling Stone. He made it a point to be known that immersion is the best way to get the best story.

That said, I didn't pick up the razor and begin to give someone a haircut to truly immerse myself in the culture of Bat's Barber Shop, but I did plop myself in the waiting area for hours at a time to try to gather as much information as I could about the business.

The second I walk into the shop, I'm greeted by the barbers and the owner himself, Kevin "Bat" Andrews. Not even a minute into my reporting I feel comfortable and at ease with these people. The barbers are quick to include me in conversations, and even quicker to begin to joke around with me.

It's not the hottest of days, but the sun is beating down on my back through the window as I sit in the waiting area. I shrug off my jacket, showing my mint green shirt, a hard color to forget apparently. I come in three days later to continue reporting wearing the same shirt and am called out on it. I reassure them that Sundays were laundry days and it had been washed in the interim.

They nod and chide me some more, and I accept it, laughing it off myself. While I have never had older brothers, I interned in for the Pittsburgh Penguins and learned about rooms of men becoming like siblings you didn't realize you had. Even when being called out, it's hard to not smile when you're in on the joke.

"Right away, I knew East Liberty was someplace special."

Community vibe makes East Liberty shine

By Jen Cardone

Drive up Bigelow Boulevard, hang a left on Baum, and East Liberty Presbyterian Church is straight ahead.

The cathedral towers over surrounding buildings, boldly standing out as a masterpiece of Gothic-style architecture. It serves as a place for the East Liberty community to worship, even if they are not Presbyterian by faith.

This past semester, I spent countless hours finding stories and walking around East Liberty. Every time I drove there, I could always see my destination as soon as I turned on to Baum. Most of my stories came from the cathedral itself. The church exudes a sense of community bond and friendliness.

The ELPC accepts anyone and everyone. They have a Taizè worship service every Wednesday at 7 p.m. where people inside and outside of the community join as one ecumenical monastic group to find faith and inner peace through meditative prayer, pauses of silence and chants.

The Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan, leader of the service, says spirituality is already within us, and that we just have to find it. Being with the community helps.

"I very much feel that we don't develop a spirituality in order to get closer to God," she says. "I think God is already there. We develop a spiritual life just to help us to become aware of the relationship that we already have between the God that is within and ourselves."

The bond of community was evident the moment I ran into Gwen Puza, the first person to introduce me to the ELPC. She was merely stopping by the church to use the restroom and when my friend and I told her about this magazine project, she broke from her schedule for the day to give us a tour of the massive structure and tell us all about the history and what happens at the ELPC. All throughout this project, she has served as a source to help me find people who know about the church.

Kay Shissler anoints the people who gather during Taizè. She has been involved with the service for 15 years and a member at the church for 53.

"Their emphasis on justice issues and inclusion is why I go," she says.

Thomas West, owner of a men's underwear store, wanted to start his business in the community because he, too, sensed the connectivity of the community and wanted a different vibe.

"I wanted to bring something new to East Liberty and get people back in this neighborhood," he says.

In the 1950s, East Liberty was often referred to as the second

downtown of Pittsburgh. It was a thriving business center with a tight-knit community that declined only a decade later.

According to Puza, when the street grid was reconfigured to discourage traffic as part of an ill-fated redevelopment scheme, businesses declined and had to shut down.

Business owners like West are rebuilding this community. He doesn't shop online and knows if a business has a certain vibe customers will come.

Online shopping "takes away from small businesses and city life," he says. "It takes something away that you won't get by walking to a store. It's just an experience that you can't get online. That's what I think a lot of people are missing, a lot of people are starting to come back to shop locally."

Neighborhood balances culture, capitalism

By Jessica Nath

The red Target sign towers over its surroundings, serving as a gateway between East Liberty's past and future. In front of it lies progress – themed restaurants, boutiques and even a Google office recently sprung up in Bakery Square.

Behind it, though, almost in its shadow, lies the neighborhood's bare-bone culture and history – older infrastructure and specialized family shops line the street.

When I first turned left off of Fifth Avenue, the Target sign was the first thing I saw, and soon I passed Bakery Square. This wasn't the East Liberty I had been told to avoid. It didn't look like a place with a high crime rate and the constant slot in news segments about robberies and shootings. For goodness sake, is that an Anthropologie store?

East Liberty is being revitalized, and Bakery Square is just one success story.

I had heard about a new restaurant named Social that had great food, outdoor seating and even a ping-pong table. The restaurant is the epitome of new – even its theme revolves around social media.

"And now, of course, with Bakery Two, not only are we seeing just the first phase, but phase two and phase three as they occur are going to bring us a myriad of more customers," Gregg Caliguiri, co-owner of Social, says.

Part of Bakery Square 2.0 is a new apartment complex sits across the street. Rents exceed $1,000.

"I mean what is being built here I wouldn't even say is a lifestyle center," Caliguiri says. "It's a neighborhood, and it's not even a small neighborhood, it's a pretty sizable number of apartments and townhomes that are being placed."

Caliguiri grew up in Shadyside, so he has seen East Liberty's evolution.

"I've been so happy to see how East Liberty – and not just our portion, obviously – but over toward Highland and as far down and up as you can imagine, the entire neighborhood has changed dramatically," Caliguiri says. "And that can only be a good thing for the city."

Caliguiri cares about his customers and wants to create an environment where they can relax and experience a new spin on what some would consider bar food. His employees enjoy working for him, and his customers are loyal.

On a site of that was declared blighted about ten years ago, Social is an example of progress, but in the same neighborhood, Justin Strong closed down his popular venue Shadow Lounge in 2013 – a venue where Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller started off.

"I'm a capitalist, I'm not mad at development – it's how people go about things, it's how public money is used, so there's different layers to it," Strong says.

What those shopping in Bakery Square consider progress, the residents down the street consider sacrifice as their homes and businesses are displaced by new shopping districts.

East Liberty is changing – fast – but change doesn't necessarily have to be bad or good. Right now the neighborhood is balancing between the new and the old, and while the new is attracting more people and changing East Liberty's negative reputation, it is also overshadowing what attracted developers there in the first place – the authentic urban culture.

Spotlight surrounding East Liberty is flawed

By Kelsie Bianco

The adage "Don't judge a book by its cover or you may miss out on an amazing story," explains the journey I took with East Liberty.

Having grown up in Pittsburgh, I am familiar with East Liberty and the somewhat seedy reputation that goes with it.

When I found out that East Liberty was the new location for *Off The Bluff*, I was anxious and excited, but doubts instantly ran through my mind.

When I told my parents, their concerns were through the roof, and for a second, I thought that they might not let me go. But being a 21-year-old adult, it was a decision that I had to make on my own.

So I got in my car, buckled up, and prepared myself for the worst. Thoughts of uncertainty ran through my mind. Will I be safe? Is it okay for me to be alone? Should I have gone at an earlier time? Little did I know, I was in fact judging this book by its cover.

My vision of East Liberty was far from accurate. Bakery Square was the first thing I set sight on. It's new, innovative and refreshing.

But even though the bold colors, trendy shops, and emerging businesses of Bakery Square were intriguing; the rich culture within the actual neighborhoods is what made me fall in love with the East Liberty and the people who call it home.

I strolled down the wide streets lined with stores both old and new. The first store that I stumbled upon was Sam's Shoes.

I met Sam and his brother, who now run one of the oldest family businesses in East Liberty. Their passion for their shop and the community instantly put me at ease and inspired me to look deeper.

"Little did I know, I was in fact judging this book by its cover."

Visiting establishments like the Global Food Market and Casta Rasta made me realize that people from all over the globe make East Liberty a diverse and vibrant community.

Dana Harris Yates is one of the most special people that I met. I walked into her little shop off of Penn Avenue in hopes of meeting someone interesting. Mission accomplished.

She told me how she has grew up in this community, and how it haped who she is and what she does.

The Cultural Oasis provides health remedies through the use of nature. Darla calls it "Natritional Healing." Her gentle voice and caring personality are what draw people to her and her store.

"She has become a mother figure for me out here," says 23-year-old Ashley Cox, who moved from Washington D.C. to East Liberty.

That is just one sign of the genuine warmth that characterizes East Liberty.

So yes, I did judge a book by its cover. But no, I do not regret it, because if I hadn't, I wouldn't have been able to truly appreciate the amazing stories that came out of it.

JOURNALISM

JMA

MULTIMEDIA ARTS

[creating synergy across new media]

JMA News Digest

Professor returns to Vietnam with camera

Prof. Dennis Woytek accompanied 11 Navy Seabee veterans who returned to Vietnam in March, after almost 42 years after the end of one of the most divisive conflicts in American history.

Along the way, he captured film, photos and sound for a very personal documentary about their return.

"For guys that come back today, they're expecting to find sandbags and bunkers, barbed wire and bullets lying around," Woytek said. "But rarely do you find that stuff, and even more is that we have found very little to even place where our bases were. Cities have grown over that to us was a jungle or wasteland of rice patties with sparsely populated villages."

Courtesy Photo

JMA Prof. Dennis Woytek poses for a photo with a former NVA soldier in Vietnam in March.

Woytek was stationed at Quang Tri and Dong Ha from March 1968-March 1969.

"We shared stories, experiences, some very serious and sad, others extremely funny," Woytek said. "One thing we have in common, we have survived, but we remember and honor those 58,000 who died during the Vietnam War."

Film chief receives Doherty award

Everybody loves movies.

And everybody who goes to the movies has gotten a loving eyeful of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, including our own fair campus in The Next Three Days all thanks to the efforts of Dawn Keezer, Director of the Pittsburgh Film Office.

Keezer was the recipient of the department's 2015 Sean Doherty Distinguished Communicator Award, which was accepted on her behalf by Film Office founder Russ Streiner.

Keezer has been instrumental in bringing A-list filmmakers to Pittsburgh – who then bring Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania to the world. The films they make also contribute substantially to our local economy.

The award is named for Sean Doherty, who suffered a devastating spinal injury playing high school football and yet went on to a successful sportscasting career at WDUQ. When Sean passed in 2007, the department decided to name this award for him because he so ably and positively modeled the virtue of per-

Duke staff wins six Keystones

The staff of *The Duquesne Duke* took home six prestigious Division II Student Keystone Press Awards in 2015 in general news, sportswriting, review writing, column writing and news photography.

Editors Saul Berrios-Thomas and Julian Routh led the way with two awards each.

Staffers Brandon Addeo, Zach Brendza, Sam Fatula, Pat Higgins and Aaron Warnick were also recognized for their work in 2014.


off
the
bluff
EAST
LIBERTY
CHARACTER
CHANGE
HISTORY
CULTURE
FOOD

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Spring 2015

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To see more about these stories, including photos and videos, visit www.offthebluff.com.

Follow us on Twitter @offthebluff

Letter from the Editor

Of all the neighborhoods we've featured in *Off the Bluff*, East Liberty is by far the most promising.

Take a look around; you'll no longer see graffiti-laden buildings, run-down businesses and rampant crime. Instead, you'll see a revitalized neighborhood that is on the cusp of a new cultural renaissance.

Since the turn of the century, East Liberty's revival has been well documented by newspapers in Pittsburgh, which point to development and planning as the main instigators for progress.

Though both were vitally important, there's more to the narrative. The story of East Liberty starts and ends with the people: the father and son who served pizza during the riots in the 1960s, the barber shop owner who prides himself on showing respect to all of his customers and the artist who gives people a canvas to express themselves in the sky, to name a few.

As a student at Duquesne University who grew up in the South Hills of Pittsburgh, I had no idea any of these stories existed before I took over this project more than eight months ago. Actually, I had never stepped foot in East Liberty until then.

But now, I feel like a part of the community, which has been more welcoming to me than I ever could have imagined. When you're in charge of a magazine, you can expect a few problems along the way, but in East Liberty, it was almost as if the community was part of my staff.

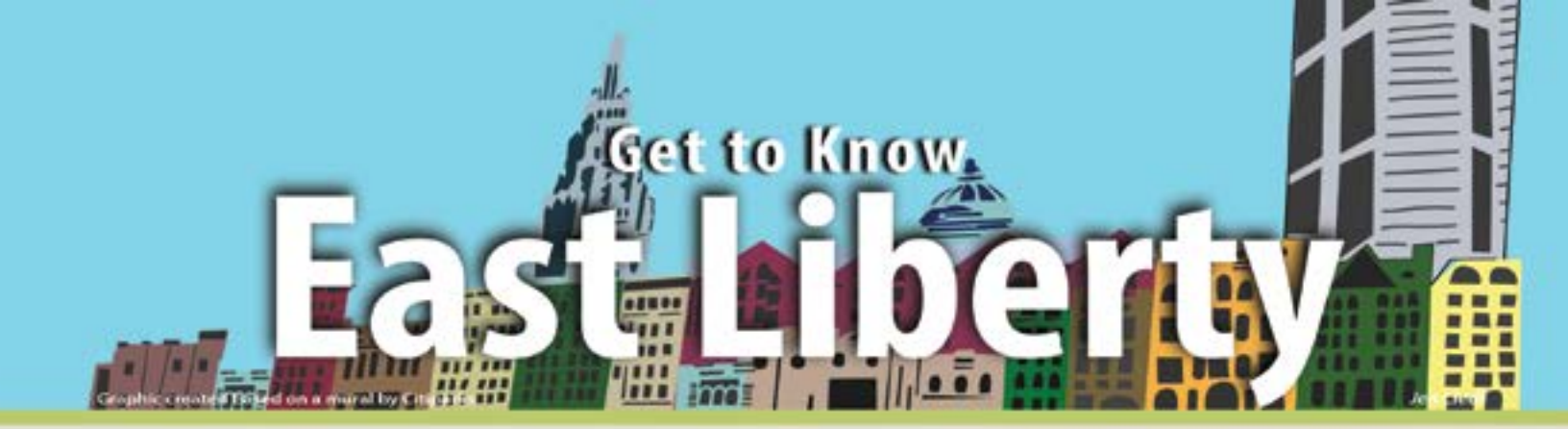
Off the Bluff was created by Dr. Mike Dillon of the Duquesne Journalism and Multimedia Arts Department in 2005. In 2007, it took form as the Pittsburgh Neighborhoods Project, which showcases a different neighborhood each academic year.

In the fall, students in Dillon's magazine journalism class took to the streets of East Liberty to capture its culture, history and trends. They brought back stories about individual characters, institutions and businesses, which are in the pages of this magazine.

I'd like to thank Dr. Dillon for his unwavering support of this project, as well as the writers, photographers, editors and contributors for making this possible.

Enjoy. See you in East Liberty.

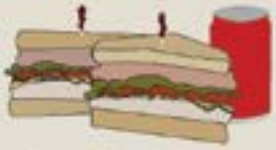
- Julian Routh



Get to Know East Liberty

WHAT IS EAST LIBERTY BEST KNOWN FOR?

24% of people said **Food & Restaurants**



30% of people said **Shopping**

Target, ***Trader Joe's*** *and* ***Giant Eagle*** *were the top favorite places to shop in East Liberty.*

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE IN EAST LIBERTY?

