

A wide-angle photograph of the Oakland cityscape under a clear blue sky. The background features a mix of modern and historic buildings, including a prominent tall, grey Gothic-style tower. The middle ground is filled with trees displaying vibrant autumn foliage in shades of red, orange, and yellow. In the foreground, a lush green lawn slopes down from the right, where two people are sitting on the grass, looking at each other. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

# OAKLAND

off  
the  
bluff

SPRING 2017

REFLECTIONS  
CULTURE  
CHANGE  
PEOPLE  
FOOD





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# Finding New in the Familiar

**O**akland is one of those neighborhoods that's easy to stereotype. Sure enough, when the Fall 2016 magazine journalism class was told to produce an entire issue of *Off the Bluff* about Oakland — without focusing too much on universities, museums or hospitals — many were skeptical. What else was there to write about?

As would soon be clear, more than anybody could imagine.

Like many Pittsburgh neighborhoods, Oakland is a community of change. What was once a thriving residential hub now acts as the home of academia and healthcare. As we found, however, that spark of life is still present, even if it does reside just under the surface. The overwhelming takeaway is that those who live in Oakland love Oakland.

Within the following pages are stories of that lesser-known side of the neighborhood: A community center fostering productive conversation, a birdwatcher with her eyes on the sky, restaurants serving authentic world cuisine, the remnants of a bygone era of baseball and so much more.

Of course, attention was also given to those broadly visible staples of Oakland. No survey of the area is complete without a look at the Cathedral of Learning, the Original Hotdog Shop or the Carnegie Library and museums.

The lesson I, and many of my classmates, learned is that Oakland is a neighborhood far more vibrant and diverse than a first glance might let on. Turn off the main drags, get to talking and dig deep. Social archaeology is fruitful labor in a community like this.

For a decade now, that's been a common theme of this magazine. *Off the Bluff* was started in 2005 as the brainchild of Dr. Mike Dillon, the chair of the Duquesne University Media department. Two years later saw the magazine's evolution into the Pittsburgh Neighborhoods Project, which shines a spotlight on a different neighborhood each academic year.

I'd like to extend my utmost thanks to all of the writers, photographers and editors that made this issue the incredible body of work that it is. And, of course, I'd like to thank Dr. Dillon for this wonderful project he created. It was an honor and a pleasure to see this edition to its completion.

And to you, dear reader, I merely ask a favor. Next time you find yourself in Oakland, look around. Strike up conversations. Take new detours. Feel the pulse of life that binds the community together.

Do so, and you'll come to love the place — I promise. I know I did.

Sincerely,

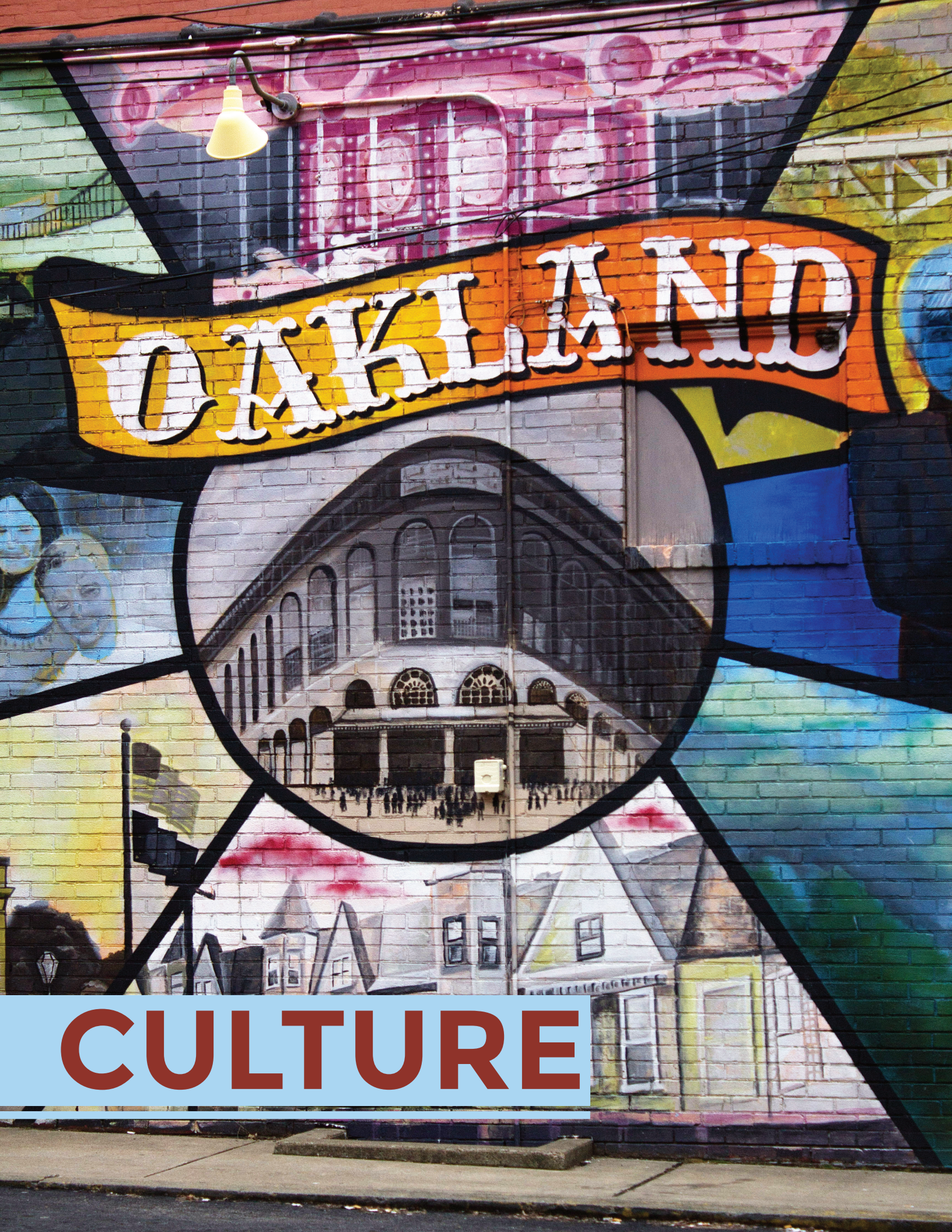


Seth Culp-Ressler  
Editor-in-Chief



PHOTO BY LAUREN ZAWATSKI





**CULTURE**



# In the Heart of Oakland Beats Schenley Plaza

words **SETH CULP-RESSLER**

photos **SETH CULP-RESSLER**



Colorful umbrellas dot Schenley Plaza's open-air eating areas as the skies open up.

Micaela Murcar gazed up at the long row of towering trees lining the east side of Schenley Plaza, draping the earth below in a blanket of shade.

"These are actually my favorite trees," she says. "I don't know what they're called, but I love them. It's beautiful here."

Murcar, a student at the University of Pittsburgh, was lounging out on the Plaza's lawn with her family. Maura Murcar, Micaela's mother, says that the surrounding area struck her as being a "miniature Washington D.C."

Schenley Plaza, then, must be Pittsburgh's little Mall.

The four-and-a-half-acre Plaza recently celebrated its 10th anniversary at the corner of Forbes and Schenley Avenues, right in the heart of Oakland. Over the past decade, the space has become a home for families, students, restaurants and, on Saturdays like today, endless amount of fun.

On this day, that sense of fun can be attributed to Adam Nelson, the founder and creative director at City of Play. The organization took over the Plaza for its Come Out and Play Festival, an event built on outdoor social games. For Nelson's purposes, Schenley Plaza stands out as a perfect location for his gatherings.

"One of the best things about Schenley Plaza is that it's a very central point between parts of the city where people are accustomed to walking," Nelson says. "There aren't a ton of places in Pittsburgh where people walk habitually from one place to another; Oakland is one of the neighborhoods [in which] that happens quite a lot."

The benefits of the Plaza's location are immediately apparent. An eclectic mix of young children, college students and older adults wander around the one-acre lawn, catapulting beanbags at each other in games of modified cornhole, bellowing battle cries in a match of pirate dodgeball or chasing around an eight-foot-tall beach ball.

Shift your gaze off the lawn, however, and more mundane scenes appear. Long



lines collect behind the serving windows of the Plaza's food vendors, no doubt drawn in by the enticing aromas wafting from the kitchens within.

An older gentleman enjoys a novel among the gardens adjacent to Forbes Avenue. Students with laptops catch up on schoolwork under the large conical tent. The soft murmur of conversation is intermittently pierced by the shriek of a playing child, a distant siren or the clinking of glasses from The Porch's outdoor dining area.

Schenley Plaza hasn't always been the social hub for the greater community of Oakland. Up until 1912, the area was a large ravine spanned by the imposing stone Bellefield Bridge — a stark contrast to the growing city around it. Plans for a grand entrance to Schenley Park were hatched, however, and the gully was slowly filled in, bridge and all.

By 1921, the simple, symmetrical design was completed. Two groves of trees flanked twin boulevards and an oval island of grass, leading the eye straight to the Mary Schenley Memorial Fountain. Slowly, though, the area became much more accustomed to parking than to pedestrians. In 1949, the Plaza was officially declared a parking lot, and the plot of land became home to nothing more than hot asphalt and slumbering cars.

The early 2000's saw an effort to reclaim the space for the community, and in 2006, a \$10 million renovation project culminated in the creation of the Plaza as it sits today. Gone was the once symmetrical layout, replaced by open grass, cool shade, plentiful food options and the ever-popular PNC Carousel.

On a beautiful Saturday like today, that carousel sees its fair share of patrons. A young girl, resplendent in her ornate periwinkle blue dress, runs up to the ride and thrusts her tokens into the hands of Saul Wells.

"I like your dress!" Wells exclaims, all while reminding the budding princess that, for her, this ride only costs one token, not the two she initially offered.

Wells is a "visitor experience associate"



Pitt students Minah Chapell (left) and Ayesha Sesay (right) lounge on the Plaza's lawn.

with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and Schenley Plaza is where he spends most of his working hours. Self-described as wearing "a hat of many colors," there isn't much that Wells doesn't do at the Plaza. He can run the carousel. He assists with coordinating events. He keeps the space looking tidy.

In between helping parents and children onto the carousel, Wells explains there isn't much to dislike about Schenley Plaza. The community is always friendly, the food always delicious. And he gets to live in the thick of it every day.

"It's an awesome place to actually be because you're outside," he says. "There's always events down here; there's always things to do."

To prove his point, Wells, laughing, mentions that he would even be bringing his own kids down to the Plaza later in the afternoon. With the Come Out and Play Festival — and the Oakland Forever Movie Night on the lawn later in the evening — how could he not?

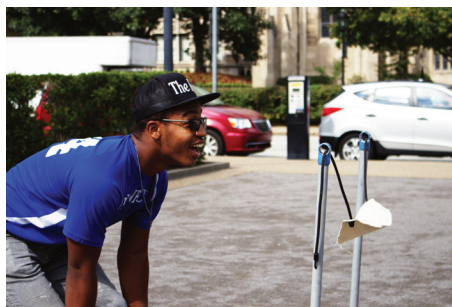
For Wells, the near-constant stream of events is the best part about Schenley

Plaza. A close second, however, is the draw the space has for visitors, regardless of what's happening on any given day. In the warmer months, that allure is what creates the "green beach." Coined by one of Wells' coworkers, that term refers to the college students who lay out on the lawn sunbathing for hours on end.

On a crisp, early October day like today, though, no bathing suits are to be found. Of course, that could be a result of the afternoon spattering of rain, not that some inclement weather stops any other Plaza activity. Umbrellas go up, but spirits don't seem to go down.

And what of Micaela's beloved trees, now offering protection from the rain in addition to shade from the sun? "London planetree" is their name, and for decades they've been grown in and around Pittsburgh as hearty, urban shade trees. The ones found in Schenley Plaza, though, are unique from most. As it turns out, the space is home to a strain notable for its genetic diversity.

In Schenley Plaza, that shouldn't come as much of a surprise. ♦



Ian Gray takes a crack at modified cornhole.



City of Play's festival of games was a big hit.



Harper (left) has a go on the PNC Carousel.





The Corner, located on Robinson Street in Oakland, is a community center that serves the neighborhood's residents in a variety of ways.

# Community Spirit Is Just Around The Corner

words **SARA SALTIEL**

photos **SARA SALTIEL**

**O**n a cold, rainy Friday night, a small group of artists and musicians gather at The Corner community center for an open mic night. The bright orange and green walls glow from the light of the colorful paper lanterns and twinkling lights strung up in the corners of the room, chasing away the gloom outside.

A mix of couches and chairs are set up around a makeshift stage with a lone mi-

crophone. Incense permeates the air as a few local artists sit at their tables selling jewelry, gems, T-shirts or their artwork hanging on the walls.

The near-empty room slowly fills up with community members young and old as a tall woman with colorful dreadlocks wearing a black dress steps up to the microphone. After welcoming the small, intimate crowd, she tentatively asks: "Do you guys mind if we start with something I've

written?" Almost everyone in the crowd nods their head and murmurs words of encouragement.

The source of the enthusiasm and support is The Corner. A community center located in Oakland, The Corner provides a diverse array of services for a diverse population. Services include after-school and wellness programs, workshops, an event space, a coffee shop and a safe place to share feelings and ideas for the Oakland





Jacquea Mae sings at an open mic night.



Ms. Di — or Mama Di, as she's known at The Corner — sells her famous buttercake at the café.

community. It's a place where everyone has a voice — a place that seeks to bridge the gap between neighbors.

Nadine Masagara-Taylor, the director of The Corner, believes the space is needed now more than ever.

"I think we live in a time where people are so disconnected and doing all kinds of different things," Masagara-Taylor says. "So, the purpose is getting people connected to their neighbor, getting to know their neighbor, and we do that through affordable, community-driven activities."

Affiliated with Friendship Church across the street, The Corner was founded in 2012. The building formerly housed Breach Menders, an organization that refurbished homes in the neighborhood. Left with an empty building in 2007 after Breach Menders' dissolution, community members wanted to make the building a "third place" space — a social area separate from one's home and workplace — so The Corner was born.

The Corner's café creates a "third place" for every member of the Oakland community. Guests of the café are greeted by the same bright green and orange walls as the event space next door, the smell of fair trade coffee, delicious baked goods, comfy mismatching furniture and the smiling face of Ms. Di — or Mama Di, as some call her.

Di, the Operations Manager at The Corner, has been there since the beginning, providing patrons with not only kind words, but also with buttercake.

"I bake our signature dish, buttercake," Di says. "It's a goody. It always sells out,

and people know me as the one that makes the buttercake."

As Di lists off patrons by name that frequent the café, it is clear how much she enjoys her job. It is no surprise that she has become as much of a staple to The Corner Café as her buttercake.