Restaurant - 35%

- Capri's
- China Buffet
- Jimmy John's
- Patron Mexican Grill
- Panera Bread
- Pizza Sola
- Plum
- The Livermore
- Union Pig & Chicken
- Vento's Pizza

Coffee Shop - 9%

- Zeke's Coffee Shop

Shopping Area - 30%

- CVS
- Giant Eagle
- Goodwill
- Jamil's
- Petland
- Rainbow
- Trader Joe's
- Target

Gym - 7%

- Club One Fitness
- Fitness Factory
- LA Fitness

Population of East Liberty

28,436 PEOPLE

http://www.point2homes.com

"It's an up-and-coming neighborhood."
- Male, 50-60 yrs old

"It has gotten a lot nicer over the past 10 years."
- Male, 18-24 yrs old

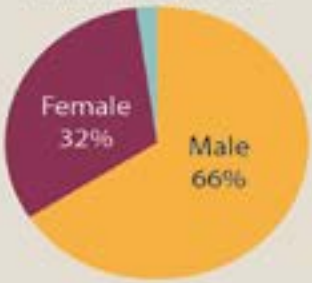
"It's good to see new developments coming to the area."
- Female, 30-39 yrs old

"It's improving but slowly."
- Female, 50-60 yrs old

"Great place to live, but the cost of living continues to go up and up. And property is (getting) too expensive."
- Male, 30-39 yrs old

GENDER

Prefer not to answer - 2%



AGE

WHAT IS YOUR MAIN PURPOSE FOR BEING IN EAST LIBERTY?

35% of people said **WORK**

20% of people said **LIVING**

11% of people said **PASSING THROUGH ON MY WAY TO SOMEWHERE ELSE**

The information for this infographic was collected between the dates of Nov. 3 and Dec. 12, 2014. Responses were gathered in the field and by a survey that was posted on SurveyMonkey.com. The results are based off of 50 survey respondents.


PERI UP

Photo By Fred Blauth

Alberto Vento Jr., also known as Little Al, prepares to put a pizza fresh from the oven into a box. He serves as owner and cook at Vento's Pizza.

Vento's serves slices through years of progress

By Talia Kirkland

Opening the door to a small pizzeria on 420 North Highland Avenue in East Liberty is like opening a time capsule. A pungent smell of garlic fills the small dining room. Photos of Frank Sinatra, Franco Harris, the late Mayor Bob O'Conner and Pittsburgh icons from many eras line the walls. There is a continuous clack from the lottery machine. And infusing it all is the boisterous conversation of the regulars and the warmth from the stoves, where pizzas bake to perfection.

Vento's is a 63-year-old tradition in East Liberty, one of the few family-owned establishments still thriving. While the pizzeria has remained unchanged in its values, the community has not been as fortunate. In fact, when the East End began to develop, it was actually a patchwork of smaller neighborhoods, now long-forgotten. Vento's owner Alberto Vento (Big Al to all) remembers, though. He remembers opening his first shop in the area of Friendship once known as Frog Town.

"I never left," Big Al says. "We were all poor in the '50s. When I returned from the Korean War and decided to open my first shop at 204 St. Clair Street in Frogtown, [it was] a small section dominated by 60 percent Whites, and 40 percent Negros, but the love and respect we had for one another was immense — a tight knit community."

East Liberty is just recovering from decades of flight and civic neglect. The area lost more than one million square feet of commercial space and half its population by 1980. A long period of ill-fated "urban redevelopment" spread blight throughout the community and crime rates soared.

But during Vento's infancy the community was booming, one of the leading commerce centers in the state of Pennsylvania.

"If you didn't do it in East Liberty then you didn't do it— on any

given Saturday night Penn Avenue would be filled with five to six hundred people," Big Al says.

But with the turn of the decade the community hit unimaginable lows. The redevelopment came first, forcing Vento's and several other surrounding shops to the other side of town.

"They moved me in 1954 to Maragarette, a side street with about twenty other little shops, putting me right in between a deli and television repair shop," he says. "It didn't last long and by 1960 I had moved to Highland Avenue."

While still adjusting to the move, the riots of the 1960s hit East Liberty like a wrecking ball. Racial discord between Italians and blacks reached a fever pitch in April 1968, in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King.

East Liberty's African Americans vented their frustrations against white homes and businesses in the area, many of them Italian-owned. Rioters busted windows and stole from the shops they once supported – leaving many businesses in shattered ruins.

"I was the one and only shop that stayed here to feed the community," says Big Al. "Ain't nobody broke none of my windows. They came, they eat and they leave."

The dark years would leave the neighborhood barren. According to some estimates, East Liberty was home to roughly 575 businesses in the 1950s, and by 1979 only 98 businesses remained. Businesses remained closed, and lots vacant for much of the decade.

Yet during the turmoil, Vento's established itself as more than just a pizza shop and grew into a neighborhood institution. Feeding the shop's reoccurring customers and friends was the easy part for Big Al; successfully running a business in a once thriving area that has gone through decades of urban redevelopment and growing racial tension proved to be the greatest challenge.

By the close of the 1970s, the East Liberty Italian business district was on steady decline.

Big Al, along with local business owner Tony Stagno, found a cause that would reinvigorate Italian pride back into the community without offense. Both devoted Steeler fans, they took an immediate liking to Franco Harris, the Steelers' rookie fullback. Franco was an African American who also shared their Italian heritage due to his mixed-decent. They decided to recruit an Italian "army of support" to cheer on Franco and the team on game days at Three Rivers Stadium. "Franco's Italian Army" was born (Sinatra later became an honorary member and posed for a famous photo with Harris while wearing a helmet emblazoned with the name of the Army).

Throughout the 1972 season, Franco's Italian Army became famous for its antics on and off the field. The group would station itself at the 40-yard line, wearing helmets and parading around the field.

"To this day some of the brothers I helped still reach out from time to time, their kids too, and it's all sincere stuff, no humbug – that's my pay day, my hug and kiss on the cheek," says Big Al. "I just feel really blessed to have survived this community." So did Franco's Army: It is memorialized in Vento's popular "Italian Army Sandwich."

Big Al also begat Little Al, who strolls in as his father reminisces. "When I was in college, me and my two sisters worked here," Little Al says. "The neighborhood was different during that time – it was mainly Jewish, Black and Italian but everybody knew Vento's: Home of the Italian Army."

Little Al, 58, runs the small rectangular kitchen which consumes the back of the pizzeria; he serves as owner, cook and community leader. Regulars who enter the pizzeria know both him and his father by name.

"The bond between establishment and community remains tight throughout the years," says Little Al.

Vento's, forced to move three times in the name of progress, now sits in the shadows of the sprawling Home Depot.

The shop fills up. Orders are made. Time to get back to work. Little Al heads back to the kitchen and stirs a fresh pot of tomato sauce and preps garnishes for sandwiches.

Big Al chuckles as he collects a pizza from the counter and walks out of the cramped, cluttered back office. "East Liberty is getting back to normal, and I'd like to be here, God willing, to see it when it turns again."

PHOTO BY JULIAN ROUTH

On the outskirts of East Liberty, Bakery Square is home to several technology-driven stores and corporations, including Google and TechShop.

Former Nabisco plant holds key to innovation

By Julian Routh

Jennifer Kwiecien is working diligently at a machine that requires both a steady hand and creative mind.

If it was 1964, she would be using a drill press in an industrial factory to make cookies and snacks for Nabisco.

But a half a century later, she is computing vector numbers into a laser cutter, which stamps an intricate design onto a glass cup.

"I'm 57 years old. I spent the last 35 years working: 15 in analytical chemistry and 20 in IT," she says with a smile. "I'm tired of working. I want to learn the stuff I never had time to learn."

Kwiecien, of Carnegie, isn't a factory worker, but a member at TechShop Pittsburgh, a community-based technology workshop in Bakery Square.

On the outskirts of East Liberty, Bakery Square has evolved from a gritty Nabisco factory to a hub of technological and cultural innovation in just five years, doing so through the undeterred will of a real estate company and its tenants, including one of the most influential corporations in the world.

Built in 1918, the Nabisco plant occupied the space for nearly 80 years before closing in 1998 as part of a "broad restructuring program designed to cut costs and increase spending on advertising," according to a 1998 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article.

A year later, the plant was turned over by the Regional Industrial Development Corporation to the Bake-Line Group, which had to sell the property in early 2004 after declaring bankruptcy.

That made way for Walnut Capital, a Pittsburgh real estate development company that was in need of a shift in focus. The group wanted to put more money into the East Side and less into Downtown, Walnut principal and CEO Gregg Perelman remembers. With Bakery Square, the opportunity was there.

"We wanted to have an opportunity to do a lifestyle center that had office, retail and housing,"

Perelman says. "And we wanted to be able to take an old facility and bring life back into it. To be honest, it all started with the revitalization of East Liberty."

If it were a few years earlier, Walnut may have been hesitant to build in East Liberty, but a wave of retail openings less than one mile from the site in the early 2000's made the neighborhood more appealing to developers and consumers. With the addition of Home Depot in 2000 and Whole Foods in 2002, East Liberty and the East End were finally coming together after a decade of near collapse.

After purchasing the property for $5.4 million, Walnut began construction in 2007 with a single vision: "Build it right and they will come."

"That's really what drove this development," Walnut president Todd Reidbord recalled at a press conference for new construction in April 2014. "Building it right meant carefully putting the pieces of a quality-of-life mixed-use development together. That included building innovative urban office space with an industrial feel."

Walnut was right; they did come. Several high-tech companies flocked to the new development, including the UPMC Technology Development Center, Carnegie Mellon University Software Engineering Institute and Google, which formerly housed its offices in a much smaller space at CMU.

"[Google] wanted to be in a cool space close to Pittsburgh's universities," Perelman says. "A lot of the times, universities don't have room on campus to house some of these companies."

PHOTO BY JULIAN ROUTH
Jennifer Kwiecien holds a glass cup she created at TechShop Pittsburgh in Bakery Square.

The proximity to university labs, especially those at CMU and the University of Pittsburgh, created a culture of innovation at Bakery Square, Perelman says. This was during the same time that Pittsburgh was experiencing a cultural renaissance of its own, evolving from an industrial steel town with smokestacks and smelters to a technological hub with esteemed engineering talent.

Google noticed so much potential in Pittsburgh and Bakery Square that it nearly tripled its occupancy to 115,000 square feet in 2011, a year after opening its doors.

To give Bakery Square more of a campus feel for Google workers and other employees, Walnut launched Bakery Square 2.0, a project that features 400,000 square feet of new office space, more than 90 townhomes and 450 apartments across from Penn Avenue on the site of the former Reizenstein Middle School. Officials broke ground in April and are almost finished with construction.

"Bakery Square 2.0 gives our tenants a home neighborhood to do everything in," Perelman says.

But Bakery Square isn't only for Google workers and cutting-edge engineers. It's also for people like Kwiecien who are looking for new things to experience in Pittsburgh, and new places to shop and eat.

For the shopping fanatic, there's Anthropologie – a women's apparel and accessory shop – and Learning Express Toys – a specialty toy store. For the hungry, there's Social, a hip restaurant and bar that has as many beer specials as it has menu items.

And of course there's TechShop Pittsburgh, where Kwiecien can learn what laser cutting is and how to operate a $250,000 Waterjet.

"It's about time I pursue my creative endeavors," Kwiecien says, lifting up her glass cup with pride.

From TechShop to Google, creativity is encouraged at Bakery Square. Now that the crumbs of Nabisco crackers have long blown away, the small square in East Liberty is poised to create big things.

Man with a Camera: Chris Ivey's East Liberty

By Jessica Nath

PHOTO BY JESSICA NATH

Filmmaker and resident Chris Ivey poses for a photo in East Liberty. Ivey started documenting the changes happening in the neighborhood in 2005 after the demolition of the East Mall high rise.

There's two sides to every story, and East Liberty is no exception.

Chris Ivey walked into the neighborhood on May 6, 2005, camera in hand, to cover the East Mall high-rise's transition from public housing to public "art." He was hired by a redevelopment company to document the changes happening in East Liberty, and what he saw that day was unforgettable.

City of Pittsburgh officials had decided to tear down what the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* called East Liberty's "Berlin Wall" but wanted a celebratory farewell, so they put together an event in which people used slingshots to hurl paint-filled balloons at the high-rise.

But the high-rise was not a canvas; it was a home, and what the officials called "art," the residents called disrespect.

"I guess the way they were doing the celebration was very offensive to a lot of people who were living there at the time," Ivey says.

Thistle Elias, a public health professor at the University of Pittsburgh and resident of East Liberty, agrees. She says she saw what she called a "solicitation" in the newspaper asking for ideas of how to turn the demolition into a celebration.

"What struck me when I saw that was a sense that I was very sure that not everybody was celebrating," Elias says. "And there was something very well intended and casual and cavalier, and I felt very naïve about that solicitation."

But Ivey didn't feel naïve that day shooting the "celebration." He felt the same emotion he had for years – the same emotion the residents felt while watching people splatter their home with paint – anger.

And that's when Ivey's short assignment turned into years of documenting East Liberty, its residents and the changes that loomed over all of them with the arrival of development.

Ivey grew up in the North Carolina town where "ultra conservative" Jesse Helms came from.

"Where I grew up, Klan activity was really out in the open," Ivey says. "You'd have the Klans outside of the K-Mart trying to sell their newspapers and stuff."

After a stint at community college in North Carolina, Ivey enrolled in Pittsburgh Filmmakers and worked as a commercial director in the early 2000s. But he says he found this line of work unstable.

"At that time, I was like the youngest director at that level, I guess people weren't used to working with someone who is young," Ivey says.

Ivey says his friend in the advertising business described Pittsburgh as "a city in transition" – but Ivey wasn't willing to wait for the city to change, and he almost left.

But then-councilman, now-mayor Bill Peduto hired Ivey to work on the commercials for his

2005 mayoral campaign, keeping the director in the city.

As Ivey's first documentary began to take shape, the filmmaker immediately ran into a roadblock – few people wanted to speak with him.

"At first people are really apprehensive about talking to the media, especially in that neighborhood," Ivey says. "Because whenever you see East Liberty on the news all the time, it's always in regards to somebody getting shot, somebody O.D.-ing, you know, it was always negative."

But a previous client of Ivey's says he wanted to help with the documentary as soon as the filmmaker brought it up to him.

"Come on, press 'record,'" Justin Strong says, recalling his reaction. "There's East Libertys in Harlem ... in Detroit ... in D.C., in the Bay area. The story's played out over and over again, and the neighborhoods for the most part all look the same."

Strong was the founder and owner of Shadow Lounge, a popular venue in East Liberty – one in which rappers Mac Miller and Wiz Khalifa played some of their first sets. He later set out to create AVA, a bar and lounge, also located in East Liberty.

Ivey helped create the venue's first commercial, and Strong wanted to help create the documentary.

"What happened between 2000 and 2013 in East Liberty was pretty magical with Shadow Lounge and AVA," Strong says. "And Ivey was able to document and tie a lot of that into the changes that happened."

But the Shadow Lounge and AVA went from defying the odds to becoming victims of gentrification, and Ivey's three films – spanning 2005 to the present – captured their rise and fall.

"He actually got to witness me typing my email announcing the closing of AVA and the moving of AVA," Strong says.

Strong shut down Shadow Lounge in 2013, and AVA moved and then closed soon after – just two examples of the sacrifices made for progress, and all of which were captured by Ivey's camera.

Ivey's camera has captured the changing landscape of East Liberty, the pile up of issues heaped on its residents and the building of tension. His documentaries follow storylines filled with people losing their homes and their businesses, all leading to, well, *nothing*.

"One of the things that I've heard from a lot of my students after [watching] his films is that they're really grateful to the additional exposure to perspectives that they've never even considered," Elias says. "But they're also frustrated because they don't know what to do – they don't know how to make things different."

That's because Ivey's films haven't reached a climactic moment yet – there is no epiphany about how to solve all the issues he presents to his audience. Instead, the viewer is left with a cliffhanger.

"A lot of people look at me for answers to a lot of the things that happened," Ivey says. "And I don't have the answers, and I feel like I'm not supposed to have the answers – the community is supposed to come together to find the answers."

"A lot of people look at me for answers to a lot of the things that happened ... the community is supposed to come together to find the answers."

Ivey's intention was never to provide solutions, but rather to show the problems in a realistic way. That's why his first film lacked an abundance of B-roll and "beauty shots," something he says offended some residents.

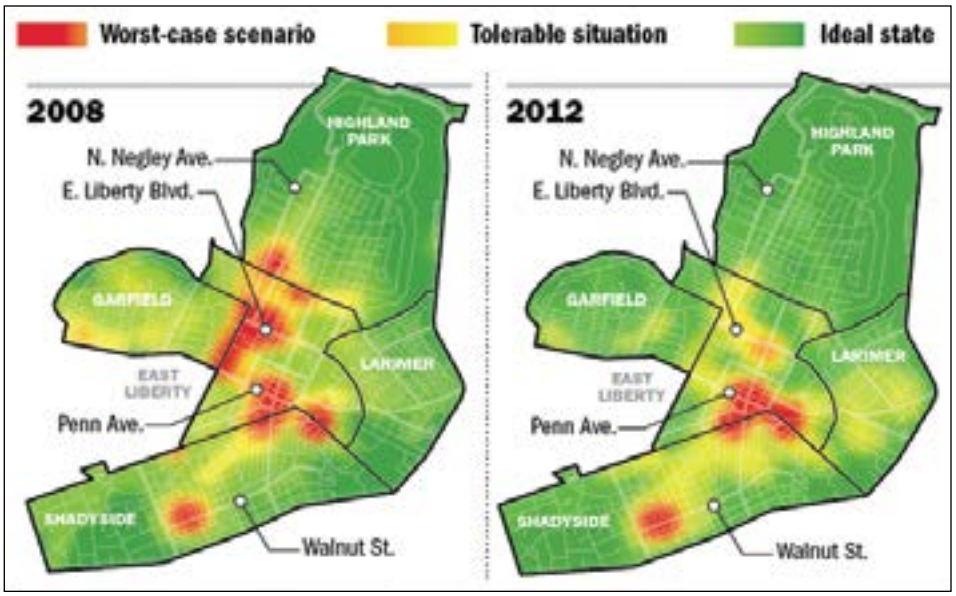
"I try to tell them, the story that we're trying to tell right now – it doesn't deserve beauty," Ivey says.

Ivey is often left with the same frustrated feeling his audience experiences. However, his films have opened up conversations within the neighborhood of East Liberty and also within the outside population.

"It's really important for the next generation who has to go over this all over again," Ivey says. "So it's more for history's sake."

East Liberty battles crime, negative spotlight

By Julian Routh



GRAPHIC BY PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

These maps, based on data from East Liberty Development, Inc., show the changing levels of crime in East Liberty from 2008 to 2012. In that period, crime declined in most parts of the neighborhood.

In the 1990s, every crime in the city of Pittsburgh happened in East Liberty.

At least that's what some people believed; and it was hard not to, especially when they would frequently hear television anchors read the grizzly details of violent crimes before signing off with, "Reporting live from East Liberty."

But that was only because the live reports were coming from outside of the city's Investigations Bureau and Zone 5 police station, which were both housed in the neighborhood.

"We had to call stations and tell them to not say, 'Live from East Liberty,' every time there was a rape in Pittsburgh," says Lori Moran, board president of the East Liberty Chamber of Commerce.

The community's attempts in ridding the news of the signoff represented the first of many battles to change the stigma of East Liberty; a stigma that has plagued community organizations and developers in their attempts to revitalize a once-booming area. Over the past decade, these organizations and developers, in collaboration with Zone 5 police, have worked tirelessly to change the perception, and the results have shown.

The perception of violence in East Liberty was at its worst in the late 1990s, even though the crime rate wasn't alarming. In 1999, there were 911 Part I crimes – including robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, murder, rape and larceny – in East Liberty.

According to a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* story in May 2000, criminology experts at the time believed a neighborhood would be considered a problem area if more than 6 percent of the city's total crime happened there. Crime in East Liberty amounted to approximately 4 percent.

But that didn't mean there weren't problems.

In the early 2000s, gang warfare was prominent in the neighborhood, according to former ELCOC director Paul Brecht.

"About ten years ago, you couldn't wear gang colors or things of that nature in certain areas," Brecht says. "East Liberty was safe, but only if you didn't wear those colors."

At the time, crime and gang activity were mostly concentrated in "hot spots," most of which were abandoned properties or slumlord, according to a 2013 crime data analysis report.

Many of the crimes occurred in high-rise public housing units, which were built in the 1950s and 60s to lure residents away from the suburbs.

"The high-rises, they were a war zone," Moran says. "When you have a 30-story apartment building of all low income people, after a while, if it's not managed properly, it goes downhill."

Down the hill the complexes went, and with them went the feeling of safety in East Liberty. The perception of danger in the slums masked the moderate crime rate, prompting the community to act.

The first action was taken by

East Liberty Development Inc., the largest development corporation in the city. The ELDI purchased more than 200 "hot spot" units and assigned new property managers to regulate conduct.

Community organizations also moved forward with plans outlined in a 1999 restoration report called A Vision for East Liberty, which called for traffic studies, tree plantings, bicycle plans and land use plans. It also proposed that East Liberty phase out the aging storefronts and bring in new tenants to attract shoppers.

"As you put good tenants in, the hoodlums standing out front aren't comfortable anymore," Moran says. "When you fix it up, keep it clean, put a trash can out there, they don't want to hang out in your alcove anymore. As we replace these nasty storefronts with newly decorated, well-lit storefronts, and we start filling them, the hoodlums go away."

When retail giants Home Depot and Whole Foods opened along North Highland and Centre avenues in the early 2000s, they paved the way for other developers to confidently invest in East Liberty. The influx of commercial development positively impacted the crime rate, Zone 5 Commander Timothy O'Connor says.

"We're trending down in crime in East Liberty," O'Connor says, "and that decline is due to the effort to revitalize the neighborhood. You no longer have abandoned buildings, properties or an absence of vitality."

Crime in East Liberty is steadily declining. From 1999 to 2008, there was a 46 percent drop in the total number of crimes committed in the neighborhood. Since 2010, total Part 1 offenses are down more than 17 percent, and the neighborhood actually has a lower number of crimes than Shadyside, which isn't perceived as a high-crime area.

It's still not entirely safe to walk outside in East Liberty at night, O'Connor says, especially after a disturbing murder on Chislett Street in early 2014. On Feb. 7, sisters Susan and Sarah Wolfe were found dead in their home. They were shot in the head.

But that shouldn't stop residents from feeling "relatively safe" in their neighborhood.

"Even though crime is trending down, there's always the potential," O'Connor says. "We still do have some street crimes, particularly cars being broken into overnight and some people who are robbed on the street later in the evening. It would be best to walk in a group and use vehicle transportation if possible."

Looking to the future, Moran says her organization is working with the community to develop a comprehensive system of surveillance cameras around crime-ridden areas in East Liberty. Also in the works is a strip of decorative lighting along Highland Avenue into Shadyside, funded by a $420,000 grant from the city.

The cameras and lights will symbolize yet another step forward in the war against a stigma of violence.

"It's been a long road," Moran says. "But it's really coming along. We want this to be a community for everyone."

PHOTO BY JULIAN ROUTH

This house, on the 700-block of Chislett Street in East Liberty, was the sight of the grisly murders of sisters Susan and Sarah Wolfe in early 2014. Allen Wade, 44, was charged with two counts of homicide in relation to their deaths. His trial was postponed in Nov. 2014, and still hasn't been rescheduled.

LGBTQ ministry preaches inclusivity, progress

COURTESY PHOTO

The LGBTQ ministry of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church marches in the 2014 Pittsburgh PrideFest.

By Kelsie Bianco

About a decade ago, Wil Forrest strode through the corridors of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church and settled into a pew. On his left sat a homeless man. On his right, a man in a dress.

Forrest, founder of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning ministry at the church, says that experience encapsulates the heart and soul of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church. With the addition of the LGBTQ ministry, the church has demonstrated its commitment to worship and prayer in ways that go beyond boundaries of race, class, ability, culture, age, gender and sexual identity.

Forrest, 43, started the LGBTQ ministry in 2013 because of the church's inclusivity, and because he had a desire to be a catalyst for change.

The ministry grew out of an already existing belief structure and practice.

"East Liberty Presbyterian is mid-hurdle over this issue and our community is one that wants to embrace God's love," Forrest says. "We believe that God's love is for everyone."

The ministry strives to spread awareness, and help members of the LGBTQ community in their struggle to be open with God.

"There have been generations of LGBTQ folks who have been told that they are awful and abominations, and just because we wave the wand and say, 'Oh, now we love you,' they're not going to be coming and knocking on our door," Forrest says.

Eric Rhodes, a member of the LGBTQ ministry, believes his spirituality helps him cope with challenges and sadness that he has faced throughout the years, rejection being the most difficult to endure.

"It is crucial that faith communities welcome and affirm people from every background," Rhodes says, a gleam of hope in his eyes. "Faith communities benefit from diversity and grow because of inclusion."

The stories told during the meeting are "the life blood of what pulls this group together." Forrest says.

"Some stories are heart-wrenching and some are hilarious, but they are what allow us to understand and grow with one another," he says.

Forrest's office, on the second floor of the church, is lined with pictures, gay pride flags and stickers, all exemplifying his passion for his community.

As he looks at the LGBTQ memorabilia on his bulletin board, he reflects on moments that have made the organization what it is today. From National Coming Out Day, to attending the Renaissance City Choirs, exposure has been key.

"I think the events are more for the people who are watching us to remind them that not every church is against us," Forrest says.

For Forrest, there are two defining facets that make this ministry effective and special, the first of which is the visibility of the group in the church.

"The other piece is what happens at the meetings," Forrest says. "That's the other win for me. I just feel really good each Saturday we meet."


CULTURE

Photo By Aaron Warnick

The Last Billboard project sits a top the former Walffle Shop in East Liberty. The project was created by artist and CMU professor Jon Rubin.

The Last Billboard: Expression on display

By Julie Pawlikowski

Steel frames. Hand-crafted letters. A 36-foot-long board. A spark of artistic expression. All of these things seem to float in the sky above the Livermore building in East Liberty. They come together to form a unique billboard that stretches beyond its function of advertisement. No companies are trying to catch the attention of consumers, no events are being promoted and no business's slogan is displayed for all to see.

Instead, messages, ideas and questions are displayed.

Some are funny: *intellect versus emotion / intellect wins / emotion starts crying*

Some are a mystery: *? / (323) 541 6361*

Another is touching: *the person standing / beside you, point at this / billboard, has brought you / here because it was too hard / to say "I am sorry" out loud.*

One is from an 11 year old girl: *questions for my new blog: / who invented tape, / how were feelings discovered, / when did "skinny" become / fashionable.*

Some are just a list: *photo / food / beauty / liquor / rx.*

Others make you think: *i wonder some days / if facebook isn't a broad / all encompassing / cry for help.*

The man behind the Last Billboard is Jon Rubin, an artist and professor in the art school at Carnegie Mellon University. What brought him to East Liberty was the desire for his students to create outside of the classroom. This desire led Rubin to create the Storefront Project. It was a class in which Rubin rented a storefront in a neighborhood where he and his students could create culture based on what was already present there.

"When I was looking for a storefront, I actually was driving around East Liberty and that space had been empty for three years, right on the corner," Rubin says. "And it was a really interesting area, it was next to the Shadow Lounge and the Ava Lounge which are very dynamic spaces, especially late at night, and I just felt like it already had a kind of a constituted community that assembled around there and that if we were on that corner we could … figure out a way of working with that community."

Thus the Waffle Shop was born. Located at South Highland and Baum, the Waffle Shop was a place

where people could eat and participate in a live talk show produced by Rubin and his students.

"Many customers who walked in could be a guest on the show and the restaurant was a way of coaxing in kind of a diverse set of the public and involving them in what was like a bizarre stream of consciousness talk show," Rubin says.

The advertising company that sponsored the billboard above the Waffle Shop building "had pulled out from the ad space up there and what was left was just a steel scaffolding," he says. "And I just thought, it seemed like a really great potential space to do something on." Together with friend and architect Pablo Garcia, he worked "to design a structure, a handmade letter system that could be put up on the billboard and changed, in a very clunky old fashioned model," the artist explains.

The billboard quickly became a thought bubble, featuring noteworthy quotes from the customers above the shop. It evolved into its own autonomous place when the Waffle Shop closed in 2012. Rubin used the funds from the Waffle Shop to help keep the billboard running. When the shop closed, he renamed it "The Last Billboard Project" and paid out of pocket until he received a grant from The Rita McGinley Fund, which is administered through the Pittsburgh Foundation.

And so the conversation continues. Now artists and everyday people from around the country can send their material to Rubin to be hung in the sky. Their words become something the people of East Liberty can look forward to and interpret in their own way. This interpretation is what first appealed to Rubin when he started the billboard: "I think of this space as just kind of a publishing space, a sort of curated exhibitionist publishing space in East Liberty for writers and artists and people who I think just have interesting things to say," he says.

With the billboard, Rubin can give life to the words of anyone who has a unique and interesting thought. Artist Matt Shain's work was displayed on the Last Billboard from January to March 2014. The complex functions and dynamics of billboards, along with an admiration for Rubin's work, attracted Shain to the project.

"the person standing / beside you, point at this / billboard, has brought you / here because it was too hard / to say 'I am sorry' out loud"

"It is strange and captivating how something so large as a billboard can be so easily ignored, but as soon as someone displays an unconventional message on one, it stands out and demands attention, which, ironically, is exactly what a billboard is supposed to do," Shain says.

photo / food / beauty / liquor / rx were the words Shain chose to display on the billboard. "I had always thought there was something kind of dumb and funny about those words that are displayed on the outsides of Walgreens/CVS/Rite-Aid type drug stores. As if those five things are all one really needs to get by, bare essentials," he explains.