"I took over the café one time and people were like, 'Where is Ms. Di?'" Masagara-Taylor says. "I'm like I'm here, too, ya know, but that's part of their routine to see Ms. Di in the morning."

The Corner serves many purposes, and its spirit of community extends beyond the café. In addition to essential social service programs, The Corner is a place where community members can connect and talk about everyday issues. It is a multipurpose space that tailors itself to the needs of the community, providing a safe place for community members to express themselves.

This is evident just by looking at the art on the walls. There is a painting of a one-eyed Statue of Liberty with the words "Land of the Thieves, Home of the Slaves" inscribed on the tablet she is holding. A painting of a grocery bag filled with food reads "People's Free Food Program." A painting of a golden Africa. The Corner, however, goes beyond creating a safe place for art. It also provides a space to heal when social burdens become too great.

With ongoing cases of police brutality and discussions regarding relationships between communities of color and the police, The Corner hosted a forum to discuss recent events. Masagara-Taylor wanted to bring different groups in the community

together to have a civil discussion.

"Diverse groups of people from different backgrounds attended, and we were able to have that conversation where it didn't turn into, like, this huge fight that you might see on social media," Masagara-Taylor says. "Just being able to say, 'Let's take people from behind their phones, from behind their laptops and actually get them to connect and know one another on a personal level,' and I think the space helped promote that positive energy."

That positive energy permeates events at The Corner and is especially evident at open mic night. As the woman with the dreadlocks reads her poetry about her experiences with racism, the group collectively nods with affirmation and support.

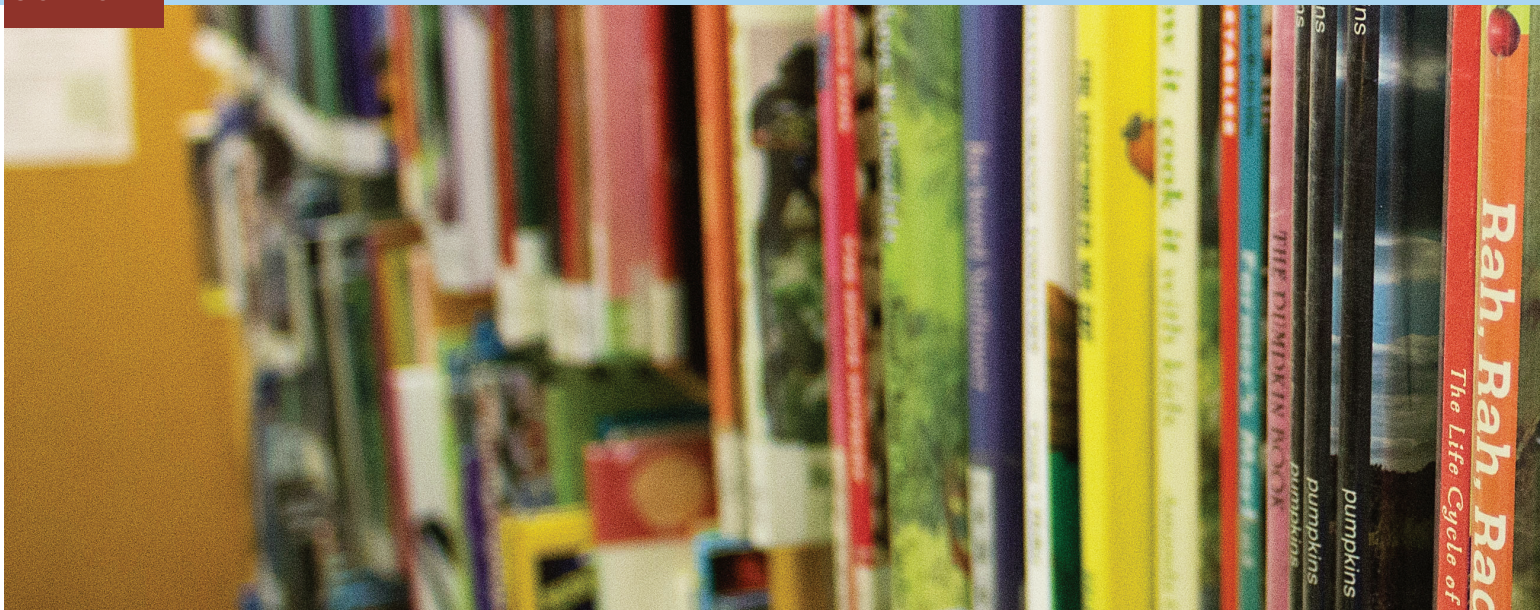
"Exhaling becomes an act of defiance. Me and my generation will have joy even if you don't like it," she reads.

The theme of almost every performance is racism and what it is like to be black in America in 2016. Performances are met with encouragement and praise as pieces alternate between spoken word and singing, some expressing what is in their hearts without any preparation. It is a time of healing, all made possible by The Corner.

Natiq Jalil, a performer of spoken word and a local artist whose watercolor paintings hang on the walls, believes that The Corner is unique and fills a void in the community.

"It's one of the few community centers I see that's left," Jalil says. "People can come together and create and brainstorm and plan. It's very necessary." ♦





# A Children's Section for All Those Young at Heart

words **JILLIAN POWER**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

**I**f you're looking for Carnegie Library's Children's Section, make a right at the entrance, walk through a tunnel of drawings and arrive at the familiar smell of old books. If giggles and little stomping feet greet you, you are in the right place.

Don't let the scattered blocks and colorful covers fool you. There's something for everyone here, from Japanese manga and pop-up books to entire sections' worth of children's folklore.

Debbie Priore, a reference librarian turned children's librarian, spends her days at the Children's Section in her chair, on her feet or wherever else she's needed to find just the right book for a child. If you've ever been asked by a child to help them find something specific, Priore's experience with a young artist may sound familiar to you.

"I was once approached by a little boy who was looking for a book specifically on drawing, and after I showed him some of our beginner books, he said he wanted books on *scary* drawing," she recalls. "So

we showed him that. There's a certain excitement about it."

Shortly after, a young boy approaches her, deflated, and asks, "Has it been two hours yet?" After coaxing him toward the books about outer space, she explains that the boy's mother had dropped him off with his grandparent and insisted that he "would not be sitting in front of a screen all day."

Getting children to read, according to Priore and Patti Kelly, who manages the department's operations, means helping them find the right book. Amy, a part-time librarian who asked that her last name not be used, knows this well. The amount of books in the department could overwhelm some adults, but the children often seem to know exactly what they're looking for, no matter how specific.

"I once had a little boy come up to me and ask for a book on telescopes, trucks and wheelchairs, in that order," she says. "Another kid asked me for a book because they wanted to know what toilet paper was made out of. Ultimately, I gave them the book 'Why Fish Fart,'

which they were very pleased with. Kids always ask me questions, they just use their curiosity so well."

For others, such as Dawn Bisi, it's a matter of convenience to be at the library so frequently. Her two sons, aged three and seven, find themselves in the children's section each week. Whenever she leaves the department, her arms are full of beginner chapter books and picture books while her boys explore nearby.

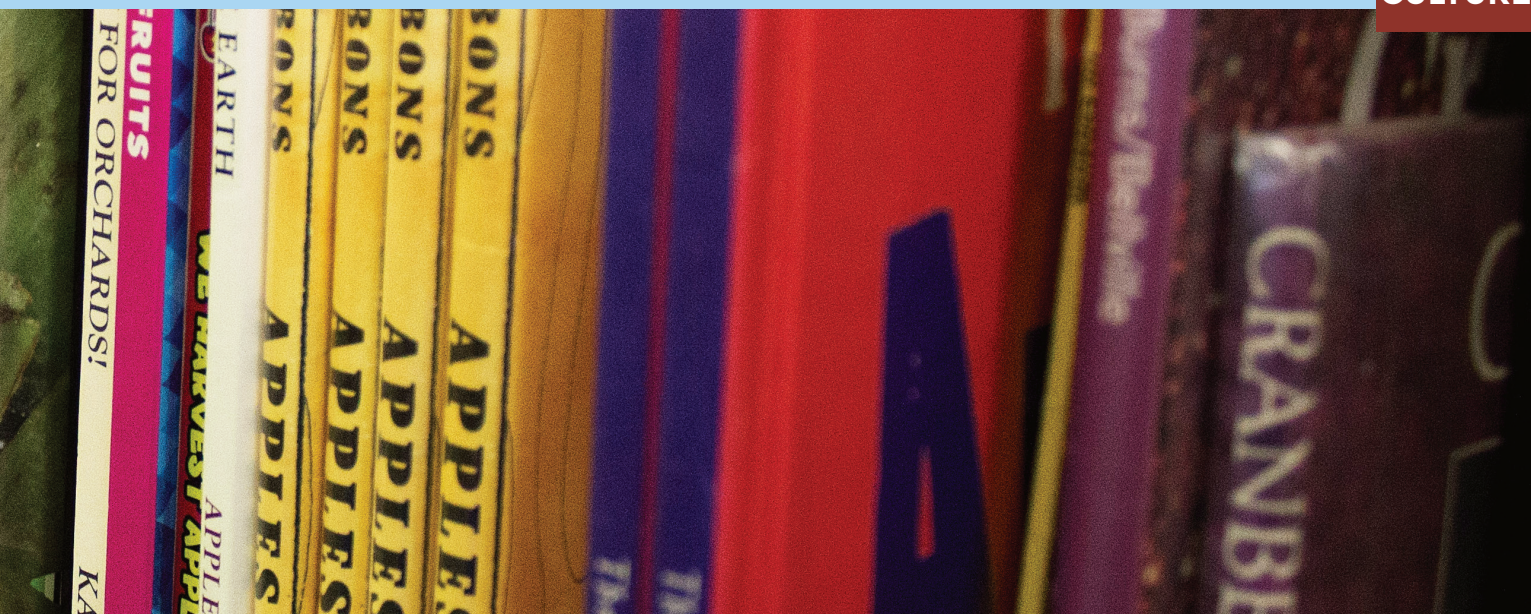
"I love to read, my husband loves to read, so we'd really like to instill that same love for reading in them," Bisi says.

Kelly and Priore are both pleased to see teenagers, college-aged students and educators in the section. Priore spoke highly of a college-aged man who was tutoring children at different reading levels, and who had asked her for her recommendations.

For Nonie Heystek, a librarian of two years in the children's department, a stuffed unicorn served as a reminder that children aren't the only ones who become involved with the library.

"I saw this dad walk in to return some





books,” Heystek recounts. “You know, he’s in a suit, like he’s coming from work, he’s got his briefcase at his side ... sitting on top is what must have been his daughter’s stuffed unicorn. It just made me smile, I had to get a picture.”

Kelly is the quiet force behind the department. Her office is surrounded with old and rare books, most of which date back to when the library first opened its children’s section.

She keeps them for restoration purposes, but by no means are they the only books she cares for. She is constantly updating and refreshing the books in circulation.

A small set of shelves holds the world literature section. The reason it exists, Kelly explains, is not just for the sake of encouraging children to learn a second language. It serves a more meaningful purpose.

“Some parents want to read to their children in their own language, and some even want their kids to begin reading them themselves,” she says.

What makes the children’s section so special isn’t the small wooden chairs or the iPads stationed where computers may have once lived. It isn’t made special by what we, as adults, attribute to it.

As parents interrupt two kids who are

playing with blocks on the floor, the boy and the girl run through the room away from them. When one is caught, he whines, “But I don’t want to go!”

Another boy runs into the section ahead of his mother, making a beeline for the seasonal picture books. Two mothers are talking while their two toddlers lounge on the carpet. An older woman is asleep in a rocking chair.

The children’s department at the Carnegie Library is special because, even with more screens vying for our attention, the book return is always full, the checkout desk perpetually busy. ♦



The Children’s Section in Oakland’s Carnegie Library is a refuge for all those — young and old — with a little bit of wonder in their hearts.





# South Craig Street Is a Block of Many Wonders

words **DAN PRIORE**

photos **DAN PRIORE & SETH CULP-RESSLER**

**A**t first, it might seem difficult to find some peace from the constant noise along Forbes and Fifth Avenues in Oakland. Bustling students heading to their classes and honking traffic on its way to and from Downtown set the daily scene.

Yet all is not lost for those in search of a nice place to relax.

South Craig Street is perpendicular to the Carnegie Museum of Art, just past the University of Pittsburgh. And visitors to the side street can spend an entire day

eating, shopping and even satisfying obscure desires.

It starts with a morning bagel from The Bagel Factory or a coffee from Starbucks. They guard either end of the street.

"I can't function at all today unless I get my Pumpkin Spice Latte," a young woman says as she walks with a friend.

Starbucks is a quick stop, but The Irish Design Center is a place to linger.

Founded in 1978, the Irish Design Center sells clothing, jewelry, knitwear and other odds and ends from Ireland and Scotland. Owner Paul Carey says he stays

busy even though South Craig has lost many of its retail shops.

"What helps us is we're more of a destinations tour," Carey explains. "We not only get people who are passing by, but people who are coming to us to buy a particular thing."

Carey says people looking around become compelled to share their personal lives with him as if they are at home.

Perhaps it is his soft and calming Irish accent or the blend of vibrant colors that soothe customers. Or it even could be the floor that squeaks as people walk around,





(Clockwise from right) A corner of the Irish Design Center. Used books packed tightly in Caliban. Joggers pass by the Irish Design Center.

reminding patrons this is no typical department store.

"Little kids are very hard to shop for because they are finicky about everything. You have one chance to have them try something on, and if they don't like it, it's in the corner," a grandmother tells Carey while she's contemplating buying a scarf. Soon they are chuckling, reminiscing about parenthood.

By the time lunch rolls around, there are many dining options to choose from. One popular eatery is Ali Baba, a Middle Eastern restaurant that looks so small from the outside, it could easily be missed. However, exotic smells from the kitchen — like cooked artichokes, spiced vegetables and hummus — fill the dining room, challenging those who have finished their meals not to leave.

Just as there are many food choices, South Craig's comic book shop, Phantom of the Attic, offers many entertainment choices. But it's more than a just a place to buy new and old comics; it is a gathering spot. And that's just how Wayne Wise, comic book historian and author, wants it to be.

"There's the cliché that comic book stores aren't very welcoming, and we try very hard to work against that cliché," he says. "We are welcoming to everybody."

Wise says he and his coworkers defi-

nately have formed a connection with the all of the store's regulars; some have made Phantom of the Attic a regular stop since its opening in 1983 and will make sure they drop by on Wednesdays for new comics.

For those regulars, the store is a holy place. A classic Batman logo lights up at dawn to tell nerds to walk up the stairway to find their store of worship. The stairway is very narrow, so they can only get glimpses of their temple as they press on, with classic superhero posters letting them know they are going in the right direction.