Another group of artists who have had their work displayed on the billboard are Benjamin Kinsley, Jessica Langley and Jerstin Crosby. They created the Janks Archive, a collaborative project in which they investigate and collect insult humor, known as 'jank' to Alabama-native Crosby. Kinsley, Langley and Crosby all taught as adjunct professors in the art school at Carnegie Mellon University. There, they met Rubin and collaborated on projects together.

"We had been following the Last Billboard project, and we really love it, so when we were invited for the Pittsburgh Biennial we contacted Jon to see if we might be able to feature text from the Janks Archive during the month of September," Kinsley says. They chose the following insult/compliment from Belfast, Northern Ireland that reads: you're so ugly that / you should be in a / museum of modern art.

Without the billboard, there wouldn't be a way for artists and everyday people to share their thoughts, questions and art in the sky. Without their words, the people of East Liberty and Pittsburgh wouldn't be able to ponder the mysterious phrases and statements. But ultimately, without Jon Rubin, there would be no billboard, no art, and no magic. But as Rubin says, "It's not my words. They really are the words of other folks."

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

An artist at the Spinning Plate Artist Lofts prepares for a new exhibit. In addition to housing 37 apartments, the building has a first floor gallery.

Spinning Plate offers home, canvas for artists

By Zach Brendza

Spinning Plate Artist Lofts is a complex with apartments, but it's not an apartment complex. It's like saying Woodstock was a musical festival. Describing either with such conventional phrases cheapens their essence — they're worth more than that.

5720 Friendship Ave. has two doorways, one on Friendship that connects to the foyer, one on Baum Boulevard that transports you from gridlock to gallery. You can choose to exit or enter the 55,000 square foot former Chrysler dealership, but the majority frequently choose the latter. And seldom the former.

The wait list for Spinning Plate is six to eight months, although a resident can leave the complex with 30 days' notice — but that doesn't happen much. Once a person turns into a tenant, they don't leave, says property manager Jennifer DeCerb. The facility is comprised of 37 apartments. Like those who inhabit the living work spaces, each unit is unique, according to DeCerb, ranging from a one room 600 or 700 square foot studio to a 2,000 square foot three bedroom spread through three floors.

The complex is devised between three floors, the first floor sharing purpose between displaying work of non-residents and residents in the gallery and living quarters for those that do reside there. But while they each have their own looks and quirks, each floor is an extension of the first floor showroom, decorated with paintings, sculptures and the like.

The target tenant demographic are those with low income, with an "artist preference."

DeCerb says 95 to 99 percent of the occupants are from the art world. The artists' residence was started with a commitment to provide housing and workspace for artists in Pittsburgh and was "one of the first projects in the city that specifically targeted artists,"

according to Linda Metropolis, one of Spinning Plate's founders. Developed with low income housing tax credit, the facility is obligated to keep below 60 percent of the median area income.

"Right now, if [one person] moved in and made 27 or 28 thousand, they would make too much to qualify. People's income can move up when they live in, but must be considered low income when moving in," Metropolis says.

That program that keeps Spinning Plate's rent at a low rate is one of its largest assets. It keeps 16-year resident Richard Claraval around. The artist thinks his neighbors feels the same, as well.

"If we lost that, I would say almost all the residents would be gone. Our rent would go up three times, at least," Claraval said. "We have a great situation here."

Claraval was the first resident to sign up for Spinning Plate when it opened back in 1998. He had the lay of the loft: whatever one bedroom was to his liking. He settled on Apt. 208, a 24 x 20 space with 14-foot ceilings, five huge windows, a large studio and an L-shaped entryway. In his space, he creates sculptures, charcoal drawings and an array of paintings. A brief tour of the building will introduce you to Claraval, not by a formal meeting but his work which decorates much of Spinning Plate's quarter's, from his "The Prison of My Youth" sculpture in the foyer, to his wall-sized paintings on the second floor.

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

The Spinning Plate Artist Lofts reside on Friendship Avenue in East Liberty. The building houses 37 work spaces that double as apartments, in addition to a first floor gallery that showcases art.

But one of the biggest amenities for him isn't in his own personal space, it's the gallery. Claraval has been manager of Spinning Plate's galley and has at least one solo and one group show of his own in the space. When his art isn't center stage, someone else's is the focus.

"[The] gallery is becoming a pretty well-known spot" in Pittsburgh for art, Claraval says, having an exhibition booked every month, year-round. It's something that he and co-manager and resident Donnie Polmeroy work hard to keep running.

The hard work of many keeps the loft running and got it started. What was a $5 million project in the late '90s would be somewhere around $12 million today, according to Metropolis. The building wasn't expensive and no one wanted to be in East Liberty at the time, she said. When Whole Foods came to the neighborhood, they saw what Spinning Plate was doing. They took it as "a positive sign" that artists were in the neighborhood.

"Artists usually are recognized as being the first risk takers," Metropolis says. "If you find artists in the community, you can assume a positive future that's coming for that community."

As the artist loft continues to grow up, turning 17 later this year, the main goal for Spinning Plate is to continue its mission of providing a haven for those creating art in whatever way that might be.

"[We're going to] keep it operating and full," Metropolis says. "[We're] going to continue do exactly what we're doing."

Taizé service pushes boundaries of worship

By Jen Cardone

Silence.

It is so quiet that any slight movement, or even a cough, could easily interrupt worshipers as they meditate. A woman adjusts her scarf when it comes undone and her shuffling movement interrupts the silence like a clap of thunder. A man slightly twists his back and the wooden bench supporting him makes a loud crack that echoes throughout the chapel.

East Liberty Presbyterian Church has a one-hour Taizé prayer service every Wednesday at 7 p.m. The Taizé worship invites people of any denomination to gather in a close-knit community to develop spiritually through meditative prayer and sacred silence.

The atmosphere is quaint and introspective. The front of the chapel is decorated in six reddish amber curtains that form a point at the top and drape out and down to brush the floor. Two lone chairs sit off on the side, waiting for anointers. An icon of Jesus on the cross stands at the center with other religious icons surrounding it in picture frames. Candles dot the sanctuary and illuminate the front of the worship space.

In Taizé practice, icons represent the beauty of worship. They represent windows to see the Kingdom of God and symbolize the incarnation and coming of Christ to the world.

Rachel Luckenbill, who has attended the service for three years on-and-off, says she is overcome with peace when she sees the worship space.

"It facilitates visualizing God and creates immediacy," Luckenbill says. "I feel like I'm in the presence of Christ when I walk in and see the amber fabrics at the front, candles and iconography."

Since last year, the Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan has led the prayer service, which has been a part of the church for more than 20 years.

Callahan was a minister in small churches, but over time, she felt a desire to work with spiritual growth in the ministry. When she was asked to head Taizé after the previous minister retired, she was ecstatic.

"I was thrilled. It's something that I feel very strongly about," Callahan says. "I think it opens people up in a way that traditional worship really doesn't."

Taizé, as a community, was founded in the 1940s in the French village of Taizé as a men's organization and ministry. Brother Roger Schütz developed the style of worship, which includes melodic scripture readings or prayer that are chanted or sung repeatedly.

Schütz, a Swiss native, worked to unify different religions by forming prayer circles during World War II to seek peace.

Prior to his death, Schütz asked Brother Alois Löser to take his position as his health deteriorated. Löser still serves today and leads the community of brothers and worshippers around the world.

> ***"We try to give them some spiritual strength and make them know that God is with them and they can depend on God to help them through this."***

Today, in East Liberty, gospel hymns and chants fill the side chapel, echoing all the way from the cathedral peaks down to the marble floor. The songs fill the space after long silent pauses, which are used as opportunities to reflect.

Taizé music director Jennifer Gorske, who attends weekly, says she believes Taizé meshes with her spirituality and passion for music.

"What drew me in was it is music and spirituality mixed together," Gorske says. "I thought it was

PHOTO BY JEN CARDONE

Icons reside at the front of the Taizé prayer service. They represent the beauty of worship and serve as windows to see into the Kingdom of God.

perfect to practice music therapy."

Callahan says no two Taizé services are identical. Each has about eight different songs and readings spoken in different languages. Although songs are repeated, repetition is intentional because it develops the worship mantra.

"[The songs] become part of how you breathe," Callahan says. "When you've sung them enough times it becomes almost a part of the fiber of who you are and the words just kind of mingle in with the thoughts that are in your head."

Callahan, who recently returned from a trip to Taizé, says East Liberty puts its own stamp on the tradition.

"Ours is different because of the racially mixed congregation of East Liberty," Callahan says. "We often sing songs at the end that are good old-fashioned gospel songs."

Other than singing, some people choose to light candles or kneel on the carpet in front of the icons. Attendees can ask for a blessing or prayer and to be anointed.

Kay Shissler, 53, anoints Taizé worshippers. Her education taught her how to walk beside people during tough times.

"People come up with serious problems and they don't know what to do," Shissler says. "We don't try to solve the problems because we can't do it in five minutes. We try to give them some spiritual strength and make them know that God is with them and they can depend on God to help them through this."

Even though some attend the service consistently, Callahan says it is more common to see young people come on-and-off for several months.

"It is designed to be open to everyone," Callahan says. "No one will ask you why you weren't here."

Luckenbill is one of these occasional attendees. She also works with congregants at Upper Room Presbyterian Church in Squirrel Hill.

"It enriches the experience I have with my own church, and I will use some of the music we sing at Taizé [there]. It helps to create cross-cultural core values," Luckenbill says.

The Taizé service ends as a woman sways in a meditative dance at the front of the chapel. Her arms are spread apart and above her head, allowing the spirit to come to her in her dance. After being anointed, she hums and dances to the melody of "The Lord Is My Light."

Library branch symbolizes community revival

By Joey Sykes

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH
The Labs provide children with an opportunity to learn about art and technology in the Carnegie Library.

The East Liberty branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh has one distinct similarity as the neighborhood it is based in: a promising future.

Located at 130 S. Whitfield Street, the library has undergone a resurgence thanks to its new look, with translucent book shelves and additions like The Labs, an area for children to learn about art and technology from staff mentors.

Caralee Sommerer, the branch's Senior Children's librarian, has seen firsthand the rise of both the library and its neighborhood over the past 14 years.

"This is a great community to work in because we are probably the third or fourth busiest branch and the community is so diverse," Sommerer says. "There are so many different types of people [entering] through the doors.

Founded in 1905, the branch has undergone radical changes in both location and architecture. The original structure for the library was located on Station Street, close to the border of neighboring Larimer, and was around until 1964 before being lost to encroaching urban development.

It didn't take long before the second incarnation of the branch was founded in its current location. In 1968, officials broke ground broke on the library, and since then, it has been on the rise. Recently, from 2009 to 2010, renovations were done that brought a modern look to the library both on the outside and the interior.

Clerical Supervisor Anthony Harty, who has worked at the branch for more than seven years, remembers the renovations as a turning point in the library's history.

"We closed for 14 months back in 2009 and they basically gutted it and built it up from scratch. It's always an adventure, though," Harty says. "I've worked at the main and at some of the smaller libraries, but this one is nice because it's not too busy and it's not too quiet. Being small, it adds character."

"We lost the original building, which is probably a more historic facility," Sommerer adds. "It was closed because development occurred in East Liberty in the '60s, which changed and forced out a lot of people from their homes. This incarnation, however, is special because of the new look. It's kind of a symbol for the neighborhood and what it's becoming."

As the library is helping to get East Liberty back to its feet, the small parts that keep the branch moving can't be forgotten. Frantz believes each branch has done a fine job feeding their patrons the knowledge they crave, but that the East Liberty branch is something unique.

"[The workers are] very friendly, the information is very succinct and they address your particular question very well," Frantz says. "Even through the hardships the neighborhood has been through, they have stuck with it well."

The branch is something more than just a library. To Frantz, it's something special to both the patrons and the neighborhood.

"It's one of their jewels," Frantz says.

Barber shop owner blends customer appreciation with quality service

By Addison Smith

It's a Saturday afternoon and there's not an empty seat in Bat's Barber Shop, not in the waiting room nor in front of a barber. Owner and barber Kevin Andrews, a.k.a. Bat, is singing along to a Rihanna song blasting out of the speakers. Customers see friends outside and wave them in to say hello. Clearly, Bats Barber Shop is a community environment, and Bat is its spokesman.

Not one person walks into the shop that Bat doesn't recognize. He greets everyone who walks in by name and with a smile, no matter who is sitting in the barber chair in front of him. It's something Bat prides in himself and in his staff.

"Being a people person, you knock all the edges off at the door," Bat says. "You come in, you don't smile, we'll mess with you. We'll tell them 'you have to smile when you come in here,' things like that. We break the ice for them. Some people get scared coming in, especially single moms, they get kind of nervous in a shop full of men, but we break the ice with them early so when they come in the door, they feel comfortable. It's just communicating with them."

The shop has been open for 11-plus years in East Liberty with a consistent customer base and friendly barbers ready to cut hair, arch eyebrows or trim facial hair with all services under $20. However, it's not the services at the shop that draw people in, it's the warm sense of community conjured by Bat and his staff.

Inside everything is black and gold, and Bat will claim his blood matches the Pittsburgh-centric theme to anyone who will listen. Some members of the staff don Steelers shirts, Pirates shirts or Penguins shirts, including Bat, who is wearing a customized Steelers shirt with "BATS" embroidered on the front and on the back. He sees a customer wearing a signed shirt and begins to poke and prod her, saying how much he needs it. The customer doesn't back down and shrugs, saying it's hers. It's this type of exchange that is typical to the shop; an environment that is conducive to relaxing and talking.

The barbers all have the same friendly demeanor as their boss. There is

"Being a people person, you knock all the edges off at the door. [If] you don't smile, we'll mess with you. We'll tell them 'you have to smile when you come in."

not a customer who isn't greeted. There's not a goodbye that isn't exchanged. Handshakes and hugs are a common thing here at Bats Barber Shop, and it's because of how Bat picks his staff and expects them to act.

"I'm good with evaluating talent and character," Bat explains. "You have to be of high character to work for me, that's what I like. If you say you're going to do something, I need you to do it. If you say you're going to be somewhere at a certain time, I need you to be there ... I wouldn't tell them to do something I wouldn't do."

Two barbers, Horace Topeck Jr. and Tye Pritchare are taking advantage of a rare lull in customers and are sitting down, playing a game of chess in the back of the shop and bantering over what they enjoy about working at Bats Barber Shop and the shop's contribution to the East Liberty community.

"[Bats Barber Shop] brings a sense of respect where the youth is concerned," Pritchare explains. "The total experience is a respectful experience. The environment is not rowdy or ratchet, it's respectful for the elders and the youth, which I think is important ... That's what makes it so special. It gives everybody opportunity."

While contemplating his next move in the chess game, Topeck quickly looks up and adds, "There's a lot of diversity. It's networking, all different types of people. There's doctors, lawyers. Then you have the regular average person, children. It's a vey diverse environment too."

As Topeck and Pritchare are relaxing in the back, playing chess, Bat is still at work on six-year customer James Goings in the chair in front of him. The 83-year-old walked into the shop with his cane and waited patiently to sit in front of Bat. His gray hair is still on his head and needs to be cut roughly once a month. He and Bat quickly begin a conversation as soon as Goings sits down.

"[Bat] cuts my hair good," Goings says with a quick smile while Bat takes the razor to Goings's head. "He's the owner and he takes care of everything. If children come in, he tells them to sit down. 'Don't mess with the seat' or 'don't put your shoes in the seat'. There's no language. No bad language is being taught. He's good. I like that."

Outside the shop, Rachel Johnson is lounging in a chair, reading a book during her break. There's no music blasting outside, making it more peaceful. To her, Bats Barber Shop is related back to the community, but in a bigger way to shape the children of East Liberty.

"I believe it's everything that you would want a black barber shop to be," Johnson says, looking back at the shop as she speaks. "It has a core group of men that try to influence the young men in the environment. They have chess and debates and they encourage people to carry themselves a certain way. [These children] don't have to be a product of their environment, they don't have to be oppressed, they can come here and be men amongst men."

Photo By Aaron Warnick
Kevin Andrews, known affectionately as Bat, runs a barber shop in East Liberty.

Thomas West: From news briefs to boxer briefs

By Jen Cardone

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

Thomas West, co-owner of Trim Pittsburgh, worked in the television business for 15 years before following his lifelong dream to open his own store. Trim offers 27 different brands of men's underwear.

"I'm still a news junkie, but I just wanted to do something else."

These are the words of an old television producer who decided to follow his lifelong dream and open his own business, which just so happens to be a men's underwear store. Thomas West created his startup from scratch and chose the up-and-coming neighborhood of East Liberty to make it happen.

During his time at Lyndon State College in Vermont, West bounced between majors, but one thing stuck with him: sometimes, the best business people are the ones who don't go to school for business.

West was a television producer for 15 years at stations in Minneapolis, Columbus and Pittsburgh. One day, he simply decided to open his own store. He co-owns Trim Pittsburgh with his partner Adam Childers.

West has always liked underwear. He believes there is a pair for everyone and for everything. The name Trim was derived from a pair he wore one day. The pair had blue trim around the edges. He turned to Childers and said, "Why don't we just call it Trim?"

He smiles. His blue eyes sparkle and bring warmth to the shop while rain pours on the store window. West, now in his thirties, is wearing a burgundy sweater and dark jeans, faded at the thighs.

West says one reason he decided to sell underwear is that men are not typically catered to in this area like women are.

"There's fun underwear out there for guys, and I think part of the learning curve is trying to figure out how to let guys know there's all this underwear out there for them," he says. "It's not in their mind-frame right now."

Trim Pittsburgh offers 27 different brands. West believes it is important to shop locally, and that he provides an experience not offered online.

"You walk into here, you can feel the fabric. You walk into here and you can see things that maybe you wouldn't be able to see online because there are some underwear brands that only sell to boutiques," he says.

He laughs and says people call it a Victoria's Secret for men, but Victoria's Secret is different because it makes its own products.

West drums on the desk with his knuckles as he thinks back to his time in the television business.

"My time in television was fun. It was great. I did a lot of big stories," he says, "but at a certain point ... I wanted to do something else."

He recalls working during Y2K in Minneapolis, when everyone thought their computers would melt and planes would fall from the sky. From Sept. 11, 2001 to

the explosion of the space shuttle Columbia over Texas in 2003, West helped document turning points in history during his producing days.

At his most recent producing job at WTAE, he was in charge of the entire rundown for the evening newscast. He wrote the show like a book and told the reporters, anchors and news team what to do.

He was part of the coverage when three officers were shot in Stanton Heights, when the G-20 summit took over Pittsburgh and when there was a mass shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007.

WTAE anchor Michelle Wright worked with West while he produced the show. She says he was always plugged in to the heartbeat of Pittsburgh.

"He loves keeping up with the current events so any time I need a restaurant recommendation or am curious about a new art show or want to know a cool concert to attend, Tom is the person to ask," Wright says. "When he produced a newscast, he loved informing people of interesting things happening around Pittsburgh. It's so exciting that now he's actually a part of making things happen."

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

Trim Pittsburgh, on Baum Boulevard, offers men several types of "fun underwear," according to West.

Partner Childers calls West a man of multiple layers.

"You have the serious Tom side, you have the energetic Tom side, you have the family guy Tom side with his nephews and you have the business Tom side," Childers says. "You're lucky if you get to see him at all of them, which I am lucky enough to see."

"My time in television was fun. It was great. I did a lot of big stories, but at a certain point ... I wanted to do something else."

Childers said the day the store opened, it hosted two bachelorette parties. West dealt with tipsy girls while Childers waited on customers who weren't there to party. Because of West's experience in the television industry, he was able to multitask and deal with every customer at once.

West's childhood was one in the footsteps of a preacher's kid. He had to exemplify perfection because he was always under constant scrutiny. His father told him to watch his p's and q's, and it taught him self-discipline.

One of his role models is Rick Werner, the owner of Stone Pizzeria. West appreciates people who take a chance on their dreams because they inspire him to follow his desires. He often asks Werner for advice because he, too, started his own business.

"You find the best advice from the most unexpected people. I feel like you always meet someone for a reason," West says.

Theater director ushers East Liberty into future

By Talia Kirkland

If it weren't for the electric blue neon sign, it would be entirely possible that someone could amble past the Kelly Strayhorn Theater without a second glance. But that attention-grabbing sign is there and the residence it adorns does deserve a closer look.

Named for East Liberty performing arts great Gene Kelly and Homewood composer Billy Strayhorn, the Kelly Strayhorn Theater aims to preserve and nurture Pittsburgh's cultural excellence.

On the front-line of that charge is Janera Solomon, executive director of the theater. Solomon has made her life's work to reclaim East Liberty's lost culture.

"We still want to be the place that is recognizable as East Liberty. The place that helps reconnect people to the East Liberty of the past and the East Liberty of the future, and what that means, to us, is being a place that reflects the diversity of the community," Solomon says.

On the edge of East Liberty's shopping district, the theater shares the distinct 20th century architecture that characterizes the neighborhood. However, instead of repurposing the aged property for apartments, shops or a restaurant, the Kelly Strayhorn is a reincarnation of the structure's old host, the Regent Theater.

Passing under the building's facade is like passing into another time. The lights and adornments that populate the entry fade the world beyond the nearby sidewalk and bring the Kelly Strayhorn's patrons back several decades. Back to a time when going to theater was something significant to the community and not just a place for two people to spend too much money on popcorn and the fourth installment of a Michael Bay movie franchise.

COURTESY PHOTO
Janera Solomon, executive director of the Kelly Strayhorn Theater, is from South America.

During Solomon's six years with the Kelly Strayhorn Theater the neighborhood of East Liberty has grown and changed. "Keeping up with the times" – as Solomon puts it – is essential to the prosperity of the community. The theater's operating budget has grown from approximately $300,000 to more than $1 million. Roughly 20,000 people attend events there each year. The organization has tripled its programming and now supports a robust co-producing program with an additional venue, Alloy Studios. The organization's activities include rehearsals, community meetings, luncheons, workshops, master classes and family/youth activities.

Sixty percent of the theater's audience and participants are residents of the East End. As executive director, Solomon finds that the mixture of class, educational background, race, sexual orientation and nationality that she observes in her attendees is encouraging. The Kelly Strayhorn Theater is truly a cultural hub.

"We've built our program on the foundation that having art in your life every day is possible, you don't need a special occasion to go to the theater," Solomon explains. The organization strives to be the place in the neighborhood where people want to come to everyday because they feel welcomed.

Moving to the United States from Guyana, South America as a young girl, Solomon would discover her passion for art through the lens of an old camera. For her, art knew no color, class or creed.

Around the age of nine, Solomon began questioning the world around her. She can vividly recall one of her first experiences at a museum in the United States.

"Oh I must have gone on a school field trip, and I can remember staring at the artwork,

PHOTO BY JESSICA NATH

The Kelly Strayhorn Theater, formerly known as the Regent Theatre, has been a staple in the East Liberty community for more than 100 years.

and thinking I don't see any black works of art, or even artwork done by a black artist," she says.

Solomon, who began playing the steel drum when she was big enough to hold a mallet, told her father, a steel drum maker and artist, about her museum experience. "You know what he told me? He told me to make some artwork of my own," Solomon says with a huge grin.

At the time she had never even attempted to draw let alone create what she considered art, but the very next day her father brought home an old camera from the thrift store. It was in that moment that she found her inner passion and, more importantly, her drive. Solomon believes that everyone deserves that moment.

"My parents taught me like Frederick Douglass' famous quote, 'If there is no struggle there is no progress,'" she says.

A mother of four, she credits her thirst for artistic expression to her parents. "They came to the United States with no money, and four young girls," explains Solomon. Being the daughter of immigrants she was taught to never allow obstacles stand in the way of her dreams.

East Liberty faces a number of challenges, but Solomon is confident that despite growing educational and economical gaps, there still remains a sense of hope. "I personally believe that it is when you are at your worst that you need art the most."

Solomon and theater members like Londen Malloy are aware that not everyone is fortunate enough to have their artistic impulses nurtured.

"I get people all the time who can't afford to attend one of our productions, and if they come to us and let us know we are more than willing to give them a ticket, or work something out where they too can participate in our activities," Malloy says.

Malloy and Solomon agree that the Kelly Strayhorn benefits from the rich artistic community in the East End. "We have events going on all the time at both the theater and the Alloy studios. We have an entire showcase dedicated to local artists," Malloy says.

The Kelly Strahorn is also committed to fostering the work of returning artists as they grow.

"What we are doing is making people feel good about themselves — letting them know that they are worth the very best," Solomon says.

Jasiri X: Freeing minds one rhyme at a time

By Robert Loveless

COURTESY PHOTO
Jasiri X performs at the Pittsburgh Steelers's annual charity fundraiser fashion show in 2014.

Emcee and activist Jasiri X says there is almost no support for hip-hop in East Liberty, but that hasn't stopped him from becoming one of the most popular and important rappers in Pittsburgh.

The 32 year-old rapper, who has lived in East Liberty since 2007, produces music that examines social issues, which is especially important in a time when there is growing distrust between police and the black community.

"There's not enough people making music about social justice issues, things that I feel affect people on a day to day basis," Jasiri X says. "I feel like that's where I come in, as an artist that speaks to these issues, around social justice issues like police brutality, mass incarceration, things that are affecting us on a day to day basis."

Jasiri X released his first song in 2007 in response to a 2006 incident in Jena, Louisiana, where six black teenagers were convicted of assaulting a white teen. The song, called "Free the Jena Six," addressed the Jena Six movement that resulted, which believed that the six teenagers were charged excessively for their crimes.

This was when Jasiri X realized that people wanted to hear socially conscious music. To follow up on the success of the song, he released a mixtape titled "I Got That X," and then another single called "Enough's Enough," which shed light on the 2006 shooting of a black man, Sean Bell, and his two friends by New York City police.

"Enough's Enough" was featured on WORLDSTARHIPHOP and led to Jasiri X appearing on BET Rap City. Despite the newfound fame, Jasiri X worried that he wasn't releasing music frequently enough. One of his influences, Crooked I of the hip-hop group Slaughterhouse, was releasing a different freestyle rap every week.

"I said 'Man, that's a great idea. I want to do something like that but I want to do music with a message.' So I said 'You know what? I can rap the news, like every week I can rap the news," Jasiri X remembers.

That's when "This Week with Jasiri X" came to life on YouTube. Each week, the artist produced a two-minute video in which he chose a different topic to rap about, and it certainly wasn't easy. His wife, Celeste, remembers "a lot of sleepless nights."

"It was very, very hectic," Jasiri X recalls. "A lot of times Sunday night I'd be up all night editing the video and then go into work Monday."

In 2010, the rapper released the song, "What If The Tea party Was Black?," which garnered national attention and more than 300,000 views on YouTube.

"That's when I think people started to take me more serious-

ly as an artist," he remembers. "And when I did that song … one of the producers I was working with—his name was Rel!g!on—had this connection to the co-owner of Body Works Entertainment. He hit me up and said, 'Hey, let's do an album.'"

That album, Ascension, was released in March 2013 and shifted away from the rapper's usual socially conscious music. Jasiri X wanted the album to have a theme and focused more on aspiration rather than politics.

"At the time, I just went through a darker time in my personal life, so I started writing my way out of that. Ascension to me represented me coming out of darkness into light," he reveals. "I always say if hip-hop is dead, then where does it go? So we're taking hip hop up spiritually and lyrically."

The activism in his music has caught the eye of several people outside of the hip-hop industry. Norman Conti, a professor at Duquesne University, invited Jasiri X and other artists and activists to perform on campus in October 2014.

Conti says Jasiri X is engaging with the Pittsburgh community and that messages in his music are appealing to young adults.

"It was a chance for our students to see issues of race or justice from a different perspective and it's equally as important to hear it in the music that they're familiar with: modern rap music," Conti says.

Other supporters of Jasiri X and his music include the employees of the Kelly Strayhorn Theater in East Liberty, where Jasiri X performs with his hip-hop group, 1Hood. Jasiri X says the theater is one of the few places left in his neighborhood that supports social justice rap music.

Courtesy Photo

The 32 year-old rapper speaks at a rally for Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York in 2014.

"Outside of the theater, I don't really see any real support happening for hip-hop artists in East Liberty," Jasiri X says. "In fact, quite the opposite."

Jasiri X cited the 2013 closing of The Shadow Lounge, a former bar and music performance space in East Liberty, as the end of support for hip-hop in the area.

"Hip-hop had a home in East Liberty when the Shadow Lounge was here," Jasiri X said. "It was a place where artists could meet, perform and build. Hip-hop was evicted in East Liberty with new developments that do not cater to our demographic."

While it seems like the East Liberty resident has already accomplished much, he doesn't appear to have plans of slowing down anytime soon. Jasiri X is currently working on two projects — a politically focused record titled P.O.W.E.R. (People Oppressed Will Eventually Rise) and another album that is still socially conscious, but also fun.

"If it wasn't for social media, I wouldn't have a career," Jasiri X says. "The cool thing about the internet is, what do you want to learn? It's there. Get involved. Educate yourself about the issues you want to get involved in. This is the time, this is the get off the couch time."

Additional reporting by Julian Routh and Kaye Burnet.

Yates heals East Liberty with unique methods

By Kelsie Bianco

Dana Harris Yates is truly a guru in the art of healing. Dana, 49, owns Cultural Oasis, a shop on Sheridan Square that offers therapies for people with physical ailments including arthritis and multiple sclerosis. The store, which opened seven years ago, is one of the only places in Pittsburgh that uses reflexology, compression therapy and homeopathic treatments.

But people don't just come to the store for treatment; it is also a place to talk, given Dana's motherly nature.

"My shop can often be seen as a meeting place for young and old people throughout the community," she says.

As Dana takes a moment to look around her store, a man enters seeking advice and attention. She looks at him with soulful eyes and says, "What can I do for you, baby?"

Dana proudly scans the shop and tells the stories of unique products that were made by her. "That's what makes me exclusive and sets me apart," Yates says.

Dana, of Native American and African descent, was born and raised in Lincoln, Larimer, Homewood and East Liberty – the neighborhood she now calls home.