Inside, enthusiasts debate pressing issues of the superhero world, laughing and bonding over their favorite fantasy stories. It's clear the two customers wearing Spider-Man and Wolverine T-shirts, heading straight to the Marvel comics section, need no help with what to look for.

Wise feels one of the best parts of being on South Craig Street is there's always new people to meet.

"We get 6,000 new college students each fall who have never read 'Watchmen' before," he says. "It's great to talk with people who are being exposed to some great comics for the first time."

Wise says the best part of his job is when he can show people new books he thinks they will love.

Visitors to South Craig looking for more traditional books can cross the street to Caliban, which buys, sells and appraises used books and photographs.

The dimly lit shop puts books in the spotlight on tall and narrow wooden shelves. Customers squeeze around each other, similarly to how the books are tightly packed together, browsing the aisles.

An older man sits on the floor with his eyes gazing intently at a potential purchase. He seems satisfied as jazz music plays in the background, proving that despite the close quarters, there is always room to relax and read.

"I've spent hours in here at times because there's just so much to look at and explore," he says. "That's something you don't always get with other bookstores."

As time stands still in Caliban, it moves too fast for those enjoying happy hour at Union Grill. Inside, voices of tired workers and students ring throughout the restaurant, regaling struggles of the weekday and finding comfort in their beers and mixed drinks. They munch on popcorn in between fast and large gulps of their beverages.

As the day winds down, it is time to close up. But aficionados of South Craig Street, and the businesses that draw them, will be back tomorrow. ♦





# Iron City Bikes

## Serves Steel City Cyclists

words **SETH CULP-RESSLER**

photos **SETH CULP-RESSLER**

**I**t's a chilly November afternoon, the first taste of the coming winter, as Richard Jezowicz sits bundled up behind the counter at Iron City Bikes, microwave dinner in hand. It's been a day devoid of customers. That means no body heat to get the small shop comfortable, either.

Jezowicz is a mechanic and salesperson at Iron City, the sole bike shop within Oakland's boundaries. As such, the small triangular building perched on the corner of South Bouquet Street and Joncaire Street has become the hub for the rapidly-changing bike culture of the surrounding community.

While Iron City has expanded its reach throughout the Pittsburgh area — it launched a large showroom in Lawrenceville around three years ago — Oakland is

the original location, opened more than a decade ago. With no nearby competition it's a prime spot for a bike shop, and the neighborhood is full of customers who need to keep their bicycles in tip-top shape.

Oakland's universities provide for a large portion of Iron City's business, many of their students taking up biking to cut down their class commute times. Sreeram Ravi, a student at the University of Pittsburgh and the president of Pitt Cycling, says there is an obvious interest from college kids when it comes to riding. Getting people into the hobby safely, however, is always a challenge.

"The central hub of Oakland is still a little bit too dangerous for bicyclists, but I feel like there's a lot of people that want to get out there and ride," Ravi says. "We get a bunch of questions about how you

ride in Oakland."

Community members who walk or bike have been concerned ever since October of 2015, when Susan Hicks, a University of Pittsburgh administrator, was killed while commuting on her bicycle. Three days later, a husband and wife were struck and killed after getting off of a Port Authority bus.

Yet, even with those memories at the forefront of many people's minds, both Ravi and Jezowicz note that more and more bikers are taking to the streets and sidewalks of the neighborhood. A large reason for that has been a boom in bike-friendly infrastructure.

"With the bike lanes, we have a lot more people that, every year, are slowly incorporating into riding three to four seasons instead of just one to two," Jezowicz says.





Iron City's bright yellow shop is hard to miss.

Those bike lanes are slowly being integrated into the neighborhood's streets, the largest of which currently runs along Bayard Street and Bigelow Boulevard. They're all part of an effort to transform Oakland — and Pittsburgh at large — into a friendlier environment for bikers and pedestrians alike.

As Ravi points out, though, the two largest thoroughfares — Forbes Avenue and Fifth Avenue — have no such protection for bikers. Pitt Cycling is currently working with local bicycling advocacy group Bike PGH to lobby for expanded bike lanes throughout the Oakland community.

That said, the already-existing bike lanes, along with the Healthy Ride bike share program, are the clear drivers of Oakland's increased bicycle traffic. The problem with the influx, as Jezowicz points out, is that not all of these bikers are hitting the street with the same experience level. Having extreme novices on the roads of an urban environment can be a dangerous proposition.

"You do have a lot of people that are getting into the bike culture, so-to-speak, and they feel like, 'Well [I'm] just on a bike what am I going to do? I'm going to go down one-ways the wrong way, I'm going to run red lights because people are supposed to be watching me,'" he explains.

The drastic skill gap can be unsafe even between bicyclists, Jezowicz says. An unpredictable rider is, after all, unpredictable for everybody using the road, not just cars. In an attempt to curb risky behavior, both Pitt Cycling and Iron City Bikes are working to make sure all new bikers are prepared to safely navigate their commutes.

Ravi says that, in addition to providing pointers to new riders, Pitt Cycling also holds regular classes to teach students how to properly care for their bikes — everything from basic maintenance to winter prep. Building an educated population of bikers is key to building a healthy bicycle culture.

For Iron City, Jezowicz says that they've noticed a marked increase in customers buying safety equipment, be it for their own bicycles or for the Healthy Ride bikes. He's happy to see it, because proper safety involves every occupant of the road. And, of course, more bikers also mean more business for Iron City.

Nevertheless, patrons aren't showing themselves today. Jezowicz isn't too surprised. For Iron City, the colder months are, predictably, the slow season. His main concern for the longevity of the shop is merely that their customers are behaving out on the roads of the city.

As he says with a laugh, "We can't sell you stuff if you die, so just follow the rules!" ♦



Pinball is on hand for waiting customers.



# Prehistoric Giants Roam the Halls of the Carnegie

words **NINA SALUGA**

photos **NINA SALUGA**

**T**he “Dinosaurs in Their Time” exhibit at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, situated at the foot of Craig Street, is a cavernous funhouse for students, small children and paleontologists alike.

Little ones wander the exhibit wide-eyed and curious, watching the animated museum guides recount riveting tales of the menacing creatures that roamed the Earth nearly 65 million years ago. Meanwhile, parents peruse the extensive collection of dinosaur relics, silently hoping to make it out of the grandiose gift shop at the exhibit’s entrance with their pocketbooks unscathed.

“Dinosaurs in Their Time” is a gift from one of Pittsburgh’s most remarkable fig-

ures, Andrew Carnegie. It is home to the T-Rex holotype, one of the most extensive fossil collections in the world and the Diplodocus equivalent of Carnegie himself, at least by name.

The exhibit is complete with an interactive fossil dig, “Bonehunters Quarry,” where children shriek happily as they romp through the backyard of their dreams, gleefully “unearthing” remains from the creatures they have only come into contact with in bedtime stories.

The “Dinosaurs in Their Time” exhibit is a unique time-travel experience where visitors travel through the prehistoric era when dinosaurs roved the Earth. Afterward, they can grab a quick cup of coffee just outside at The Bagel Factory or a sushi roll from Sushi Fuku afterward.

It is a distinctly Oakland experience at its finest, where visitors are likely to bump into other neighborhood residents as well as international and prehistoric characters alike.

There are plenty of dinosaurs to meet inside, but there’s one that guests will meet exclusively at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, says Mallory Vopal, the gallery experience manager.

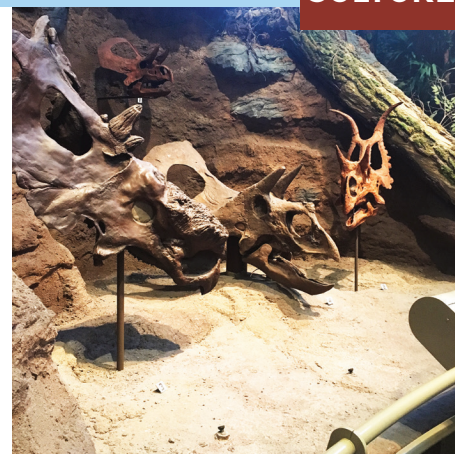
“We have lots of really amazing specimens that are found only here, for example we have the T-Rex holotype which is the very first T-Rex ever found,” Vopal says. “You can only find the T-Rex for the first time once, and so the fact that we have the very first T-Rex found here is amazing.”

Among the other notable characters that reside in the museum’s chamber is



Dinosaurs aren't relegated to the museum's interior. One of Oakland's most beloved landmarks — Dippy the Diplodocus — lives right outside.





Visitors to the “Dinosaurs in Their Time” exhibit are able to wander through towering displays featuring fossils of the bygone creatures.

a household name in Oakland, and that’s Andrew Carnegie himself. Sort of.

“We have *Diplodocus carnegii*, which is named after Andrew Carnegie, and then we have a *Apatosaurus louisae* which is right next to it, and the two dinosaurs are looking at each other,” Vopal says. “Louise was his wife, so it’s Andrew Carnegie and his wife forever memorialized as two dinosaurs in our dinosaur hall.”

Nestled just beyond the gift shop and among the Hillman Hall of Minerals, the Benedum Hall of Geology and the Paleo-Lab Fossil Preparation Center, the “Dinosaurs in Their Time” exhibit is housed in a chamber with soaring ceilings and pale blue walls that serve as the backdrop to prehistoric times.

Dinosaurs hover vigilantly as they keep watch over the exhibit. It’s hard to tell if the massive creatures are smiling or hungry as they loom high above visitors’ heads. Intricate Mesozoic murals span the length of the walls, looming in the backdrop as to make the authentic, reassembled dinosaur bones the starring attraction.

The Carnegie Museum of Natural History is a cornerstone of Oakland’s identity. The museum and its exhibits, like “Dinosaurs in Their Time,” magnify the remarkable collection of educational and cultural

institutions the neighborhood houses.

“Oakland is an amazing area because of all of the institutions of higher learning, but also because we’ve got the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Carnegie Museum of Art, there’s Phipp’s Conservatory, there’s Soldiers and Sailors Hall,” Vopal says. “There’s so many amazing institutions just in such a small concentrated area ... Oakland is just a really special part of Pittsburgh for the amazing higher learning opportunities that are just right here.”

Apart from bolstering educational and cultural opportunities in the neighborhood, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and its exhibits are unbeatable tourist attractions. The extensive collections of archival material and afterhours programs encourage frequent visits from tourists and locals alike.

The museum’s “After Dark” events are popular among students and tourists, and are held five times per year. “After Dark” events happen when the museum opens its doors afterhours to accommodate guests for a 21 and up bash with live music, a bar and exhibits curated to give guests a uniquely afterhours experience.

The museum and its events bring in visitors of all kinds, from Pittsburgh na-

tives to dinosaur enthusiasts, children, students and international tourists. The dinosaurs that reside at the “Dinosaurs in Their Time” exhibit are some of the most sociable creatures in the area, making new friends and welcoming old ones back daily.

They are often visited by first-timers like Melanie Perry, a native of Tasmania who also sees the Carnegie Museum of Natural History as an invaluable asset to the Oakland community.

“Things like this are always really good for the community,” Perry says. “Where I live in Tasmania, we just had a new modern museum open and they have heaps of events and it brings lots of people. So, I think it is really important, and it brings in tourists and people that are interested.”

Mike Alexandersen and Rosemary Pike grew up in Pittsburgh but now live in Taiwan. A visit to the Carnegie Museum of Natural History was at the top of their list of homecoming activities. Pike and Alexandersen see the museum as a powerful resource for tourism in Oakland.

“It certainly brings in people basically just to see it; that’s why we came in today,” Pike says.

Alexandersen adds, “It means that we spent money at a restaurant.” ♦





The Korean room, pictured above, is one of 30 different themed rooms found within the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning.

# Pitt's Nationality Rooms Celebrate World Cultures

words **MCCALL BEHRINGER**

photos **SETH CULP-RESSLER**

**P**ittsburgh is a city of just over 300,000 people. It's also a city of immigrants, built by men and women with roots all over the globe. The University of Pittsburgh sought to honor that important facet of Pittsburgh's history in Oakland's most visible landmark.

The Nationality Rooms can be found in the Cathedral of Learning. When Dr. John Bowman, the 10th Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, began his campaign for the construction of the Cathedral of Learning in 1921, he envisioned providing students with special classrooms. To achieve that goal, he appointed Dr. Ruth Mitchell to lead a project that would serve the students of the university, as well as honor the rich history of the nations that contributed to

the thriving culture of the city.

E. Maxine Bruhns, current director of the Nationality Rooms, says the rooms are the most popular tourist attraction in Pittsburgh. Tours can be scheduled to view specific rooms, but there are also open house events where people can come to learn about specific heritages.

Each room was designed to showcase a time of prosperity in the respective cultures. Committees were assembled, and careful planning to showcase a particular aspect of the nation's history went into each room. The content of the rooms is restricted to only cultural content in a time period prior to the American Constitution and the founding of the University of Pittsburgh in 1787. Political references are prohibited inside the rooms.

"We preserve and promote heritages,"

Bruhns says about the role the rooms play in the community. There are currently three more rooms in fundraising and planning stages: a Finnish room, a Philippine room and an Iranian Room. The struggle of raising the funds to build the room is apparent; Bruhns says the Finnish room is still in need of \$200,000.

Since Bowman's original initiative, the Nationality Rooms have grown to 30 different showcases of culture and heritage. The ability to walk into one of these rooms allows the visitor to travel to a culture far outside of Oakland. Understanding heritage is an important part of understanding this community and the people that live here.

As previous director Ruth Mitchell says, "Nobody grew on trees. Everyone came from somewhere." ♦





**FOOD**



# Community Human Services Provides Food for All



words **MCCALL BEHRINGER**  
photos **MCCALL BEHRINGER**

Lydia Strickling, a junior at Duquesne University and volunteer at the pantry, sorts fresh basil for distribution to community members.





Volunteer Divya Patel, a pharmacy student at the University of Pittsburgh, hands bags of fresh produce to local patron Wayne Young.

**B**oxes are stacked five high and, as volunteers start to unpack, the smell of fresh cilantro floods the air. While volunteers organize tables full of fresh tomatoes, onions and peppers, customers begin to pile into the purple chairs in the waiting room.

The tables at the Community Human Services Food Pantry in Oakland start to buckle under the weight of the farm-fresh food available to those in need. At the same time, the waiting room overflows with more than 60 people waiting to walk through the pantry.

The Food Pantry is situated between houses on Lawn Street and opens its doors to between 700 and 900 families every month. The pantry serves those families who chronically struggle to provide food, as well as those who are in temporary need from something like a sudden job loss.

Programs Coordinator Mel Cronin says anyone in need is welcome.

"We provide services to anyone who needs food assistance in Oakland," she says. "There's a lot of temporary need, so not everyone is coming here monthly."