With culture written all over her wardrobe, from her bandana to her beaded necklace, Dana radiates heritage and tradition. She explains what her job entails with a serious, yet captivating tone: "From a cultural and ancestral perspective we use nature in a different way than people view nutrition." The treatments focus on nature, where people view what vitamins and minerals do in relationship to the types of food they eat.

COURTESY PHOTO
Dana Harris Yates, owner of Cultural Oasis, was taught the art of natural healing at a young age.

From a young age, Dana was taught the art of healing with fruits and herbs by her grandmother. "When I first realized that people actually went to the doctor, I was about 16 years old," she says. "I mean, that's the way things were with us. I knew how to take care of myself with natural remedies because of my grandmother's teachings."

Madea, Dana's grandmother, taught Dana a lot of what she knows by finding lessons in nature. "She was a wonderful, brilliant, passionate woman who I have always looked up to," Dana remembers.

Dana also recalls growing up in East Liberty. She remembers a close-knit community of churches, playgrounds and "Mom and Pop" stores. A memory of fruit trees resonates in her mind.

"I can remember going from one house to another with the other neighborhood children and picking our fruit off these delicious fruit trees and that's what we ate," she says. With so many resources in East Liberty, Dana felt like she had everything she needed.

Although Dana does believe that a doctor is needed in certain circumstances, she believes natural healing has much to offer.

"Things come full circle. All this information from my culture's perspective that we took for granted is now being used in a purposeful way and being reintroduced to the society at large," Yates says with conviction.

Although "Natritional Healing" is important to her, it isn't the only thing that makes Dana who she is. Aside from being a loving wife, mother of six, having a master's degree in psychology and owning a store, Dana was once a rap artist under the name "Paradise Grey" and, later, "Jene-sis."

"We rapped about meaningful things that we believed in, not that stuff you hear today," she remembers.

Dana has taken several different paths in her life, all of which led her back to her roots at the doorstep of the Cultural Oasis in East Liberty.

HOME

From Montana plains to Penn Avenue: Great Harvest puts fresh bread on table

Photo By Aaron Warnick
Tom Katsafanas owns the Pittsburgh location of Great Harvest Bread Company.

By Julie Pawlikowski

It begins in Montana and ends in Pittsburgh. The wheat is harvested from the flowing plains of Montana where it is ground into fresh flour, shipped across the country to Pittsburgh and then baked into bread at 6401 Penn Avenue in East Liberty.

It is there that the Great Harvest Bread Company proudly stands. Owned by Tom Katsafanas and his wife Erin, it is the only Pittsburgh location of the Dillon, Montana-based Great Harvest Bread Company franchise. According to the company's website, its philosophy is "about customer experience and the promise of phenomenal tasting products made with freshly-milled whole grain and pure and simple ingredients." And that's just what you'll find when you enter the bakery.

There is a sense of wellness in the air that can be felt from your first step inside the building. Familiar tunes mix with catchy alternative music, and hanging spherical lights give the shop a sophisticated feel. The walls are complimentary shades of purple and green and artwork produced by young children and professional artists adorn them. The nose is confused—but in a good way. It can't tell if the aroma wafting from the kitchen is sweet like cinnamon or tart like yeast. In the end, the nose just knows that something smells good. Though the space may seem small, it is designed cleverly: a low wall separates the ordering area from the sitting space and patrons can either sit at it or at the tables along the big windows.

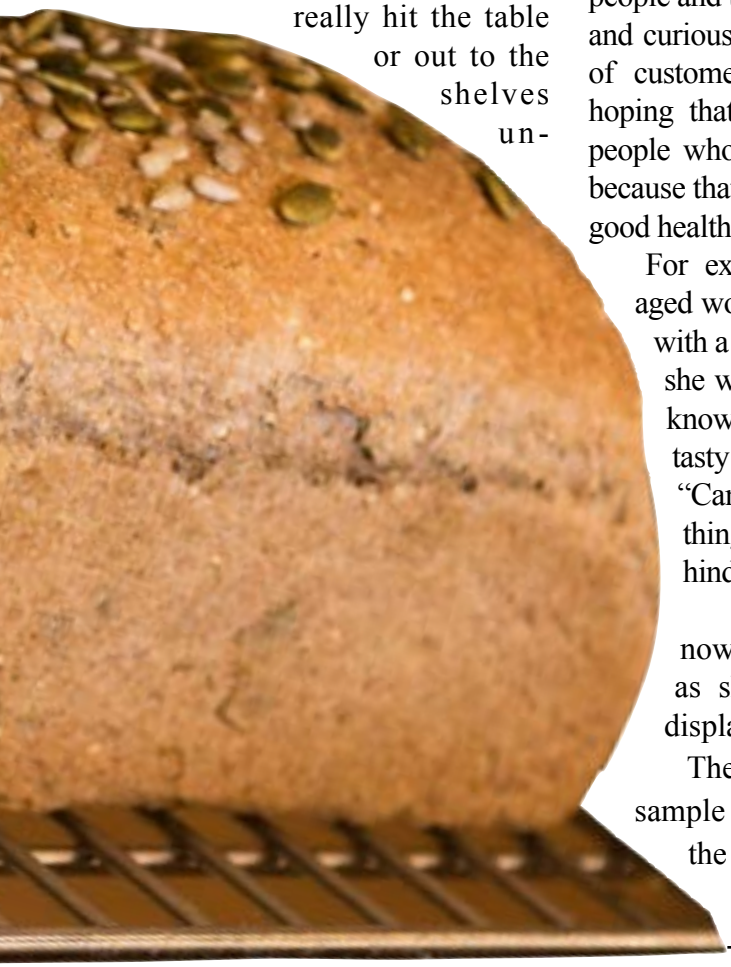
As you approach the counter to read the menu, you might be able to catch a glimpse of the man behind the operation, Tom Katsafanas, as he bakes or works in his office. Tom grew up in East Liberty before moving to New England where he worked for an ad agency. After looking at buildings in Mount Lebanon, Squirrel Hill and Lawrenceville, Tom settled on East Liberty as the site for his store. His decision was based on East Liberty's redevelopment, its growth and its energy: "The changes that are occurring in this market with the growth potential, with the opening of the East Liberty streets, it just looked like a win-win for anybody who wants to establish a business here," he says.

Many factors drew him to the Great Harvest Bread Company. "I actually like the concept of the franchise. It's a freedom franchise. You can kind of do whatever you want to do with your operation; you're not restricted in any way." For example, some franchises require stores to look and run the same so that you could be in any city in the U.S. With the Great Harvest franchise, however, Tom has the ability to style the store

to his taste and sell products he's proud of.

The health consciousness of Great Harvest and its attention to real foods also influenced Tom and Erin to buy the franchise. According to their website, greatharvestpittsburgh.com, Tom and Erin "decided that we should share the Great Harvest experience with Pittsburgh, an awesome city with a growing food scene and a focus on fresh, locally made food." While living in Manchester, CT, they bought bread from Great Harvest and when they learned that it was a franchise, they thought, "Why not? Let's buy a franchise," says Tom.

"From start to finish, it's about a five-hour process," says Tom about making the bread. "We start around a quarter to five in the morning and the bread doesn't really hit the table or out to the shelves until 10, 10:30." The long process to ensure the quality of the bread doesn't stop at the end of the day: "We donate all our product that we have left over to a variety of different charities, church groups and so forth," says Tom. "We find that giving back to the community helps a lot."



East Liberty's community is a varied one. According to Tom, his customers are a mix of health conscious people and those who are just hungry and curious. "We get a wide variety of customers," Tom says. "We're hoping that we do attract a lot of people who do want to eat healthy because that's what our focus is on, a good healthy all-natural food."

For example, when a middle-aged woman walks into the store with a puzzled look on her face, she walks away with a greater knowledge about bread and a tasty sample.

"Can I help you with anything?" asks the worker behind the cash register.

"I'm just looking, for now," mumbles the woman as she eyes the menu and display shelves.

The worker offers her a free sample and after going through the list of different breads, the woman selects the Dakota — a honey wheat dough mixed with sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and sesame seeds. The woman leaves the shop, munching on the bread slice and carrying a menu in her hand.

Tom hopes to reach more of these people by meeting with the East Liberty co-op where he will do a couple of slicing events. Another marketing move Tom made was dropping a basket of bread samples off at the Belmont Market where Tom hopes to someday sell bread at.

"I actually enjoy the whole process of running my own business and making a product that I'm proud to serve to people. I really enjoy that, I think it's fun," Tom says. His products are what give the Great Harvest Bread Company in East Liberty its appeal and character. If the store could be personified, it'd be a combination of that super health nut friend you had in college that always pushed you to exercise more and eat right and your grandmother whose recipes and meals made your mouth water just thinking about them. It's a place any person, regardless of age or gender, can go to get a reasonably priced and wholesome meal.

Photo By Fred Blauth

At 130 South Highland Avenue in East Liberty, Casa Rasta combines the many flavors of Mexican and Caribbean cuisine in a uniquely rich environment.

Casta Rasta serves a taste of funky fusion

By Robert Loveless

Enter Casa Rasta and you immediately notice the cozy lighting and bright red walls with palm tree siding. The walls are lined with potted palm trees and Mexican/Caribbean trinkets. Green, red and yellow fluorescent bulbs light up various portions of the restaurant and the music toggles between reggae and Latin. Sahaar Turner, the friendly hostess, stands behind the desk in the back with a wide and welcoming smile. Sit wherever you'd like.

Casa Rasta gives off a warm, tropical vibe that greatly contrasts with the brisk winter weather outside. A man with waist-length dreadlocks tied back with a navy, skull-decorated bandana walks out of the kitchen.

"Hello, Chad," he says to a patron and waves, revealing a black tattoo that peeks out from beneath the cuff of his green sleeve and extends down his forearm. This is Antonio Fraga, the chef and owner of the Mexican/Caribbean fusion restaurant.

Fraga opened Casa Rasta on a whim.

"I had always had the ambition for many years to open my own space so I can do my own cooking," he explains. "Working for other people is a service. You cannot do what you like to do. So one day, I don't know if I was tired or if I was prepared for it, but the anxiety just took over and I was like, 'Okay, I'm gonna do it.'"

Fraga opened his first Casa Rasta location three years ago in Beechview and expanded to East Liberty in September. However, his journey to becoming a restaurant owner was not as simple as enrolling in culinary school.

Born and raised in Mexico City, Fraga enjoyed his mother's traditional Mexican cooking as well as various foods from the northern and southern regions. By age 14, he was supporting himself and moved to Bela Cruz on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico to pursue an education—to

become a doctor.

"It was very hard. I've been on my own since I was 14. I didn't have the economical support to actually keep going with my studies," he recalls. "So the cooking has been a survival thing for me. See I needed to cook my own meals. It's what kind of pushed me to getting a little more skill."

While Fraga lived in Bela Cruz, he observed the cooking style of the Caribbean and Rasta cultures, which incorporated various fruits to achieve a sweeter cuisine. After moving around the country and marrying his wife, Fraga ended up in Pittsburgh. When the time came to open his own restaurant, he wanted to fuse the traditional Mexican food he knew as a child with the Caribbean influence he experienced in Bela Cruz.

"I put what I have learned from the Caribbean side into my mom's cooking," Fraga explains. "I mix the fruit side with the spicy." The residents of East Liberty seem to be responding pretty positively to it.

"It's different, it's not your typical restaurant. I think they got pretty creative about it," Sherra Burley says.

Diner Chad Elish, a former employee at Casa Rasta's Beechview location, agrees about the creative environment.

"I like the atmosphere here. It's really, really cool. The food is phenomenal. I think they've upped what they had since I worked there."

"And there's more options," his companion, Jenn Hyland adds. She also thinks that it's "really cool" that the restaurant combines Mexican and Caribbean food because they're her two favorites.

PHOTO BY FRED BLAUTH

A Caribbean plant sits against a wall in Casa Rasta, where vibrant colors are abundant throughout.

Casa Rasta also provides more than just a unique dining experience – it really tries to promote its fusion of cultures in East Liberty.

"We'll have music on Thursdays. We'll have a reggae band or a Latin band and this past Thursday it was so dope. There were families that came and they got up and danced. There was an old couple that was dancing together and have been together for like 40, 50 something years," Sahaar Turner recalls. "We're about to start doing open mic nights for all artists, writers, people who are trying to find a platform to get exposure. We are welcoming that type of crowd in here."

While Casa Rasta offers a unique cultural blend, some compare it to Patron Mexican Grill across the street. However, Turner feels Casa Rasta is more intimate, which helps the restaurant to stand out from its rival.

"It's healthy competition. Pow," she laughs. "I feel like this place is a cool place for the whole family. It's a nice blend between the city and the culture because I know they're bringing a lot of cultural arts back to the city."

Whether it's the fusion of two cuisines, the rich environment or the hospitable staff, diners seem to be enjoying one of the newest restaurants in East Liberty, and Fraga has taken notice of how customers are responding. "The more people that come, the more we see them next week."

Photo By Jessica Nath

Social co-owner Gregg Caliguiri poses for a photo in Bakery Square. The 45 year-old also owns Walnut Grill, Walnut Grove and Shady Grove.

Photo By Julian Routh

Social features a number of specialty beers from seasonal kegs. The restaurant appeals to the millennial generation that works in the Square.

Social graces vibrant Bakery Square scene

By Jessica Nath

After a long day of computing vector numbers at TechShop Pittsburgh or working in the Google offices, there's nothing better than grabbing a drink at Social in Bakery Square. Wedged in a corner between a coffee shop and Google, the restaurant embodies everything the millennial generation stands for.

Collages of posters plaster the entrance, inviting customers to the next concert or to take their first Lyft ride for free. The rectangular bar inside takes center stage with four television screens – all displaying different channels, all showcasing sports. Taylor Swift blares through the speakers overhead, sure to be followed by another upbeat pop ballad. USB plugs line the underside of the bar's rusted-red granite counter, and the tops of the menus are lined with "Conversation Starters," many of which revolve around social media.

Gregg Caliguiri, one of the partners who own the restaurant, says the social media theme was partially influenced by the Google offices.

"Being 45, I don't totally understand it to be totally honest – I don't really get that involved with it ... I hate to love it to a certain point," Caliguiri admits. "But we knew that would be such a great name to take advantage of – there's a double entendre there – it definitely speaks to social media."

Because of this, it's reasonable to assume that the restaurant aims to attract the generation obsessed with "selfies" and Instagramming their food before eating it. But as the dinner rush pours in, it's clear that the significance of the name "Social" also lies in the gathering of people of all ages. A family with a little boy no older than five fills a booth near the entrance, and seated in front of the Ping-Pong table outside, a group of co-workers chit-chat over drinks. They work at Management Science Associates just down Penn Avenue.

"This is where we go pretty much when there is any work events – anytime there is a happy hour," Katrina Van Meer says, a bourbon in hand.

"Someone got promoted, someone's leaving, someone started," Michelle Schivins adds

with her drink of choice, a Miller Lite, sitting in front of her. "Because we all work down there, it's convenient for everybody."

Today they are celebrating Van Meer's promotion, but Schivins says other days she is lured to Social by the food.

"The pizzas are really good, they have different gourmet pizzas, kind of off the wall but they're really good," she says.

Dishes such as "pierogi pizza" and "mushroom bianca pizza" fill up the restaurant's menu, not leaving much space for the typical "pepperoni" or "extra cheese" pies.

"We put a lot of care into the dough, sitting for three days, it allows the gluten to relax, so it stretches very nice, and it has a very nice chew to it," executive chef Jared Lordon says.

Lordon works behind the scenes in the kitchen, a place he says is hot and loud.

"You hear all the dishes clattering, meat sizzling, mushrooms are sautéing," he says. "So there's a lot of noise, and there's a lot of confusion."

Lordon's job requires him to organize that confusion. He says it entails meticulous tasks such as making sure the peppers are always chopped exactly the same for each dish as well as making sure the workers don't get too heated.

"The kitchen is one of the few places I think where you have male, female, black, white, brown, yellow, everything, gay, straight," Lordon says. "Everybody is sort of just thrown in there, and it is very interesting and difficult sometimes to get everybody to work together."

It appears as if the servers outside the kitchen's black swinging doors have mastered this. Wearing grey or black shirts declaring them "Social Workers" and "Social Drinkers," they buzz around the restaurant, filling each customer's empty glass or carrying out the dishes.

Caliguiri says that's exactly what he wants for his customers.

> ***"I want people to get really great, attentive service, but not from an assuming or snobby attitude, but someone who's comfortable."***

"I want people to get really great, attentive service, but not from an assuming or snobby attitude, but someone who's comfortable and makes them at ease, too," he says. "And yet at the same time, the level of service is far and away exceeding their expectations."

He says that goes for the food, too, which he admits can be deceiving.

"You walk into an atmosphere like this, and you immediately think bar food, but once you see the type of plate we're using and silverware we're using, and even the look of the restaurant in terms of its atmosphere, you think 'oh it's not just bar food' and you get to taste things and you think 'definitely not.'"

Social opened in July 2013, but it's far from Caliguiri's first venture into the restaurant business. The Pittsburgh native opened his first restaurant, the Pittsburgh Deli Company, in Shadyside in 1993. He and his business partners have since then opened Walnut Grill, Walnut Grove and Shady Grove.

Though his hair and beard are flecked with white and dark grey, his striped Puma hoodie, faded blue jeans and tinted glasses give him the appearance of someone just starting in the restaurant business instead of already being in it for more than 20 years.

"He's a very unique individual to work for … he's exciting to work with," Lordon says. "We sort of feed off of each other."

Lordon says Caliguiri's energy is one of his favorite parts about working at Social. As for his other favorite part?

"At the end of the day I know that what we're doing is right so to say," he says. "The way we're doing it and how we're doing it and what we're doing I think is very right, and it feels right to me."

Photo By Addison Smith

At 344 Sheridan Avenue, the Farmers' Market Cooperative in East Liberty is Pittsburgh's only year-round farmers' market. The cooperative opened in 1941.

From farm to table: Market offers fresh food

By Addison Smith

It's a Saturday in East Liberty and people are stepping inside a pale yellow brick building, shaking the rain off from their jackets and closing their umbrellas. Once inside, they're greeted by vendors and fluorescent lighting. This is the Farmers' Market Cooperative of East Liberty, and it is bustling.

Once inside, safe from the terrible, frigid and wet weather, customers are greeted by piles of apples, a meat stand, wine and stacks of vegetables. Even around 10 a.m., when the market has been open for five hours, there's plenty of options for the wandering eye and food connoisseur.

Directly inside the entrance behind the doors are piles upon piles of apples. Shining and a perfect mix of yellow and red, the apples come from Kistaco Farms, run by Tim Hileman, a third-generation farmer. His white crew neck t-shirt is tucked into faded blue jeans, he's wearing a baseball cap over thinning sandy brown hair and his eyes scream just how tired he is, but he's still working.

He and his family arrive at the market around 5 a.m. every Saturday, right when the cooperative is set to open. They unload their signature apples and apple cider as well as a selection of other fruits and vegetables. Kistaco Farms has been coming to the Farmers' Market Cooperative of East Liberty since 1968, 27 years after it opened in 1941.

"[The market] brings local food. It's actually a nice meeting place, we used to have people come in and run into people they haven't seen for a while," Hileman explains. "They stay in, they visit. It's just a nice gathering place for a Saturday morning."

For 10 a.m. on a Saturday, the market seems to be in full swing. Not one vendor is without a customer in front of his or her stand. According to Hileman, the constant buzz hasn't always been a part of the market. His stand is busiest in the fall, he explains, because apples and apple cider are an autumn staple, but the market itself is always in a flux.

"[We're doing] pretty well,"

Hileman says with a shrug. "We have ups and downs, you know. Back when I was a kid in the '70s, this really was a busy place. Through the '80s and '90s it fell off a little bit; I think primarily because of the neighborhood.

"You know, the neighborhood had a down cycle, the Sears Building was here just sitting empty," Hileman continues, looking at the door. "There just weren't a lot of people coming into this area. They weren't making an extra trip to come to the farmers' market. Since Home Depot opened up [in 2001], it's been a lot better."

PHOTO BY ADDISON SMITH
Inside the market, customers are greeted by several stands of locally grown meat and fresh produce.

To the left of the piles of apples is a refrigerated case of glass filled with different meats. Behind the counter stands Valarie Kennedy, wearing a faded Duquesne University sweatshirt. The red fabric is no longer bright, but Kennedy makes up for that with her bubbly personality, stopping to talk about the Kennedy Meat Stand while bossing her son, Jacob Kennedy, who strikingly resembles her with the same blonde hair, round face, easy smile and blue eyes. She fumbles with her hands and rubs them down her sweatshirt.

"Some of the people who help us at the stand actually had grandparents who shopped here."

"With the USDA regulations and things that have changed over the years, the Kennedy Meat Stand is a fully USDA-inspected meat facility," Kennedy explains. "We sell to private individuals and families, as well as commercial restaurants and vendors."

The Kennedy family has been in the cooperative for five generations and they get to the market at around 3:30 a.m. Saturday mornings to begin to prepare for the crazy bustling day ahead. Even six and a half hours after unloading, the meat stand and those working behind it are incredibly busy. According to Kennedy, that's the norm and the family manages "to sell quite a bit".

"There are a level of regular customers who sustain the market, especially our meat stand," Kennedy says, wiping her hands on her sweatshirt. "We have people that have been here multi-generations, we have three generation customers, right now actually. Some of the people who help us at the stand actually had grandparents who shopped here ... I'll tell you, I have seen people who have come straight off an airplane who have been told to come to the market ... I've probably had about 10 to 20 new customers today alone."

As the city's only year-round farmers' market, the cold and rainy day isn't abnormal for customers. They bustle in and out, keeping the Farmers' Market Cooperative of East Liberty busy and lively in a neighborhood that is finally back in bloom. When East Liberty thrives, the cooperative thrives.

Asian kitchen expands East Liberty's palate

By Yen-Mei Lin

On 5996 Center Avenue sits an elegant, loft like restaurant that brings a taste of Asian cuisine to the East Liberty community.

Plum Pan Asian Kitchen serves all kinds of Asian dishes, including Japanese, Chinese and Thai. Even though the Japanese and Thai dishes are best sellers, most of the customers are Americans, as most dishes are catered to those who prefer American-Asian food.

Head chef Mike Lin, who comes from Taiwan, has been a Japanese chef for more than 30 years. Lin worked in Australia for two years before moving to Pittsburgh a decade ago.

Lin's style in the kitchen is a bit out-of-the-ordinary. While he cooks up sushi, sashimi and nigiri in the kitchen, he doesn't speak at all.

"I need to concentrate on making the best quality of sushi for the customers," Lin says.

Out in the dining room, several Japanese lanterns of all shapes and sizes hang from the ceiling. Upon entering Plum Pan, there is a sushi bar on the left, containing several kinds of raw fish including tuna, salmon and sailfish.

Customer Lisa Witkowski dines at Plum at least once a week.

"The sushi is very fresh, the sashimi doesn't taste fishy at all," she says, pointing to Lin. "He is really good at making sushi."

Photo By Fred Blauth

Vibrant lanterns hang from the ceiling at the Plum Pan Asian Kitchen in East Liberty. Through its decorations and cuisine, the restaurant offers a taste of Asian culture to workers on their lunch break.

During lunch time, most of the restaurant's clientele works nearby. Even though the dishes are not cheap, the customers are still willing to pay on having fresh food.

Not only is the food exquisite and fresh, but the service is excellent. Waiters are happy to teach customers about Asian cuisine and the proper way to eat sashimi.

"Now I know how to use chopsticks for eating sushi," customer Danielle Felton says after getting a friendly lesson from her waiter. "The waiter is very patient with teaching me and explains the menu."

The atmosphere is suitable for having a family party, reunion or business gathering because the dining room is quiet with enough seating for a good crowd. The room is separated from the entrance by a hallway, which keeps the vibe secluded and peaceful.

Plum also offers takeout, but sometimes, just like the dine-in crowd, customers don't always know what to order. The dynamic wait staff can help by recommending what dishes are good for a night at home.

"What dishes do you recommend for takeout?" a young woman asks.

"Sashimi is one of the good choice for takeout," the waitress Kelly says. "If you don't eat sashimi, you can have California rolls or other Thai food, such as Pad Thai."

Just another lesson from the friendly staff at the Plum Pan Asian Kitchen in East Liberty.

Dome transcends time in shadow of church

By Julie Pawlikowski

Photo From Creative Commons

Motor Square Garden on Baum Boulevard held several pop culture events in the 1920s, including the first live sports radio broadcast in 1921 and the Great American Circus' Knights of Malta in 1923.

From 1889 to 1900, the East Liberty Market House at 5900 Baum Boulevard operated as a city market. Financed by the Mellon family and built by famed Boston architects Peabody and Stearns, the Liberty Market House was bought in 1915 by the Pittsburgh Automobile Association. Renamed Motor Square Garden, the PAA used the building as a car dealership and exhibition hall for its cars. It also functioned as a host for many conventions, sporting events, and shows.

It was used intermittently as the home court for the University of Pittsburgh basketball team until 1925 when the Pitt Pavilion opened inside Pitt Stadium, according to Pitt: 100 Years of Pitt Basketball by Sam Sciullo. Circuses were held at Motor Square Garden, notably, the Great American Circus' Knights of Malta from Nov. 27 to Dec. 1 in 1923.

In addition to the circuses and basketball games, Motor Square Garden hosted many boxing matches. A first in radio history also occurred at the Motor Square Garden: "The first live sports radio broadcast between junior lightweight pugilist Johnny Dundee and Johnny Ray [occurred] at Pittsburgh's Motor Square Garden in April 1921."

The entertaining life of the Motor Square Gardens lasted until the 1980s when the American Automobile Association, or AAA, renovated the building. According to Wally Gobetz of flikr.com, "the Landmarks Design Associates of Pittsburgh redesigned it as an upscale shopping mall." Though the shopping mall failed, the AAA still occupied the building along with a second tenant, the UPMC School of Nursing.

Perhaps more interesting than the events that occurred at Motor Square Garden is the architecture of the building. Because it was completed in 1900, it does hint at the Beaux-Arts style, which relates to the classical decorative style maintained by the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. According to "Landmark Architecture Pittsburgh and Allegheny County" by Walter Kidney, "the exterior of the building features a large tin-clad, steel-framed blue dome and a yellow brick facade. The industrial interior has a large atrium with exposed steel girders and skylights above." Historian Joseph Rishel remembers walking by the auto dealership in his youth on his way to the orthodontist: "I can't recall what type of car(s) they sold, but I did notice that wonderful dome. It was green with translucent windows. In many ways it was the most remarkable architectural feature of the East Liberty business district despite the fact that the building was overshadowed by the soaring East Liberty Presbyterian Church so very nearby."

Downtown 2.0: East Liberty hit stride in '50s

COURTESY PHOTO

Penn Avenue in East Liberty was bustling in the 1920s, all the way up until the 1960s, when urban renewal swept across the city and neighborhood.

By Kelsie Bianco

East Liberty is striving to rekindle its glory years and reestablish itself as Pittsburgh's "second downtown".

In the 1940s and 1950s, East Liberty was a booming commercial area surrounded by a closely-knit community. According to East Liberty Development, Inc., the community boasted movie houses, roller-skating rinks, department stores and retail shops.

Between the 1930s and the 1950s, East Liberty's holiday parades were among the most recognizable events in the country. In 1936, the Christmas parade was acknowledged as the largest in the nation, outdoing New York and other cities. Joseph Rishel, a retired history professor from Duquesne University, says East Liberty thrived until changes in the American landscape after World War II.

"The area boomed along with the baby boom, and all the people with all those kids shopped in East Liberty," Rishel says. "The many clothing stores for men and woman were booming with traffic."

However, by the 1960s, "urban renewal" was sweeping cities and East Liberty was not spared. Renewal, in this case, meant destruction. Leaders locally and regionally thought it was time for change due to commercial vacancy and competition from the suburbs, Rishel says.

"The planners moved in and basically ruined East Liberty by their incompetent handling of the plan and restricting all traffic on Penn Ave. That really killed East Liberty as a business district," he says.

East Liberty's attempt to compete with the suburbs by reshaping its street grid was a disaster. Neighborhood streets, homes of residents and commercial properties were knocked down in order to make room for a highway-sized road called Penn Circle. According to the East Liberty Development, Inc. website: "More than 1,000 rental apartment units were built to anchor each end of the business district, replacing a long tradition of neighborhood home ownership." The history and tradition of East Liberty was lying beneath the rubble of the construction.

Billy Conn: Don't mess with The Pittsburgh Kid

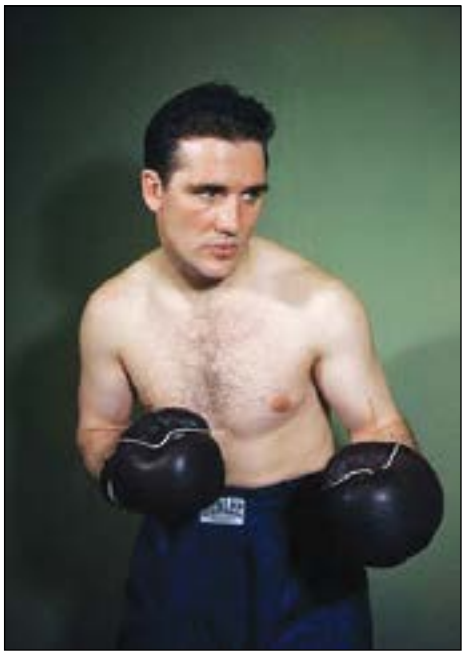


Photo From Creative Commons

Billy Conn, from East Liberty, made his boxing debut as a welterweight in 1934 at 16 years old.

Photo From Creative Commons

Billy Conn (right) lands a menacing blow in one of his two fights against heavyweight champion Joe Louis (left). The Pittsburgh Kid gave Louis a great fight in 1941, but was knocked out in the 13th round.

By Robert Loveless

Back in 1990, a 71 year-old man foiled a burglary by punching the robber. While this may seem unusual, the robber didn't realize he was up against The Pittsburgh Kid, former light -heavyweight champion Billy Conn. The thief took off, but not before the Kid could tear off his jacket –which contained his name and address.