The center runs on the honor system, and Cronin explains that customers report their income, a factor in determining eligibility.

Sherry Brown is a regular. An Oakland resident, she struggles with her diabetes and maintaining a healthy diet.

"To be honest, I can't afford the fruits and vegetables that your doctor wants you to eat as a severe diabetic," she says. "I was at a clinic and a lady told me about this, and I've been coming ever since."

The Food Pantry provided opportunities beyond just food for Brown.

"I started getting involved with the staff upstairs because I'm a little dyslexic," she says.

Friendly staff members helped her look up health-related information on the internet. To further assist with patrons' health,

nursing students from the nearby University of Pittsburgh staff the center, too.

The makeshift nurses corner in a back office features a privacy screen, scale, blood pressure cuff and information about common health issues. The bulletin board in the waiting room has job postings, housing opportunities and a bucket of free condoms. Upstairs, there are computers that visitors can use for any needs they might have.

For patron Wayne Young, 56, who spent much of his life reaching out to veterans in need and helping them find resources to sustain themselves, the Food Pantry was there when he stopped teaching and found himself in a crisis.

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**"I can't afford the fruits and vegetables that your doctor wants you to eat as a severe diabetic."**

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"I said, 'Wayne, there are resources available. Use the resources you've been promoting,'" he says.

Young found fellowship as well as food at the pantry.

"A lot of people know other people," he says. "Pretty much everybody knows everybody or have seen everybody in the area."

He sees the Food Pantry as a place where you receive assistance but also find support from the people, staff and other customers.

"You don't feel threatened," he says. "There's no violence. It's a warm atmosphere."

The smiles stretched across the faces of volunteers as they help a customer pick out vegetables, and the laughter of

customers in the waiting room are examples of the warm atmosphere Young describes. But the atmosphere can also be found in a quiet corner of the pantry where a volunteer offers a snack to a child holding her mother's jacket while she picks out a box of pasta.

Nick Drain, a former intern and consistent volunteer, says the reason he returns to the Food Pantry is the minute-to-minute interactions. Drain has spent over 600 hours walking through the Food Pantry with people. The commitment to volunteering is essential to the operation of the Food Pantry.

"It shows the community around you is willing to help one another," he says. "The things provided here are necessities: It's food, the basic thing you live off of."

Volunteers make two trips to a customer's car or help them load everything into bags they can carry onto the bus. Even the most timid of customers smile at the extra work volunteers do to make the process as easy as possible. One customer thanks a volunteer twice as she grabs her box of fresh food to take home to her family.

For a moment, the line between volunteer and customer is blurred, and neither seems to be in a less fortunate situation. Instead, two people carry boxes of food out the door while laughing and exchanging smiles.

Cronin talks about the way she wants volunteers to approach the Food Pantry and work with the people they meet there.

"I'm not defined as an individual by the money that's in my bank," she says. "I am a human being. My name is Mel. I walk on this planet just the same as you do, as the customers do."

The Food Pantry isn't just a place where people receive food; it's a place where people find community and friendship.

"Whether you're standing in the food pantry handing out the food or you're receiving the food, people are people," Cronin says. ♦





# The Original Hotdog Shop Grills Memories That Last

words **TORI NOVAK**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

**A**mong a sprawling street of big-name chains peers a neon sign that's unmistakable. Located at the corner of bustling Forbes Avenue and South Bouquet Street — the same spot it was founded on in the summer of 1960 — the Original Hot Dog Shop has become synonymous with the neighborhood of Oakland.

One step inside reveals chaos so odd it feels like Black Friday. There's nothing laid back about "The O." A tall man flips

what appears to be hundreds of hot dogs on a griddle that could feed an army. The clientele couldn't be anymore varied: from businessmen and doctors on their breaks to students laden in Pitt-adorned sweat-shirts and T-shirts — sometimes sober, sometimes not.

Considering the amount of grease they go through in a day, it's a good thing Dr. Thomas Starzl pioneered the heart transplant at UPMC Montifiore, a block from the hot dog shop. You'll more than likely need one after consuming one of The O's

calorie-stuffed meals.

Founder Sydney "Syd" Simon's story is that of many Pittsburgh business owners. Simon was the son of two hard-working immigrants who settled in the East Liberty neighborhood of Pittsburgh. He began his food service journey at a deli in Highland Park, and was devastated when it closed.

In the sizzling hot summer of 1960 — the same year the Pirates won the World Series against the New York Yankees — he saw an opportunity. With his





(Top) The O's famous neon signs light the way. (Bottom) Colorful menus greet customers.



Wall decorations tell stories from years past.

brother, Moe, along for the ride, he began selling hot dogs outside of Forbes Field. Hot dogs, fries and a cigar box for a cash register were all the brothers had to their name. Little did they know, their tiny business would eventually become an Oakland staple.

Megan Lange is a marketing director in New York City by day and a food blogger by night. While these days she reviews high-end cuisine, Lange got her start as a student at the University of Pittsburgh and a regular customer at The O.

"I don't remember 90 percent of my visits to The O, but I think that's how it's supposed to be," Lange says. "Those great times when you've been exhausted from studying for finals and you're stuck in the twilight zone, or when you've had too much to drink and you're just dying for a hot dog."

Brad Gockley, 27, rolls up the sleeves of his white button down shirt as though he's about to break a sweat. The giant hot dog sitting before him is topped with onions, relish and a heaping of Heinz ketchup.

"This isn't the kind of outfit you eat a hot dog in, but I'd make any exception for The

O," Gockley says with grave sincerity.

Like Lange, Gockley was also introduced to The O as a student at the University of Pittsburgh. His first visit is one he'll never forget.

"We went to The O after a night of partying with my fraternity and decided to have a hot dog eating contest," he recalls. "I blew all my money on hot dogs, literally all \$80 I had to my name"

But what keeps customers — including Bruce Springsteen when he's in town — coming back for more? For many, it's simply nostalgia.

Joe Pansuiak was born at UPMC Presbyterian hospital, only a stone's throw away from his parent's home on South Bouquet. Later in life he purchased a blue house in South Oakland, right next door to his parents. He's made countless memories in the neighborhood, but there's one place that always means home to him: The O.

"My father used to take us to The O for hot dogs before the Pirate games. I grew up with The O and it was always a staple in my life," Pansuiak says. "I took my first date there after a movie. I was nervous as could be, couldn't even think

straight with this pretty girl in front of me, smiling over her hot dog and that giant basket of fries."

He hopes to pass on the tradition to his 4-year-old niece. The little girl's blonde pigtails bounce as she skips to pick up her very own O dog.

Current owner Terry Campasano, the daughter of Simon and his wife Essie, plans to continue this sense of nostalgia for years to come. She grew up at the family owned business and is passing the legacy on to her children.

"They've been saying this place would shut down every year since I can remember, but we just keep going," Campasano says.

Now in her 60s, Campasano has been working the front lines of The O since her early teenage years. She's seen the height of Pitt Football and the hard times of sporadic Oakland crime, but remains a part of a dwindling constant for the perpetually changing neighborhood.

No matter what you call it — The Dirty O, The O, Essie's Original Hot Dog shop — one thing remains true. This Oakland powerhouse will continue to provide great hot dogs and iconic memories for years to come. ♦





# Cultivating Lives, One Plate at a Time

words **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

**A**re those collard greens?" a man asks. "Can I have some?"

A quick "Sure!" from Leanna Travis makes the man smile. Travis is a senior neuroscience major at the University of Pittsburgh and head of the urban garden on Oakland Avenue and Sennott Street. The garden, full of plants and herbs, helps feed people such as Carmen, the elderly man seeking produce who lives just a few feet away.

Created and maintained by Pitt's stu-

dent organization Plant to Plate, the garden serves as a community of its own within Oakland, specifically for Pitt students.

"Over the years, it's changed, but our goal now is to make this place a space for Pitt students to learn about growing their own food, local food and produce in general," Travis says.

The space is its own little world. It sticks out like a sore (green) thumb in the middle of the dark, tall city buildings and housing spaces it's surrounded by. Some people walk by, oblivious to the

oasis growing right next to them. But for those inside the greenery, it's become more than just a garden; it's a place of community.

"My favorite part is to interact with different people," Travis says.

The garden is a place where people who may never have even walked by each other on Pitt's 35,000-student campus get to meet and work side by side. Various Pitt student organizations like Gamma Sigma Sigma, Alpha Phi Omega, the Nursing Student Association and more are among those that volunteer regularly. Some people who volunteer don't know everyone within their own club, so when they come to the garden, they have an opportunity to get acquainted and also meet people from different clubs.

Clusters of people from different student groups often congregate around the rectangular picnic table at one corner of the garden. Introductions flow like rainwater onto the flourishing plants.

"Hi, I'm Megan, how are you?" one girl says.

It is obvious how much of the garden thrives because of community. Those who volunteer usually hear about it through other people. Rebecca Laher, for instance, got involved because of Travis, her roommate. The neuroscience student has many fond memories from the garden, including the time when she helped build the shed that now houses the garden's many tools and supplies.

"That was a lot of fun," she says. "We were trying to read the instructions but they were old and ripped apart. We were just looking at the pieces like 'How do we do this?'"

Laher says that the moment the shed was completed was an exciting one.



Afternoon light spills over a neighboring house, illuminating Plant to Plate's sunflower patch.





Gabrielle Mueller works on a gardening fence in the garden.



Nhat Dang hands Anika Hattangadi freshly-harvested tomatoes.

"When we finally finished and put the roof on, everyone was jumping around and signed their initials on the door," she says.

In addition to fostering community, the garden also provides a space for students to step back from the daily grind and relax. Joanna Moore, a nursing student who frequently volunteers at the garden, finds that it gives her a chance to breathe.

"It's an opportunity to make myself go outside and get fresh air," she says.

The garden is open and thriving, and the green landscape provides a welcome contrast to students constantly surrounded by modern city structures. For Laher, this kind of atmosphere provides quiet relief from the busy city life.

"Pulling weeds is cathartic," she says. "It's fun digging up weird stuff like huge turnips."

Nhat Dang, pre-pharmacy student and co vice president of the garden, is also drawn to the garden's peaceful environment. He learned about it through Facebook and began to get involved.

"It's brought me joy, and a release from studying from exams," he says. "I find gardening very relaxing."

Another equally important function of the garden is to provide produce for many students who are food insecure, and to teach them sustainable growing practices. Nearly all of the garden's produce is donated to the Pitt Pantry, a food bank started by Pitt students for students with food insecurity.

Courtney Joyce, a social science major, gets much of her food from the Pitt Pantry, and often stops by the garden on Wednesdays to harvest the produce she'll eventually consume.

"A lot of times as a college student you can't afford to buy every meal," she says.

"You start to cut corners on what you're able to eat."

The sustainability element is equally important for students, especially to Dang.

"I think it's important for people to understand how food gets on their table," he says. "I know a lot of people who swipe into a restaurant, eat the food and never think about how all this work goes into making one plate."

Now, as the garden's last crops continue to be gathered, winter's presence is beginning to be noticed. Plant to Plate

will be trying something new as the harvesting season comes to a close: planting via the garden's new greenhouse. In years past, they would stop gardening in the winter and pick back up in the spring. This year, however, they will be starting a trial and error batch of crops within the greenhouse.

Though time may pass and crops may wilt, the garden is sure to make an impact on other students like Joyce.

"It's been really awesome," she says. "I'm really grateful for all of this stuff." ♦



Plant to Plate's success is entirely reliant on the community of Pitt students putting in work.



# Asian Restaurant Options Abound in Oakland

words **NINA SALUGA**

photos **NINA SALUGA**

Pittsburgh's rising "foodie" status is not lost upon the Oakland neighborhood. Restaurants are diverse and ever-evolving with the latest crazes, from bubble tea to sushi bowls. Be it Forbes Avenue or South Craig Street, foodies can eat their way through Oakland's buffet of trendy cafes and authentic ethnic eateries. There's something for everyone to discover — and hopefully share with newbies to the scene. Take a look at five Asian-style restaurants foodies in the neighborhood won't want to miss.

## ROSE TEA CAFE

Rose Tea Cafe is a funky, modest eatery on South Craig Street that specializes in Taiwanese cuisine. The restaurant itself is low-key, but the fare is some of the most authentic Taiwanese food found in the city. The menu covers an extensive assortment of Taiwanese dishes with the restaurant's own unique flair. Vegetarians can get their fix with the zesty and flavorful broccoli with garlic sauce, while thrill seekers can try the Mala beef, a spicy beef dish served chilled. The restaurant's salt and pepper chicken is a fan favorite as well. For more adventurous palates, be sure to check out the extensive assortment of trendy bubble or milk teas.

## SUSHI FUKU

Sushi Fuku is a must for anyone looking to experience the evolution of a Japanese tradition. Sushi Fuku is a neighborhood favorite, known for revolutionizing the way customers experience sushi. The restaurant is fast-casual, and what's unique about it is that customers craft their own creation. Patrons start by choosing a protein or two — raw, cooked and tempura options are available daily — and then decide from plenty of options to put inside, like avocado, cream cheese, kimchi or mango. Dress it up with wasabi mayo, teri-



A fruit and nut salad, mesquite turkey sandwich and "Sunrise Suzy" from Red Oak Cafe.

yaki sauce or another one the house offers. Guests can choose to either "roll it" the traditional Japanese way, or "bowl it" into a concoction that can be eaten with a fork. Sushi Fuku is Oakland's restaurant scene at its most innovative.

## RED OAK CAFE

Red Oak Cafe is a health-conscious pick for those with a penchant for green juices, egg whites and early morning runs in the neighborhood. The cafe is a cozy-looking hangout that offers a hearty selection of soups, salads, sandwiches and breakfast options, as well as a fresh juice bar.

Try a breakfast sandwich with an Oakland namesake, like the Mary Schenley, or an egg scrambler called Oakland with chorizo, egg and Pico de Gallo. Although Red Oak Cafe specializes in vegetarian fare, there are plenty of meat options available, like the buffalo chicken wrap or the hot Shakespeare, an egg sandwich towering with ham, red and banana peppers and pepper jack cheese. So stop in for one, because breakfast is served all day long.

## OISHII BENTO

Oishii Bento is a casual dive off of Atwood Street that specializes in Japanese

and Korean fare. Oishii Bento is a healthy alternative to other ethnic eateries that offers authentic bento boxes and bowls, as well as sushi and tea. The restaurant, which calls itself "the yummy lunchbox," uses only the highest quality ingredients and offers authentic Japanese bento boxes filled with pork, beef, chicken, tofu, seafood or vegetables. It also features bento bowls, udon noodles and hand rolled sushi. Oishii has a hole-in-the-wall feel; its downstairs is devoted to takeout while the upstairs is a shabby-chic dine-in area where guests enjoy a view that spans Atwood Street.

## LULU'S NOODLES

Lulu's Noodles is a funky little spot on South Craig that puts an American twist on traditional Asian noodle dishes. The restaurant is a casual spot that offers Asian-inspired dishes like pad Thai, barbecue pork and a wide selection of popular bubble teas. The restaurant has a warehouse-like feel, with high ceilings and an open dining area that offers foodies an eclectic visual experience. The restaurant prides itself on fresh Asian cooking and its huge portion sizes. A typical noodle dish fills the plate with fresh vegetables and poultry, beef or seafood and is served on a plate almost the size of a flying saucer. ♦





PEOPLE



# A Rebel With a Cause



words **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI & DOMINIC DISILVIO**



**T**hough he has a little less full, curly hair on his head than he did in the 1970s heyday of Oakland's Decade night club, and a slightly slower gait, Dominic DiSilvio's audacious spirit is still intact.

The 77-year-old Italian was the owner of the renowned Oakland night club "The Decade" for over 20 years until its closing in 1995. Recently, he and his granddaughter Gabby Means released a book, "The Decade: Images of Modern America," highlighting the far-reaching impact of DiSilvio and his club.

Even as he approaches his eighth decade, DiSilvio is just as lively as he was at The Decade through the 1970s and '80s. During his tenure at the club, musicians like Bruce Springsteen, U2, The Ramones, Cyndi Lauper and The Iron City Houserockers loudly rocked their way through the building's frequently packed space.

Pittsburgh Post Gazette writer and reviewer Scott Mervis recalls in a recent article that at The Decade, "the energy of the music, the hard-nosed staff, cramped spaces, cluttered decor, lack of a bathroom door (!) and the uneasy convergence of students, punks and blue-collar locals made it a place where anything could happen." The club's animated, tight-knit community was a staple in Oakland's history, and its atmosphere was one that reflected DiSilvio himself.

"I knew from an early age he wasn't like every dad," DiSilvio's eldest daughter Gina Means says. "I remember him wearing big platform shoes, bell bottoms ... None of my friends' parents were like that."

This uniqueness is also mirrored in one of his passions: bars. When DiSilvio was 15, he and his family would vacation in Ocean City, New Jersey. Unfortunately for him, the town was dry. To solve his problem, he would simply go over a small bridge that connected Ocean City with the lively Somers Point, New Jersey, and sneak into the town's wild bars. While there, he'd hear artists like Bill Halley and Conway Twitty, and another passion, music, was satisfied.

Years later, DiSilvio's love for music and bars merged, and The Decade was born. Owning a nightclub only emphasized what his family calls his "mercurial" nature. The Decade was DiSilvio's home, and though he welcomed people of all walks of life through the club's doors, he was fiercely protective of it as well.

One night in 1978, before The Decade hosted the Iron City Houserockers, members of their record company

came to visit. While looking for the Houserockers' lead singer Joe Grushecky, DiSilvio walked into the dressing room (the kitchen, at the time), and before his eyes stood a towering, disheveled rocker known as Meat Loaf. Wary of the man, DiSilvio asked what was going on. Grushecky replied, "This is Meat Loaf!" Unfazed, DiSilvio said, "I don't give a shit if he's fettucine alfredo; get him out of my kitchen."

This tenacity pushed DiSilvio headfirst through the various problems he faced during his time as The Decade's owner.



DOMINIC DISILVIO



DOMINIC DISILVIO



DOMINIC DISILVIO

Historic photos from [The Decade's heyday](#).

One such difficulty came as snow nearly two feet tall covered the ground one January evening at the club. DiSilvio had a large band in from out of town scheduled to play that night, but the group was more concerned about making it to their next show than playing one at The Decade. They came to DiSilvio, expecting not to get paid, and asked just for gas money to get to Cleveland. Instead, DiSilvio answered, "No, I'm not givin' you gas money ... I'm gonna pay you, and

you're gonna play!" The band did play that night — three full sets — to the small audience that was mostly comprised of DiSilvio's family.

The other end of DiSilvio's fluctuating scale holds his gentle and caring side. When the Houserockers' soundman, "Big Bob" Boyer, was found dead in a local motel, DiSilvio stepped forward and took charge. The man didn't have any family members, so DiSilvio paid the cremation and funeral expenses. Since he knew how much The Decade meant to Boyer, and how much Boyer meant to local musicians, DiSilvio paid tribute to the man by having a casket made and burying his ashes under The Decade's own stage.

A great contributor to DiSilvio's mellower side is his family — his third, and perhaps most important passion. His daughter Gina Means remembers times in her father's younger days when he would "walk and talk."

"We always had to get an extra-long cord from the phone company," she says. "He'd walk from one end of the house to another talking on the phone."

Throughout her college years, she had memories like that with her dad when just the two of them would "walk and talk" together around Pitt's campus.

"He'd say, 'Let's take a walk,' and you'd think 'Oh my gosh, what's he gonna talk about?' I look back now and think, 'Wow, he really cared,'" Gina says.

This part of DiSilvio is apparent to granddaughter Gabby as well. They spent two summers together writing the book that chronicles The Decade's history, and Gabby recalls her grandfather's support of her other writing endeavors as well.

During her freshman year of college, she talked with her grandfather and explained how she wanted to go after a career in writing, while also thinking about her slim prospects of success.

"We were sitting down and talking and he said, 'Gabby, I think it's always good to do what you love,'" she says.

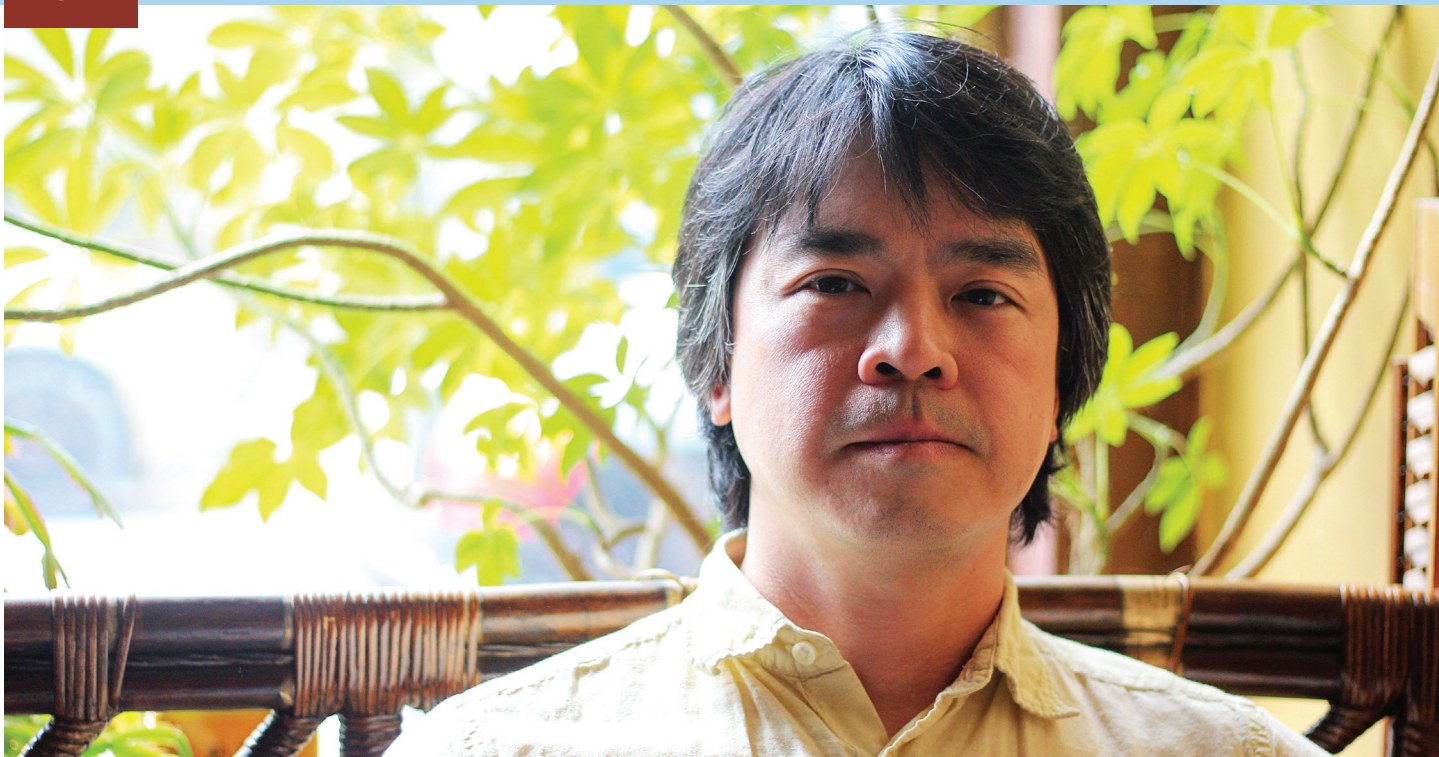
DiSilvio's love and support of his family and their mutual love and respect in return has only fueled The Decade's success. Without his family, he realized The Decade wouldn't have been able to operate.

"My family, we are The Decade," he says. "I couldn't have done any of this without them."

Though The Decade's fire has since burned out, DiSilvio remembers fondly the special aura the place held.

"There have a lot of places that tried to copy us ... and failed," he says. "It was one helluva ride." ♦





# Honoring Family Heritage on Atwood Street

words **NINA SALUGA**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

**W**riters know that one objective of storytelling is to make the strange familiar. Ron Lee, owner of Spice Island Tea House, might be Oakland's most archetypal example of this maxim.

Lee's restaurant is a successful Southeast Asian eatery situated off Atwood Street. The street is also home to household names like Dave & Andy's Ice Cream, Sorrento's Pizza and Puccini Hair Design.

Lee's Spice Island Tea House is not the all-American ice cream parlor or an Italian-American pizzeria. It is a uniquely Ron Lee creation that lends diversity and mixture to the otherwise conventional roster of establishments on Atwood.

Family heavily influences the venture for Lee. From his brother, who co-founded the restaurant, to his cousin, the chef, Spice Island is a family-driven business from every angle. The restaurant is Lee's

way of preserving and sharing his family history and ethnic origins with the Oakland neighborhood, as well as providing it with a diverse business.

Lee's family has been on the restaurant scene in Pittsburgh all their lives, with restaurants run by his late father located in Squirrel Hill and the South Side; both have a singular focus on Chinese fare. Although ethnically Chinese, Lee's family originally hails from Burma.

Lee himself was born in Taiwan and raised in Hong Kong before his family moved to Pittsburgh when he was 8 years old. Lee's family history makes his restaurant a unique place to experience Burmese culture. For some, Lee's restaurant is their first experience with Burmese cuisine or Burmese culture in general.

"The menu has relatively been the same for a good number of years. A lot of the Burmese dishes have been passed down

from my family," Lee says. "We are probably one of maybe just a couple restaurants that serves Burmese cuisine."

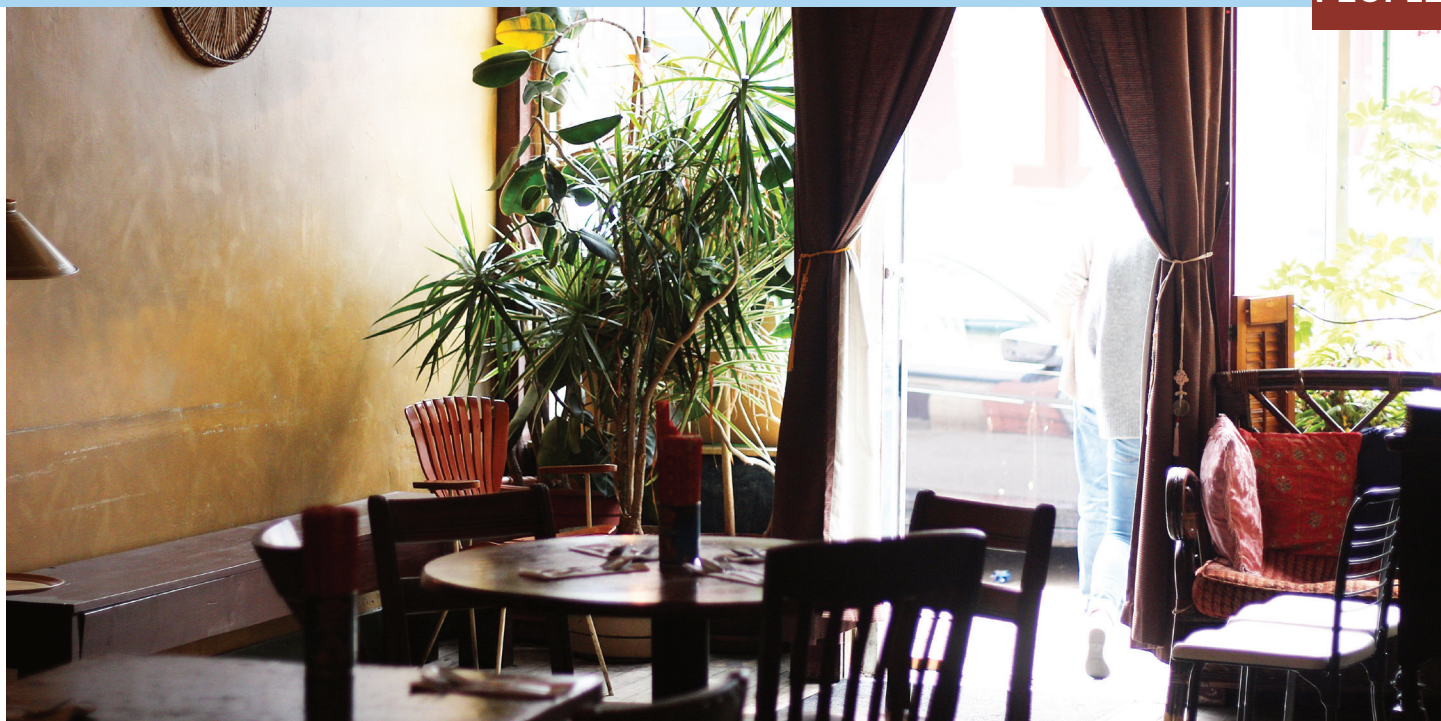
The teahouse idea for the restaurant came from Lee's efforts to create a coffeehouse atmosphere that would serve full-fledged fare. Lee describes the restaurant as having a sort of "shabby-chic" feel that he came up with himself. As an active proprietor who floats back and forth from back of the house to front of the house operations, Lee prides Spice Island on being an establishment that customers can feel good about patronizing.

"I think one person said to me a while ago about our place is that it makes people feel good about themselves," Lee says.

It's this laidback, feel-good atmosphere Lee creates that makes customers and employees alike gravitate toward his business.