Billy Conn, from East Liberty, made his professional boxing debut as a welterweight in 1934 when he was only 16 years old. Eventually, he fought his way up to heavyweight status and won matches against nine world champions. Although he was often outweighed in matches, Conn defeated many quality opponents, including Fred Apostoli and Tony Zale.

"When he was young he had a lot of ambition to become a fighter," his son, Tim, says. "Once he became famous and got the title, he wasn't the type of person who wanted to brag about it and show off. He was more of a quiet type person and didn't look to bring attention to himself."

While his career was filled with victorious matches, Conn will always be remembered for his fights with heavyweight champion Joe Louis. In 1941, he and Louis slugged it out for 12 rounds, with Conn determined to win.

However, with two seconds left in the 13th round, Louis knocked out Conn with one powerful punch. Nevertheless, Louis said that his opponent was the best light heavyweight he ever saw, and the match is considered to be one of the greatest fights in history.

Later that year, Conn went on to star as himself in the movie *The Pittsburgh Kid*, a story about a boxer's rising career after his manager's death.

In 1942, Conn had the opportunity to fight Louis again, but before he had the chance, he broke his hand in a fight with his father-in-law. Soon after, Conn went on a morale tour during World War II.

Finally, in 1946, he had one last shot at a rematch with Louis. However, by then, Conn hadn't fought in a professional match in years. He was older and slower and was knocked out in the eighth round. Conn soon retired and lived in East Liberty up until his death on May 30, 1993.

Mellon's Fire Escape: Burial in church was real

By Jen Cardone

Photo By Fred Blauth

The East Liberty Presbyterian Church, otherwise known as "Mellon's Fire Escape," was built in the early 1930s. It was paid for by Richard King Mellon, who requested that he and his wife be buried within.

The regal, gothic East Libertarian Presbyterian Church is known to older neighborhood wags by another name: "Mellon's Fire Escape."

Richard King Mellon's family paid for the construction of the cathedral, also known as the Cathedral of Hope and the ELPC, on the condition he and his wife could be entombed within. And so they are, in a gloomy chamber adjacent to the cathedral.

Like his contemporaries, such as Henry C. Frick and Andrew Carnegie, Mellon made a fortune in banking by steamrolling competitors and driving many hard bargains. His bank backed companies that some say created crushing conditions for laborers.

Mellon invested in his first coal property and real estate, both of which doubled in value during the 1860s, so much that he was able to open T. Mellon & Sons, a bank known today as BNY Mellon.

The Mellons had eight children, with Andrew and Richard being the most famous. Both brothers eventually founded the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research in memory of their father in 1913. In 1967, it became part of Carnegie-Mellon University.

Richard Mellon served under Andrew at the Aluminum Company of America and invested in the Pittsburgh Coal Company, known today as CONSOL Energy. He is also credited with developing land into an amusement park in 1931, known as Idlewild Park.

Construction on the Cathedral began on Aug. 18, 1931 and Richard Mellon placed the cornerstone on June 19, 1932. The project was completed on May 12, 1935.

The Gothic style masterpiece features classic pointed arches, multi-colored stained glass windows and a cruciform or cross-style floor plan.

Richard and his wife Jennie spent about $4 million on the ELPC, the equivalent of $66 million today. And, as was nearing the end of his life, some wondered if his celestial philanthropy was a salve for his guilt or a get-out-of-hell free card. In fact, he died two years before the cathedral was completed, with the Trinity Chapel reserved as the final resting place for Richard and Jennie.

"Local wags called it the Mellon's 'fire escape,' as though a church might save the family from a heated afterlife," historian and architecture critic Charles Rosenblum says.

East Liberty makes immersion simple, fun

By Addison Smith

Throughout this magazine, you have probably noticed a theme of "community." There's a certain type of social attitude that jumps off of the page and after spending time in East Liberty myself, I have to admit "a community feeling" doesn't even begin to describe it.

I went to East Liberty by myself the first couple of times. My first trip was to survey the area and find the good stories: the people, the businesses and trends that would help to bring this community to life. My second trip was to begin the reporting for my first story: a piece on Bats Barber Shop.

Although these excursions were solo trips, there was something about East Liberty that didn't make me feel alone. Right away, I felt comfortable in this area. Right away, I was willing to immerse myself in the community. Right away, I knew East Liberty was someplace special.

I could detail every little thing about East Liberty that stuck out in my mind, but that would take pages upon pages of space that I don't have and you wouldn't read. Instead, I'm going to focus on my time in Bats Barber Shop and how welcome the barbers and the customers made me feel right away.

You're always told to immerse yourself as much as possible to get the best story as a journalist. Duquesne law school Dean Ken Gormley once detailed his experiences bear wrestling to me for a piece he wrote for Rolling Stone. He made it a point to be known that immersion is the best way to get the best story.

That said, I didn't pick up the razor and begin to give someone a haircut to truly immerse myself in the culture of Bat's Barber Shop, but I did plop myself in the waiting area for hours at a time to try to gather as much information as I could about the business.

The second I walk into the shop, I'm greeted by the barbers and the owner himself, Kevin "Bat" Andrews. Not even a minute into my reporting I feel comfortable and at ease with these people. The barbers are quick to include me in conversations, and even quicker to begin to joke around with me.

It's not the hottest of days, but the sun is beating down on my back through the window as I sit in the waiting area. I shrug off my jacket, showing my mint green shirt, a hard color to forget apparently. I come in three days later to continue reporting wearing the same shirt and am called out on it. I reassure them that Sundays were laundry days and it had been washed in the interim.

They nod and chide me some more, and I accept it, laughing it off myself. While I have never had older brothers, I interned in for the Pittsburgh Penguins and learned about rooms of men becoming like siblings you didn't realize you had. Even when being called out, it's hard to not smile when you're in on the joke.

"Right away, I knew East Liberty was someplace special."

Community vibe makes East Liberty shine

By Jen Cardone

Drive up Bigelow Boulevard, hang a left on Baum, and East Liberty Presbyterian Church is straight ahead.

The cathedral towers over surrounding buildings, boldly standing out as a masterpiece of Gothic-style architecture. It serves as a place for the East Liberty community to worship, even if they are not Presbyterian by faith.

This past semester, I spent countless hours finding stories and walking around East Liberty. Every time I drove there, I could always see my destination as soon as I turned on to Baum. Most of my stories came from the cathedral itself. The church exudes a sense of community bond and friendliness.

The ELPC accepts anyone and everyone. They have a Taizè worship service every Wednesday at 7 p.m. where people inside and outside of the community join as one ecumenical monastic group to find faith and inner peace through meditative prayer, pauses of silence and chants.

The Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan, leader of the service, says spirituality is already within us, and that we just have to find it. Being with the community helps.

"I very much feel that we don't develop a spirituality in order to get closer to God," she says. "I think God is already there. We develop a spiritual life just to help us to become aware of the relationship that we already have between the God that is within and ourselves."

The bond of community was evident the moment I ran into Gwen Puza, the first person to introduce me to the ELPC. She was merely stopping by the church to use the restroom and when my friend and I told her about this magazine project, she broke from her schedule for the day to give us a tour of the massive structure and tell us all about the history and what happens at the ELPC. All throughout this project, she has served as a source to help me find people who know about the church.

Kay Shissler anoints the people who gather during Taizè. She has been involved with the service for 15 years and a member at the church for 53.

"Their emphasis on justice issues and inclusion is why I go," she says.

Thomas West, owner of a men's underwear store, wanted to start his business in the community because he, too, sensed the connectivity of the community and wanted a different vibe.

"I wanted to bring something new to East Liberty and get people back in this neighborhood," he says.

In the 1950s, East Liberty was often referred to as the second

downtown of Pittsburgh. It was a thriving business center with a tight-knit community that declined only a decade later.

According to Puza, when the street grid was reconfigured to discourage traffic as part of an ill-fated redevelopment scheme, businesses declined and had to shut down.

Business owners like West are rebuilding this community. He doesn't shop online and knows if a business has a certain vibe customers will come.

Online shopping "takes away from small businesses and city life," he says. "It takes something away that you won't get by walking to a store. It's just an experience that you can't get online. That's what I think a lot of people are missing, a lot of people are starting to come back to shop locally."

Neighborhood balances culture, capitalism

By Jessica Nath

The red Target sign towers over its surroundings, serving as a gateway between East Liberty's past and future. In front of it lies progress – themed restaurants, boutiques and even a Google office recently sprung up in Bakery Square.

Behind it, though, almost in its shadow, lies the neighborhood's bare-bone culture and history – older infrastructure and specialized family shops line the street.

When I first turned left off of Fifth Avenue, the Target sign was the first thing I saw, and soon I passed Bakery Square. This wasn't the East Liberty I had been told to avoid. It didn't look like a place with a high crime rate and the constant slot in news segments about robberies and shootings. For goodness sake, is that an Anthropologie store?

East Liberty is being revitalized, and Bakery Square is just one success story.

I had heard about a new restaurant named Social that had great food, outdoor seating and even a ping-pong table. The restaurant is the epitome of new – even its theme revolves around social media.

"And now, of course, with Bakery Two, not only are we seeing just the first phase, but phase two and phase three as they occur are going to bring us a myriad of more customers," Gregg Caliguiri, co-owner of Social, says.

Part of Bakery Square 2.0 is a new apartment complex sits across the street. Rents exceed $1,000.

"I mean what is being built here I wouldn't even say is a lifestyle center," Caliguiri says. "It's a neighborhood, and it's not even a small neighborhood, it's a pretty sizable number of apartments and townhomes that are being placed."

Caliguiri grew up in Shadyside, so he has seen East Liberty's evolution.

"I've been so happy to see how East Liberty – and not just our portion, obviously – but over toward Highland and as far down and up as you can imagine, the entire neighborhood has changed dramatically," Caliguiri says. "And that can only be a good thing for the city."

Caliguiri cares about his customers and wants to create an environment where they can relax and experience a new spin on what some would consider bar food. His employees enjoy working for him, and his customers are loyal.

On a site of that was declared blighted about ten years ago, Social is an example of progress, but in the same neighborhood, Justin Strong closed down his popular venue Shadow Lounge in 2013 – a venue where Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller started off.

"I'm a capitalist, I'm not mad at development – it's how people go about things, it's how public money is used, so there's different layers to it," Strong says.

What those shopping in Bakery Square consider progress, the residents down the street consider sacrifice as their homes and businesses are displaced by new shopping districts.

East Liberty is changing – fast – but change doesn't necessarily have to be bad or good. Right now the neighborhood is balancing between the new and the old, and while the new is attracting more people and changing East Liberty's negative reputation, it is also overshadowing what attracted developers there in the first place – the authentic urban culture.

Spotlight surrounding East Liberty is flawed

By Kelsie Bianco

The adage "Don't judge a book by its cover or you may miss out on an amazing story," explains the journey I took with East Liberty.

Having grown up in Pittsburgh, I am familiar with East Liberty and the somewhat seedy reputation that goes with it.

When I found out that East Liberty was the new location for *Off The Bluff*, I was anxious and excited, but doubts instantly ran through my mind.

When I told my parents, their concerns were through the roof, and for a second, I thought that they might not let me go. But being a 21-year-old adult, it was a decision that I had to make on my own.

So I got in my car, buckled up, and prepared myself for the worst. Thoughts of uncertainty ran through my mind. Will I be safe? Is it okay for me to be alone? Should I have gone at an earlier time? Little did I know, I was in fact judging this book by its cover.

My vision of East Liberty was far from accurate. Bakery Square was the first thing I set sight on. It's new, innovative and refreshing.

But even though the bold colors, trendy shops, and emerging businesses of Bakery Square were intriguing; the rich culture within the actual neighborhoods is what made me fall in love with the East Liberty and the people who call it home.

I strolled down the wide streets lined with stores both old and new. The first store that I stumbled upon was Sam's Shoes.

I met Sam and his brother, who now run one of the oldest family businesses in East Liberty. Their passion for their shop and the community instantly put me at ease and inspired me to look deeper.

"Little did I know, I was in fact judging this book by its cover."

Visiting establishments like the Global Food Market and Casta Rasta made me realize that people from all over the globe make East Liberty a diverse and vibrant community.

Dana Harris Yates is one of the most special people that I met. I walked into her little shop off of Penn Avenue in hopes of meeting someone interesting. Mission accomplished.

She told me how she has grew up in this community, and how it haped who she is and what she does.

The Cultural Oasis provides health remedies through the use of nature. Darla calls it "Natritional Healing." Her gentle voice and caring personality are what draw people to her and her store.

"She has become a mother figure for me out here," says 23-year-old Ashley Cox, who moved from Washington D.C. to East Liberty.

That is just one sign of the genuine warmth that characterizes East Liberty.

So yes, I did judge a book by its cover. But no, I do not regret it, because if I hadn't, I wouldn't have been able to truly appreciate the amazing stories that came out of it.

JOURNALISM

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JMA News Digest

Professor returns to Vietnam with camera

Prof. Dennis Woytek accompanied 11 Navy Seabee veterans who returned to Vietnam in March, after almost 42 years after the end of one of the most divisive conflicts in American history.

Along the way, he captured film, photos and sound for a very personal documentary about their return.

"For guys that come back today, they're expecting to find sandbags and bunkers, barbed wire and bullets lying around," Woytek said. "But rarely do you find that stuff, and even more is that we have found very little to even place where our bases were. Cities have grown over that to us was a jungle or wasteland of rice patties with sparsely populated villages."

Courtesy Photo

JMA Prof. Dennis Woytek poses for a photo with a former NVA soldier in Vietnam in March.

Woytek was stationed at Quang Tri and Dong Ha from March 1968-March 1969.

"We shared stories, experiences, some very serious and sad, others extremely funny," Woytek said. "One thing we have in common, we have survived, but we remember and honor those 58,000 who died during the Vietnam War."

Film chief receives Doherty award

Everybody loves movies.

And everybody who goes to the movies has gotten a loving eyeful of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, including our own fair campus in The Next Three Days all thanks to the efforts of Dawn Keezer, Director of the Pittsburgh Film Office.

Keezer was the recipient of the department's 2015 Sean Doherty Distinguished Communicator Award, which was accepted on her behalf by Film Office founder Russ Streiner.

Keezer has been instrumental in bringing A-list filmmakers to Pittsburgh – who then bring Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania to the world. The films they make also contribute substantially to our local economy.

The award is named for Sean Doherty, who suffered a devastating spinal injury playing high school football and yet went on to a successful sportscasting career at WDUQ. When Sean passed in 2007, the department decided to name this award for him because he so ably and positively modeled the virtue of per-

Duke staff wins six Keystones

The staff of *The Duquesne Duke* took home six prestigious Division II Student Keystone Press Awards in 2015 in general news, sportswriting, review writing, column writing and news photography.

Editors Saul Berrios-Thomas and Julian Routh led the way with two awards each.

Staffers Brandon Addeo, Zach Brendza, Sam Fatula, Pat Higgins and Aaron Warnick were also recognized for their work in 2014.