"He just kind of lets things run their course, especially because he's been running





Spice Island Tea House's small, intimate eating area is where Ron Lee hopes to introduce Oakland residents to Burmese cuisine.

this place for so long," says Allegra Eidinger, a waitress at the restaurant and student at the University of Pittsburgh.

His love of his craft and the ease with which he runs his business are tangible, drawing customers like Lance Turturice, a student and loyal Spice Island patron, back time and time again.

"You can really tell that he cares about the food and that he's trying to bring something new to his customers and the community," adds Turturice.

Oakland's sheer population density and diversity lend Spice Island the clientele it takes to keep it flourishing. Between employees of hospitals, universities and shops, and the students and locals that patronize them, the demographic is wide-ranging.

"We have a lot of steady customers as well," Lee says. "We've had a lot of regulars who have been working in the area who have been coming for years."

It's this "replenishing market," as he calls it, which ensures that there is always a new throng of customers shuffling in and out of Spice Island.

Lee says that Spice Island steers away from the trendy and beyond what is "edgy." He wants patrons to really explore the unique culture and cuisine the restaurant has to offer.

"When people come in, they really haven't explored outside of what they're used to," Lee says.

A lot of the dishes are products of Lee's travels and imported from his family's native Burma. But he's also created some of his own signature dishes, like the popular favorite Java-fried rice. But don't steer

away from the restaurant's more exotic dishes, like the Mohinga, either.

"Come try the Burmese cuisine; order things that you can't pronounce," he advises.

Lee describes his restaurant as a "ground up" project. The business is organic in many ways, and the cuisine is clearly very specialized, making Atwood Street the perfect place to establish itself. Atwood Street has been a sort of restaurant row for ethnic cuisine, but Lee's location off the well-traveled section of the strip allows him certain liberties that other businesses located there might not have.

## **"Order things that you can't pronounce."**

"We didn't put the place on the map; we accepted that and used it to our advantage," Lee says. "Being off the beaten path, you can take certain risks."

Lee describes his business style as a more independent, eclectic way of doing things. This can be attributed to his creative background at Carnegie Mellon University, where he graduated with a degree in creative writing.

"I don't exercise my writing degree a lot in this arena, but in a lot of ways, it opens your mind up to expressing yourself in different ways," Lee says. "It's not just verbally or by page, but in terms of visually or how you want a certain atmosphere to convey a certain feel. It's all about feel, really."

When he and his brother, Alex, co-founded Spice Island, Lee's job was to enhance the vision, give it personality and bring it to a workable reality. As anyone that steps into the restaurant can tell, he has achieved that goal tenfold.

But Lee hasn't given up his endeavors in creative writing entirely. In 2005, Lee's wife convinced him to combine his expertise in creative writing and restaurant running to publish a book.

"I actually wrote a book on how to open a restaurant," Lee says. "It's kind of like a how-to book — a dummy book. This one is everything you need to know about opening and running a restaurant. It sold enough that it got a second printing, I actually had to do a second edition."

Lee's ingenuity, craftsmanship and expertise in the creative and business arenas are what make his restaurant the shabby-chic, effortlessly cool eatery that it is. Everything down to the mismatched décor collected from thrift shops, the hand-painted walls and the music that drifts from the sound system are all products of Lee's creative vision.

"Lots of money allows you to become creative, but not having a lot of capital forces you to become creative," he says.

But what exactly does Lee, his culture and his business, with its exotic fare and funky feel, give to Oakland?

"I have no idea," Lee says with a laugh. "I guess it gives people the variety. Oakland to me is probably still one of the more diverse neighborhoods for restaurants in terms of food choice. I think we have a niche here. You won't find many places like ours." ♦



# Moroccan Pursues the American Dream in Oakland

words **LEONARDO SANCHEZ**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

As soon as you enter Beta Bites, you can tell that is not a typical American restaurant. Located on South Bouquet Street, in Oakland, the place has a unique aroma of spices and meat, and the Moroccan music mixes with the loud sounds that come from the grill. Mohcine Eljoui, born in Tangiers, is the owner of the restaurant.

With a smile on his face, he greets his customers while coming and going from the kitchen. The business is small, but Mohcine has a lot of work to do. In addition to managing the place, the Moroccan may also cook and serve the customers every now and then. Delivering the carefully seasoned dishes all across Pittsburgh, however, is his main task.

“Even when I’m home, I keep my phone close, so I can see how things are going at the restaurant,” Mohcine says while getting into his car. “If they are busy and my help is needed, I go there.”

By the look of the vehicle, one can tell Mohcine spends a great amount of time in there. Cups of coffee and bottles of water

are strategically positioned near the driver’s hands, while a stack of papers — each one containing a different delivery address — stays on the car’s dashboard.

Beta Bites serves a diverse clientele — not surprising, given that Oakland is one of the city’s most diverse neighborhoods. It’s a mecca for international students and faculty, according to Vibrant Pittsburgh.

“In business, the first thing that we learn is location. That’s the reason why I was waiting for the right spot, and then I found this one,” Mohcine says.

Located among several old, unkempt houses belonging to students, Beta Bites relies on Oakland’s unique population to keep the business growing. The neighborhood’s rich academic life was also something Mohcine considered when choosing the restaurant’s address.

“I opened the restaurant in this neighborhood because there is a lot of students, and they are always open-minded, willing to try new things,” Mohcine says.

Mohcine was once a Pittsburgh student himself. He arrived in the city in 2000,

when he was only 21, to pursue a college degree. Due to financial difficulties, however, he was never able to finish the course.

Getting people interested in different dishes is a key point for the business owner, whose idea has always been introducing Moroccan flavors to American food. Beta Bites’ menu, therefore, is rich and creative, blending ingredients that normally wouldn’t be found together.

Customers eating there can find plates composed of both juicy lamb chops and American-favorite macaroni and cheese. The pizzas created by Mohcine, on the other hand, often have Arabic ingredients, such as kafta and pita bread. Everything carries a heavy, exotic Moroccan-style seasoning.

“Moroccan is a fine cuisine, but I can’t afford to have a posh restaurant,” Mohcine says. “So, I’m trying to introduce it to American flavors in an inexpensive way, so everyone can afford it, like college kids.”

In order to fulfill his dream of living in the United States, Mohcine had to



Beta Bites is located on S. Bouquet Street.



A Beta Bites employee prepares a customer’s order in the restaurant’s small cooking space.





Mohcine Eljoui is the owner of Beta Bites, a Moroccan restaurant in Oakland. His food combines American staples with Moroccan flavors.

leave his family behind in Tangiers. He nourished the ambition of living abroad throughout his adolescence, and the first time he came to the United States, at 13, he “was fascinated.”

Mohcine grew up under the influence of the director of the American English Center in Tangiers. A friend of the family, the educator taught him many of the things he had to know before coming to the United States. After 16 years far from home, he regrets nothing.

“We make choices. Of course, the first five, six years were really hard,” Mohcine says. “You feel homesick; it’s a different lifestyle, but new experiences keep things interesting.”

Mohcine doesn’t think of going back to Morocco anytime soon. Pittsburgh is now his home, after all. It’s also the place where he met his wife, Nicole Eljoui, with whom he has three sons, aged one, six and nine.

Nicole is American, born to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother — a completely different background to Mohcine, who was raised as a Muslim.

“Our cultural differences come up in unexpected situations,” she says.

However, love conquers all. The couple

has been together since 2003, after they met at an Arabic restaurant where they both worked. After they married, she went on to become a teacher, while Mohcine pursued his dream of becoming a business owner. After many attempts, Beta Bites opened.

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**“I’m trying to introduce [Moroccan food] to American flavors in an inexpensive way, so everyone can afford it.”**

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For Nicole, her husband’s great amount of work is a difficult thing to cope with.

“It’s very hard. Many days I really wish that my husband could just be ‘normal,’ but I know that is not his personality; he is an entrepreneur,” she says. “With three young kids, the situation is really hard. We all miss him incredibly, and the time he is able to spend with us is very special.”

Even though Mohcine doesn’t get a lot of free time, he already thinks of his next projects. The idea of founding an organization destined to provide support for Moroccans living in the city is a recurring topic.

“I have already thought about it with some friends, but we need people who have time and right now everybody is trying to build,” he says. “We’re mostly the first generation here in Pittsburgh, but hopefully in the future, we’ll be able to do it.”

Pennsylvania currently has about 3,000 immigrants from Morocco, according to a U.S. Census Bureau pool from 2014. Although a small number, “it’s a growing community,” Mohcine says. For now, Moroccans can keep their culture alive by meeting at the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh, located in North Oakland, like Mohcine does.

While Mohcine hasn’t fulfilled his dream of opening an organization aimed at helping his countrymen, places like Beta Bites are responsible for preserving the culture of hundreds of Moroccans now living in Pittsburgh. Mohcine Eljoui’s liveliness, on the other hand, not only represents the diversity of Oakland, but also makes many foreigners feel like they are home. ♦





Suzanne Johnston is a genealogist and library assistant at the Carnegie Library in Oakland. Johnston has always been fascinated with stories.

# Uncovering Family Stories in Oakland

words **MCCALL BEHRINGER**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

**W**hen Suzanne Johnston was growing up, she loved listening to her grandparents tell stories about people she had never met.

Spending time with her grandparents on the weekends gave her the opportunity to ask questions about her family and their past, like “Why does so and so have that name?”

To find out, she began writing letters to family members to hear more stories. Johnston was born in Pittsburgh, but when she was young her family moved to Nebraska. She attended college there and eventually returned to the Pittsburgh metro area in 1962 to get her Master’s degree at the University of Pittsburgh.

It was then that Johnston first discovered the Carnegie Library as a place filled with new stories. After graduating she went on to work at Mercy Hospital as a speech pathologist.

Today, at 75, she is retired from that career and has embarked on a new one that reflects her childhood curiosity: running a genealogy business. Much of her work takes place at the Carnegie Library in Oakland.

Johnston is a fountain of knowledge and a collection of stories, though not always

her own. As she leans in close to answer a patron’s question in the library, she puts her hand on her chin as if to sift through her personal experiences. She answers the questions, but then starts with, “You might also want to try...”

As a genealogist, Johnston can uncover secrets about a family’s past or help a person understand where they come from.

“There are two types of genealogists,” she says. “There are name collectors and those who are interested in the stories behind a family.”

Johnston is the latter.

“I love to hear stories but I’m not very good at writing them down,” she says.

Johnston is a quiet, but warm woman, and as she walks around the genealogy floor of the library she smiles at everyone. She is always quick to help people, according to co-worker Nancy Romig.

“She’s so knowledgeable, she can help anyone,” Romig says. “She’s a good go-to person. She can tell people where to look next.”

Not every story she uncovers is met with gratitude. Johnston recollected a story she unearthed for a client about a family member who had a baby a few months into a marriage and had to publicly apologize in church.

“The client said, ‘I don’t want to research this anymore because that kind of thing never happens in my family,’” Johnston recalls, rolling her eyes. “People don’t always accept it.”

Oakland has seen a substantial amount of change since Johnston attended graduate school nearly 50 years ago.

“It used to be place where people lived; there were old people, young people, middle-aged people,” she says. “And now, today, it’s either really old people or Pitt or CMU students.”

Instead of resisting the change, Johnston has embraced it; she moved back to Oakland from the Pittsburgh suburbs shortly after her husband Donald – aka “Ducky” – passed away.

Marilyn Holt, Johnston’s best friend and boss, says she is best described as a nice person and is good-natured to her neighbors.

“Her neighbors seem to be grad students and they cluster around her,” Holt says. “She is always the most knowledgeable and always the most willing to help anyone in the room.”

Over the years, Johnston has uncovered countless stories about families’ pasts, but there are still many left for her to learn.

“I just really love to do this,” she says. ♦





Imam Abdul Wajid gives a presentation to a group of visitors at a March 19, 2017 open house at Oakland's Islamic Center of Pittsburgh.

# Imam Abdul Wajid is Accepting of All

words **CAROLYN CONTE**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

After a hike up Bigelow Boulevard's hill in the neighborhood of Oakland, near the University of Pittsburgh, Christopher Hackney arrives at the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh. Crunchy leaves and chirping birds sprinkle the yard of the building. As Hackney steps into the office, the new Imam greets him with a playful tease.

"Why are you wearing a Pirates shirt?" The 30-year-old bearded man, who Hackney had not met before, says as he puts his hands on his hips. "That better be a Pittsburgh Penguins shirt the next time I see you!"

Abdul Wajid, the Imam of Oakland's Islamic Center of Pittsburgh, has more than once caught visitors off guard with his informal manner. Hackney, a student Wajid helped convert to Islam recently, describes this first impression of Wajid as a good example of his personality.

Like Hackney, Wajid is new to the center. He joined seven months ago after being interviewed by the office, community members and students. But before arriving at the modern edifice at 1400 Bigelow Blvd., Wajid had been practicing Islam since he was a child. He memorized the Quran in grade school and attained his

master's in *ifta*, which is the legal interpretation of the Quran.

Despite its spiritual mission to serve the Muslim community of Oakland, some people politicize the center — especially since the 2016 presidential campaign, when Donald Trump made profiling Muslims a major issue of his platform.

"I do encounter Islamophobia in Oakland. Of course, it is anywhere in the country," Wajid says, "but that is not my daily life."

When it does happen, Wajid says, the story is often the same.

"People usually come in here with an agenda, asking about Islamophobia and terrorism," he says.

He prefers to focus on the positive aspects of the mosque, however. He believes that because Oakland is a diverse community, it is more accepting.

Whatever questions or points of view visitors bring to the center, Wajid's warmth and disarming manner charms them.

When a reporter arrives for an interview and begins to remove her boots, Wajid waves his hand.

"Eh, keep your shoes on," he says.

Office manager Hira Mustaq said Wajid's accepting nature endeared him to the

hiring committee.

"I think that's one of the reasons we chose him," Mustaq says. "He wasn't the youngest option, yet he was still young and a comfortable, relatable person. He's just a human."

When he is not preaching, most of Wajid's work is done in the office, which has a soothing atmosphere due to the aroma of incense and Arabian rugs. Besides sermons, Imam Wajid counsels, visits the sick, washes the deceased, performs marriages and holds weekly meetings. His main responsibility is to support the community and be an approachable religious presence in it.

In the end, though, Wajid doesn't just support the community: He lives in it. Students might bump into Wajid anywhere. Just ask Suha Abdelbaqi, who encountered him at a sushi restaurant.

"I was just standing in line when I hear someone tell me to hurry up," Abdelbaqi says. "I turn around, and there's my Imam behind me!"

Wajid enjoys these relationships with the students and says that Oakland's young population is part of what he loves about the mosque's community.

"When I deal with kids, even taking religion out of it, I feel the most passionate," he says. ♦



# Keep Looking UP



words **NICOLE SLATER**  
photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**



On some days, when you look up at the Cathedral of Learning, you might catch a glimpse of peregrine falcons taking flight.

That is not the case on this brisk October day, but it doesn't stop birder Kate St. John from pulling out her binoculars to look to the sky.

St. John's family moved to the South Hills of Pittsburgh when she was six. She has lived in the region ever since. Over that time she has worked at many jobs and volunteered at many organizations in Pittsburgh.

However, her favorite thing to do is watch birds.

Her love for birds began when she was in elementary school. "I loved birds because they fly," St. John explains. Her interest faded away for almost two decades as she built a career working with computers.

In her 30s, though, she once again became involved in the outdoors. It was the peregrines that grabbed her interest.

The peregrine breed of falcon nearly went extinct in the 1960s, but was reintroduced to the United States in the 1980s. The first pair came to Pittsburgh in 1990. They arrived alone, but soon began mating. Western Pennsylvania was not a traditional nesting area for peregrines in the past because there are few sheer rock cliffs and many foxes. But, the birds have found a home here. And the human inhabitants of Western Pennsylvania have found themselves intrigued.

"They are so charismatic. They're gorgeous. They're fearless," St. John explains. "They would do reckless things, things that you'd think, 'You're going to die,' but they usually don't. They attack birds much larger than them and they win."

The peregrine falcon is a solitary animal and not friendly to human intruders. As the main volunteer monitor for the Cathedral's peregrine falcons, St. John has spent many hours watching the birds and how they interact with each other. She serves as the point person on all things peregrine, remaining in close contact with the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Her knowledge of the history of the birds is apparent in her ability to spout off facts and important dates like she's reading out of a book.

St. John's favorite part of watching the peregrines is "Fledge Watch," which is the time she and her fellow birdwatchers spend waiting for the baby peregrines to take their first flight off of the Cathedral.

During one such watch, the father bird, named Erie, flew around trying to persuade his babies to take the leap.

"He would fly and they'd all flap their wings, like, 'oh boy, oh boy!'" St. John recounts excitedly. "At one point he flew away from them, level, same height as them and then he flipped upside down and flew straight at them. And they were going nuts! It was way cool."

St. John's enthusiasm for the falcons has gotten others hooked.

"As the population of peregrines has increased, there have been people that follow them at different locations," she says.

These locations include tall buildings in Downtown Pittsburgh and the George D. Stuart Bridge in Tarentum.



St. John can often be seen in Oakland, binoculars in hand, looking to the sky for peregrines.

These days, St. John spends much of her time maintaining her popular blog, "Birds Outside My Window." She is surprised by the amount of people who read her daily posts, but more so by the articles that attract readers.

"There are days I work really hard on a subject and I do all the research and three people like it," she says. "There are things I don't even try on at all and they get fifty likes in an hour."

Contributing photographer Steve Gosser continues to send photographs to the blog because he wants to help St. John gain awareness for the issues she writes about.

"By reading her blog, you can easily tell she loves to understand as much as she can about birds and nature and the reasons why everything is as it is," Gosser says.

However, St. John noticed that she gets the most views following a tragedy, like the death of Dorothy, a peregrine falcon, early in 2016.

With resources like St. John's blog and the Nest Cam on the Aviary website, people can feel like they are familiar with the falcons by watching them interact in their habitat. But St. John warns that people

must not forget that these are wild animals that do not act in the same way we do.

"There are some surprises. When you watch nature you have to not to jump to a conclusion about what's going on," she explains. "I do it myself all the time, 'I think they must be doing that because...' but the answer is no. Everything we see is purposeful."

Learning about birds and other animals, St. John says, is an important part of our continuing success as a civilization.

"We are animals. We are not that different from other animals. Some of the stuff they do better than we do," she says.

St. John believes being outdoors is vital to the happiness of human beings.

"Being outdoors makes people happier," she says. "They don't realize taking a walk outside calms you down. There's something about the way we live today that makes us lose connection with what's good for us."

The importance of watching and learning from nature and its inhabitants is something St. John feels strongly about.

"All the things we've invented that we live with today are quite recent," she says. "The Industrial Revolution is only a couple hundred years old. Agriculture is only 10,000 years old. Birds have been here since the dinosaurs. There are things that are more used to living on earth and we could stand to learn from."

While St. John has an appreciation of the technology that surrounds us on a daily basis, she wonders what would happen to us if one day all of our gadgets went away.

"Keep looking up," she says. "Being outside takes you out of yourself, which is a good thing. We get all worried about stuff, and then you look up and there's a peregrine!" ♦



# Frenchi's Deli & Market Serves More Than Just Food

words **SARA SALTIEL**

photos **SARA SALTIEL**



Standing on an elevated platform behind a cash register, Frenchi greets every customer like an old friend. In the span of five minutes, he has a lively conversation in French with a foreign customer, asks an older woman how her family is doing, asks a student how his exams went and lets a regular buy a pack of cigarettes on credit.

Tucked away on Atwood Street in the heart of Oakland stands Frenchi's Deli and Market. It may seem nondescript, but the man running the show is anything but. Said Ali, nicknamed Frenchi because of his nationality, opened Frenchi's a little over a year ago and makes a point to create a familiar and welcoming atmosphere.

"We don't want people to come here ... and, you know how you go to some stores and the person behind the cash register is like a robot?" Frenchi says. "I really like to interact with our customers, and I don't even like to call them customers because most of them are really like friends."

This mentality is evident in everything that Frenchi does. He is a *bon ami* first and a businessman second.

"We are not here just to make money even though it is a business," Frenchi says. "We try to make it more, I guess, lovely than just, you know, the relationship between customer and business."

To follow through on his words, every Sunday he collects food, money and warm clothes for the homeless. He lets customers buy items with credit, trusting them to pay him back. If it's someone's first time ordering a sandwich, they get a free pop or bag of chips. If someone is hungry but doesn't have the money, he lets them have a sandwich for free.

Not everyone approves of his methods. Frenchi recalls that a former employee gave him a hard time after he saw Frenchi give a first-time customer a free bag





Frenchi's Deli & Market is the go-to stop for University of Pittsburgh students looking for anything from a midday lunch to a late night snack.

of chips with his sandwich. Frenchi has heard this many times but does not let it affect how he runs his business.

"It is hard to understand other people's mentality when you don't have the same heart or feeling," he says. "It's not always about money. It's not always about chasing that penny."

Sometimes those noble intentions can backfire. He lent €3,000 to his cousin over a year ago and still has not received anything back. He has let regulars take a pack of cigarettes and has not received payment for them. But thanks to his upbringing, no matter how many times this happens, Frenchi's sense of compassion shines through.

Frenchi was born in Paris and lived with his family until high school, when he was recruited to play basketball for a prestigious school outside of the city. He transferred to a high school in Florida for his last year, and upon graduating, he decided to stay in the U.S. with his brother in Cleveland, eventually moving to Pittsburgh.

Even though he moved away from his mother, he has never forgotten her teachings. She was the figurative mother in their

neighborhood, and a lot of the neighbors even called her mom. Frenchi cites her kindness as his inspiration.

"She will tell you, like, 'God bless us with this,' 'If someone ask for it give it to them,'" Frenchi says. "Maybe God test us with what we have to see if we are going to be stingy and greedy, and that was a very big impact on my life."

Frenchi's kindness is well known in his little piece of Oakland. As day turns to night and students walking to the bar replace students walking to class, every other passerby yells a hello to Frenchi through the open door. People stop in just to see how he is doing. Students perusing the aisles of mostly junk food and ready-made meals stop to have a chat or invite him to a party.

Two Pitt students, Colleen McLaughlin, a regular, and Emily Szopinski, a recent Frenchi's convert, talk over each other as they try to convey what Frenchi's means to them.

"It's homey," McLaughlin says. "I introduced myself last year, and he is so good at remembering everyone."

Szopinski agrees.

"Yesterday was my first day, and I felt like a regular. It's a hidden gem," Szopinski says as Colleen nods her head in agreement.

Connecting with neighbors was not always so easy for Frenchi. After moving to Pittsburgh to help train employees at a market he had worked for in Cleveland, he realized if he could run someone else's store, why not his own?

Once his store was opened, he encountered an unwelcoming neighbor across the street who would not return his relentless "Hello's" and "Good morning's."

"Every morning I tried, which sometimes you know, kindness and love, it's really easy because I don't give up on them," Frenchi says.

One day his hard work paid off. The man came into the store and Frenchi gave him a sandwich for free. Frenchi won him over, and the older gentleman is now a regular. Being kind even when it is hard to do so is Frenchi's philosophy as a person and a business owner.

"It is never too late," he says. "If you always do something kind, the light will always reach any darkness." ♦



Frenchi chats with customer and University of Pittsburgh student Paul Williams. Frenchi is famous among Pitt's student body.





Phil Coyne stands in front of the remaining traces of Forbes Field in Oakland, a portion of the stadium's outfield wall.

# Eighty Years and Still Going Strong

words **SAM NOEL**

photos **SAM NOEL**

**A**fter 80 years — yes, 80 — of ushering for the Pittsburgh Pirates, Phil Coyne's love for the team and its fans is as strong as ever. He started ushering at Forbes Field right after he graduated from high school.

"That was the thing to do, when you were living at home," Coyne says. "All the kids from Oakland would come on as ushers."

Coyne, 98, was born and raised one block away from Forbes Field; when the team moved to Three Rivers Stadium, and later to PNC Park, he moved with them.

Naturally, Coyne's age is a source of curiosity for many who meet him. Most want to know how he's made it to nearly a century. He smiles and imparts some sage advice.

"I've been saying to this to everyone who asks me how I keep going: two Oreos and a glass of milk before bed," he says, smiling. "A while back, I got a call from my boss. 'You got a package.' So I said, 'Open it,' and here he said it was 20 big packages of Oreos."

Coyne is a library of Pirates memo-

ries. On a sunny October afternoon, he takes a reporter on a tour of the site where Forbes Field once stood and explains all of the specs and quirks of the ballpark, showing where the outfield walls stood, where famous home runs were hit and where the park's bleachers and seats stood.

His favorite Forbes' moment? Bill Mazeroski's 9th inning, seventh-game home run to beat the Yankees in the 1960 World Series.

"It has to be. Paul and Lloyd Waner were my favorite players to watch, but that was my favorite moment," he says.

(Brothers Paul Waner, aka "Big Poison," and Lloyd Waner, aka "Little Poison," were Pirates stars; each made his Bucco debut in the mid-1920s, and, after stints with other teams in between, both retired from the Pirates after the 1945 season.)

PNC Park is fine, but Coyne still misses Forbes Field. He wasn't enthralled at all by Three Rivers Stadium, the multi-purpose, cookie-cutter edifice that housed the Pirates for 31 years between Forbes and PNC.

"Mostly 'cause it was closer to home," he

says. "They're all the same when it comes to the people. But [Three Rivers] didn't feel like a ballpark."

Coyne is nostalgic about Forbes Field, but he doesn't dwell on the past.

"You grew up with it," Coyne says, relaxed. "Those days have come and gone now."

Besides, he's done plenty of living outside of baseball.

During World War II he served in the U.S. Army on the Italian front. Coyne enjoys service to others — whether soldiering, ushering or just being a good neighbor. He wasn't yet a legend for his longevity when his neighbor Camden Copeland met him.

"Before I knew Phil as a Pittsburgh legend, he was 'Uncle Philly' to me and all our neighbors," Copeland says. "He let little kids put stickers on his face while he pretended to sleep."

Looking back, Coyne is himself surprised that he has been able to continue as an usher for 80 years. He's looking forward to more games, more seasons.

"As long as the mind is clear and the legs hold out," Coyne says, "I'll be ready to go next year, too. It's all luck." ♦





**CHANGE**



# Panhandlers Find Community on Oakland's Streets



words **OLIVIA KAPPLER**

photos **OLIVIA KAPPLER**

(Front to back) Bill, Jenny and John sit out in front of the Forbes Avenue Rite Aid in Oakland, hoping for some spare change from passersby.



**R**oberta, Bill, John and Jenny are four friends who sit outside of Rite Aid on Forbes Avenue in Oakland, asking passersby for money. They are grateful for a few pennies, or even a friendly “Hello.” This Rite Aid is their favorite spot to gather and talk to one another. Pitt students and local residents graciously give them what they can.

Anna Moyer, a University of Pittsburgh junior, makes sure she has at least a few quarters to give to them when she takes her weekly Rite Aid trip.

“I say ‘Hi’ to them when they’re there,” Moyer says. “Bill always shakes my hand, and I’ll give him a few quarters or what I have handy.”

According to Keystone Crossroads, a collaborative reporting project that focuses on Pennsylvania’s cities, homelessness in Pittsburgh has increased from 1,423 homeless individuals in 2011 to 1,573 in 2014. If there is any kind of silver lining, it is that the state of Pennsylvania saw the second-lowest growth rate in the country over that period of time, behind only the territory of Puerto Rico.

One of the beggars is Roberta Leonard, 52. Leonard has been homeless for four years. Her family currently resides in Florida, but she was born in Pittsburgh and came back to be with her boyfriend.

That life soon ended after she left him because of constant physical and verbal abuse. The end of the relationship, though, left Leonard homeless.

She especially enjoys the company of Bill Dorsey, 67, who has been collecting money outside of Rite Aid for 38 years. Dorsey is blind, and although he asks for money, he is not homeless and currently resides in the Bedford Dwellings apartments in Pittsburgh.

Not only does Dorsey collect money, he

enjoys singing gospel music to entertain those who want to listen.

“I’m not afraid to be out here singin’ in the streets,” he says.

Dorsey does not work right now, which is part of the reason he begs, but is receiving the help that he needs to support himself through “some programs” in Pittsburgh that provide financial aid. He says he can’t remember the agency’s name.

Dorsey says he enjoys most of the people who walk by him on Forbes Avenue that he knows on a first-name basis, but there are some people who give him grief, saying they doubt he is really blind.

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**“They always sit out there, so they have become a part of our Oakland community in a friendly way.”**

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“They say, ‘Oh he ain’t blind,’ and I say, ‘Well let me drive your car then,’” Dorsey says.

Dorsey fumbled with the few coins in his McDonald’s coffee cup as he rocked back and forth on his crate, smiling as though he knew everyone who would walk by.

After high school, Dorsey did not further his education. At one time he was employed by a rehabilitation agency, but claims he received unfair treatment because he is an African American. He quit.

Leonard went to Taylor Allderdice High School. She attended CCAC for a year and a half, and planned to transfer to the Univer-

sity of Pittsburgh for nursing.

Leonard was unable to transfer to Pitt, but says her relationship with the university changed from being her dream school to her safe house. Students have become accustomed to Roberta and understand her need. Those who walk by give her what they can, or even a meal.

“I always wanted to go to Pitt,” Leonard says. “I like the students, they [sic] nice to me, they pay me to go get food.”

Zach Halverson, an Oakland resident, shows empathy toward the beggars when he walks by and does what he can to help out.

“You just know that you’re making their day when you give them at least a little bit, you know?” he says. “They always sit out there, so they have become a part of our community in Oakland in a friendly way.”

After Leonard’s college career ended she was jobless and back with her family in Florida. In 2013 and 2014 she had to get surgery on both of her knees because she had trouble walking. She was unable to get a job during her recovery, and then claims that the opportunity to get a job has never been an option thereafter.

Just recently, Leonard applied for help through Operation Safety Net. She hopes that if they reach out, she can have a place to stay until she tries to get back on her feet.

Leonard hopes that within the next several years she can find a job and make a life for herself, and dreams to go back to nursing school at Pitt to become a registered nurse.

Dorsey also has hopes to get a job where he can help people and make them happy when they are in need. He wants to be able to support his teenage daughter so she can have the life she deserves. For right now, he says that he is preparing carols to sing for Christmas time on Forbes Avenue, and that he will worry about the future after that. ♦



Sitting on an overturned milk crate, Bill collects change in a McDonalds cup. He enjoys singing to pedestrians in exchange for money.





The chapel's interior holds soaring ceilings.



The ornate stained glass windows in the chapel hold almost 250,000 pieces of glass in total.

# Heinz Memorial Chapel Serves Oakland

words **CASSIDY BRENNAN**

photos **SETH CULP-RESSLER**

One nondenominational church still continues to serve the people of the Oakland community today. Built in 1933, the Heinz Memorial Chapel was constructed to serve the people of the community and offer a place for not only religious ceremonies, but also a place for people to learn.

The chapel is dedicated to Anna Margareta Heinz, who valued education and religion. Her son Henry J. Heinz passed away in 1919, and his three children decided to build the church in honor of their father and his mother. Henry J. Heinz grew up in the Oakland area, where the University of Pittsburgh is located, so his children knew that this was the ideal place to honor him while also serving a purpose for the community members.

The breathtaking architecture captivates residents and visitors to Oakland, making it a must see. The outside of the building contains intricate stonework, while the inside has detailed wood and ironwork. Stepping inside for the first time is an event unlike any other. The high ceilings paired with the chapel's organ make for an exceptional sensory experience.

The Heinz Memorial Chapel is one of a kind, with 23 windows designed by Charles Connick. The windows in total contain almost 250,000 individual pieces of glass.

The architectural design, by Charles Klauder, was created in order to have a physical representation of the University of Pittsburgh. Having each window in the chapel designed by one artist is a unique feature to the chapel. Most churches have windows designed by a few artists and not just one.

Today, the chapel still holds services for any religious background. It is nondenominational, which also makes it unique compared to other churches in the area. Students, alumni and affiliates of the University of Pittsburgh are allowed to hold ceremonies such as weddings throughout the year. The chapel holds about 170 to 190 weddings per year.

Currently, many different organ concerts are also being held at the Heinz Memorial Chapel. Wendy Lau, assistant director at the chapel, said the recently refurbished organ makes a majestic sound.

"The organ in the church is just a magnificent instrument, and recently had a brand new electronic system installed," she says. "Now it has been said that the organ runs as well as a computer."

The sentimental value of the chapel, combined with the amazing architectural features, makes for the perfect place to visit in Oakland. Any day of the week or time of the year, excluding university holidays, the church is open to visitors. ♦





PUBLIC DOMAIN PHOTO



PUBLIC DOMAIN PHOTO

# Salk Found Polio Cure at Pitt

words **DAN PRIORE**

**T**he scene was surreal.

Families eagerly awaited the medical press conference, listening patiently by radios to know the instant the news had been confirmed, according to an account in *The New York Times*. Crowds huddled around. Cheers of joy soon broke out.

Dr. Jonas Salk had discovered a vaccine for polio.

It was April 12, 1955, and much of the country and scientific community was concerned and panicking over the polio epidemic. It had been reported that more than 50,000 children in the United States had been infected with the disease. Many had died, and even more were severely paralyzed, forcing them to use an iron lung — a large metal contraption made of metal that helped people breathe.

There was no defense against it until Salk and his team of researchers arrived at the University of Pittsburgh in Oakland in 1951 to search for answers.

The process was certainly not easy. Salk worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week, according to an article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. In the UPMC labs, Salk refused to hold staff meetings and rarely showed much of an effort to inspire his team. It can only be imagined the doctor hoped all the children suffering in the once

Oakland Municipal Hospital was enough motivation to find a cure.

Around 1.8 million children had been tested with different vaccines before Salk came around, but none had proven effective. A breakthrough came once Salk's research found a new way to kill the virus: a formaldehyde solution as known as formalin.

Over the next few years, the vaccine was enhanced. About 1 million people went through a trial run following the 1955 announcement. The results proved just how safe the newest vaccine version was.

Eventually, the number of cases dropped to only a handful each year. According to *The New York Times*, just over 10 years later in 1969, not one death was reported in the United States because of polio.

Even though Salk was not liked among his peers — and was known for not handing out proper credit to all the researchers he spent hours working with in the UPMC labs — he was adored by the public.

The Digs, a photo archive collection from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, says on the afternoon of April 16, 1955, a crowd of about 500 Pittsburghers, including children, gathered at the airport — waiting for Salk's plane to land.

They had to see their hero come home. ♦



PUBLIC DOMAIN PHOTO

(Clockwise from top) Dr. Jonas Salk at Copenhagen Airport. Salk and his team administer the polio vaccine to patients on February 26, 1957, in the Commons Room of the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning. Salk at the University of Pittsburgh, where he developed his vaccine.





PUBLIC DOMAIN PHOTO

A vintage postcard illustration depicts Forbes Field in its heyday. The stadium operated in Oakland for 61 years, from 1909 to 1970.

# Forbes Field Brought Baseball to Oakland

words **SETH CULP-RESSLER**

**I**t's June 30, 1909, and more than 30,000 crazed fans are packed into the seats and bleachers lining Forbes Field, the Pittsburgh Pirates' newly-finished crown jewel.

As the Pittsburgh Press reported on that opening day, Forbes Field was "the world's finest baseball park." The soaring concrete and steel structure stood as a monument to the institution of baseball and a sign of the game joining the new millennium.

That inaugural day, the Pirates faced off against the Chicago Cubs, a team that had won the World Series the previous two seasons. Unfortunately, the champions came out on top once again, winning 3-2.

The rest of '09 wasn't so bleak for the Bucs, as the Society For American Baseball Research explains. In fact, Pittsburgh went on to clinch not only the National League title, but also the World Series that same year.

Barney Dreyfuss, the owner of the Pirates at the time, wanted to make an impact with his new park — a grand statement to celebrate his team and the burgeoning Pittsburgh fan base it was attracting.

The Oakland location of his new field, however, was controversial. At the time,

Oakland was considered a remote site for a major stadium, far removed from a downtown location that would seem an obvious choice.

Rob Ruck, a professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh, explained that in the end the location was a perfect choice. With the litany of Pittsburgh natives that played in the park, and the employees that hailed from the neighborhood of Oakland, Forbes Field soon became a community staple.

"Even though Forbes Field was owned by Barney Dreyfuss and his family, Pittsburghers felt it belonged to them," Ruck said. "What they saw on the field was a reflection of who they were."

What they saw also was a variety of sporting spectacles. As the online entry for Forbes Field's Pennsylvania historical marker explains, at different points in its history the stadium played host to, among others, the Steelers, the University of Pittsburgh football team, boxing matches and the Homestead Grays, a Negro League team from the era of segregated baseball.

That 1909 championship win wouldn't be the last the ivy-lined walls of Forbes Field witnessed over its 61-year lifespan.

The Pirates would go all the way again in the 1925 season against the Washington Nationals, the winners of the previous year's series.

The 1960 season, though, was the big one. The Pirates found themselves faced against the New York Yankees, one of the most dominant teams in baseball at the time and the clear favorite to take home the championship.

Nevertheless, the series lasted until the seventh game. The Pirates led going into the ninth inning but New York quickly tied it up, much to the dismay of the packed-to-the-brim Forbes Field.

It was then, in the bottom of the ninth, that Bill Mazeroski knocked one right over the left field wall — and just like that the Pirates earned their third World Series win. Every October 13, on the anniversary of that home run, Pirates fans gather at the remnants of the outfield wall and listen to the radio broadcast from that hallowed day.

Forbes Field's last game — on June 28, 1970 — looked much like its first. In a fit of poetic justice, the Buccos faced off against the Chicago Cubs, just like they had 61 years before.

This time, though, the Pirates won. ♦





**REFLECTIONS**





# Experiencing New Places With a Journalist's Eye

words **MYAH SCHLEE**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

**I**t has become increasingly easy for me to lose focus on my surroundings. With technology and information constantly at my fingertips, the urge to be updated on world events and where my friends went out last night is omnipresent. Access to news has only become faster as time has passed, causing the urge to explore to diminish to an almost nonexistent level.

However, this semester I decided to try seeing the world through the eyes of a journalist: observing, engaging with others and becoming a part of my surroundings. The result has changed the way I approach new places, people and experiences.

In September, I made my first trip to Oakland after receiving an assignment that intimidated me: walk around and get a feel for the atmosphere of the neighborhood. As I walked the streets of Oakland, an extremely unfamiliar territory, I was shocked at what I was able to notice simply by paying attention.

Never before had I observed a place through the eyes of a journalist; in fact, I picked up on happenings that I never would have seen without putting down my phone and pausing to look around. I saw the way students sprinted through the streets in a hurry to get to class, observed the way the man begging on the corner shook his Styrofoam cup full of change at every passerby and took in the smell of fresh bread baking on the corner of the busy street.

After the first trip to Oakland, I soon

realized that the best way to fully experience a new place is to blend in and become part of the surroundings.

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**From behind the lens of an iPhone, the world is not nearly as exciting. As I learned on the streets of Oakland, listening to your surroundings and talking to the people you encounter can give you more information than a statistic from a website.**

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Rather than dodge my way through the streets to avoid the foot traffic spreading across the sidewalk, I learned to sit on the steps of a nearby building and observe the pedestrians. Instead of rushing through superficial small talk with the workers at various shops, I engaged them in conversation about how they got to where they are. Utilizing a

new approach to getting to know the people of Oakland proved to be a lesson I could take with me outside the boundaries of the neighborhood.

Not only are observation skills acquired by getting out in the field important, but the inquisitive nature of a journalist is also extremely useful. When exploring any new city, the best trick to understanding local life is to engage with the people that inhabit the area.

Think of it this way: Every person around you has at least one experience that could be turned into a story. Therefore, it's a journalist's job to go out and find these gems of information. For example, instead of getting lost in an article about World War II, go out and find a veteran who can give you a first hand account of the same battle that the article details. If you're an avid sports lover who enjoys the latest information from Twitter, try going out to the game and experiencing the commentary as it happens.

From behind the lens of an iPhone, the world is not nearly as exciting as it would be right in front of your eyes. As I learned on the streets of Oakland, listening to your surroundings and talking to the people you encounter can give you more information than a statistic from a website.

Hearing another person's story or experiences can give a brand new view of an area, and insight that few newcomers may possess. Regardless of who you are or what you study, the benefits of seeing the world from the eyes of a journalist are invaluable. ♦





# Putting Together the Puzzle Pieces of Oakland

words **LAURA POLLINO**

photos **LAUREN ZAWATSKI**

I could fill an entire page with what I didn't know about the neighborhood of Oakland, and, well, here it is.

My home is about 35 minutes from Oakland, so growing up my parents always brought me to the city. We usually came down for breakfast at Pamela's, Pitt basketball games or Sorrento's.

However, I never paid attention to what Oakland actually had to offer. My assignments for *Off the Bluff* magazine helped me discover the puzzle of Oakland as much more than just Pitt's campus: It's a phenomenal place that's full of diversity and culture.

In high school, our language classes always went on field trips to the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning and toured the Nationality Rooms. Back then, we went simply because it was a free day off classes; however, in college, when I went I took time to look at the history and value of it all.

I learned more deeply about one specific neighborhood staple due to a class assignment I had this semester, and it is one of Oakland's largest puzzle pieces: Schenley Park.

Having been to Oakland so many times, I don't even remember driving past or through the park, but now I've learned that the park is a central attraction for Oakland. It has bike trails, playgrounds, walking trails, golfing, swimming, disc golfing — just about everything.

While I was researching the history of the park, I gathered information from online sources and Bob Bauder, a writer for the *Tribune-Review*. He told me that Mary Schenley

was “a rich heiress” who was given a rather large inheritance from her mother in the 1850s. With that inheritance she donated a great deal of land in 1889 to create the park.

I pieced the parts of this information together on Mary Schenley back to the Cathedral of Learning at Pitt. I learned that the Croghan-Schenley Ballroom and its parlor, both originally from the family's mansion, were moved to the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning in the 1940s. Still to this day, it remains a major piece in Oakland. What I was learning about Oakland was becoming a grander image.

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**The puzzle of Oakland is much more than just Pitt's campus: It's a phenomenal place that's full of diversity.**

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It was like a puzzle. Lots of things connected in one way or another, and it was starting to come together.

My next puzzle piece, once again in the form of an assignment, was a montage piece on a pizza shop I have been going to since I was roughly six or seven years old. Sorrento's Pizza Roma has been my family's favorite pizzeria for as long as I can remember. When we got the assignment to do this type

of story, I immediately chose Sorrento's.

I had the opportunity, for which I am beyond grateful, to meet the owner. It was awesome to meet and chat with the person running my favorite pizza shop. I also had the opportunity to speak with the manager for the past six years, recently hired employees and some that have worked there for more than twenty years. The history of the shop and how it has evolved over the years has been quite the journey.

The next puzzle piece I discovered in Oakland was the Original Hot Dog Shop. I had no clue about “The Dirty O.” I've been driving past that place for forever, and never thought of the history it had and the impact it had on Oakland.

The lights on the sign give you that old time feel — almost taking you back in time. It's like one of those movie scenes you wish you could go to. At first, the smell of this place was a smell I didn't recognize. But it was the smell of old times, Oakland, French fries and a hotdogs — all in one puzzle piece.

But I have learned throughout this course that pieces appearing as just a park, a pizza joint or a hotdog shop can have a much larger impact on their surroundings and the people in the community than you might think.

I've learned more about Oakland in the past ten weeks than I have my whole life.

I learned everything from the best diners in the city to the history of the land. I appreciate this course a great deal because it has expanded my views and given me a further educational view on this phenomenal place. ♦







