



LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS



Year after year, the students in Dr. Dillon's Magazine Journalism class have told the stories of Pittsburgh, looking into every nook and cranny of the city to find untold stories. They uncovered the hidden truths and bolstered the voices that make up the Steel City, constantly breaking free from their comfort zones and leaving the confines of the Bluff. This year was no different. In this issue of *Off the Bluff*, Iconic Pittsburgh, the students brought to life what makes the city emblematic—not just the skyline or Steelers. Each story and photograph jumps off the page with colorful quotes, strong vocabulary and compelling narratives. The writers in this class not only discovered the voices that echo throughout the city but also the voices within them. They carefully crafted articles to display their creative abilities and inner monologues. They were beyond successful. Magazine Journalism was one of my favorite classes at Duquesne. I told stories in unique ways and explored how to do it well. Most importantly, the class brought out my inner journalism voice. I am so grateful that I got to enhance my editing skills and help the writers of this issue tell Pittsburgh's most quintessential stories. It is an honor and a privilege to be the last editor-in-chief of *Off the Bluff* under Dr. Dillon's supervision. The magazine will never be the same without him, but I know the journalists of Duquesne will continue to tell compelling and groundbreaking stories about Pittsburgh in their true voices. - Kaitlyn Hughes, Editor-in-Chief

As students in my Magazine Journalism class quickly learn, writing the ending can be harder than writing the beginning.

You don't want the narrative momentum of your story to dissipate into nothingness. Nor do you want to contrive: *And they all lived happily ever after!*

The same goes, I'm finding, for wrapping up one's career.

I started this publication soon after I arrived at Duquesne. This is the 25th edition. Our journalism program was very modest then, and I felt students in my advanced classes needed to get out into the community and talk to the wide variety of people they'd soon be encountering as professional journalists. I wanted them to ... well, get off the bluff.

And have they ever. Issues have focused on city neighborhoods, the environment, the arts—and this year, Iconic Pittsburgh. So many stories. And, gratifyingly, the two most common takeaways students express at the end of the project are: "This pushed me out of my comfort zone." And: "I had no idea Pittsburgh had all of this cool stuff!"

Off the Bluff started as a broadsheet, but when our Media Department launched in 2005 I found myself working with a talented colleague who is a wizard at design, Prof. Jim Vota, and we made the turn into magazine publication.

Magazine Journalism students pitch and write stories in the fall, and I choose an editor to oversee production in the spring. I couldn't be ending my run with a finer student, editor and person than Kaitlyn Hughes, whom I've taught in several classes and whom I've watched grow into a confident professional as an editor at *The Duke* and an intern at the *Tribune-Review*.

So, how do you end a story? I tell my students that for my money a quote that loops back to the lede is the most naturalistic way to finish it off.

About 10 years ago, a student interviewing me for a video assignment asked me: "What is your philosophy of teaching?"

Outwardly, I stroked my beard and appeared thoughtful. Inwardly, I thought, "I'm supposed to have a philosophy of teaching?!"

Then something came to me. I explained that my philosophy of teaching was the same as my approach to reporting and that I could summarize it in fewer than a dozen words. I hope students would agree I lived up to it:

"Tell people something worth knowing in a compelling and memorable manner."

Dr. Michael Dillon, Publisher



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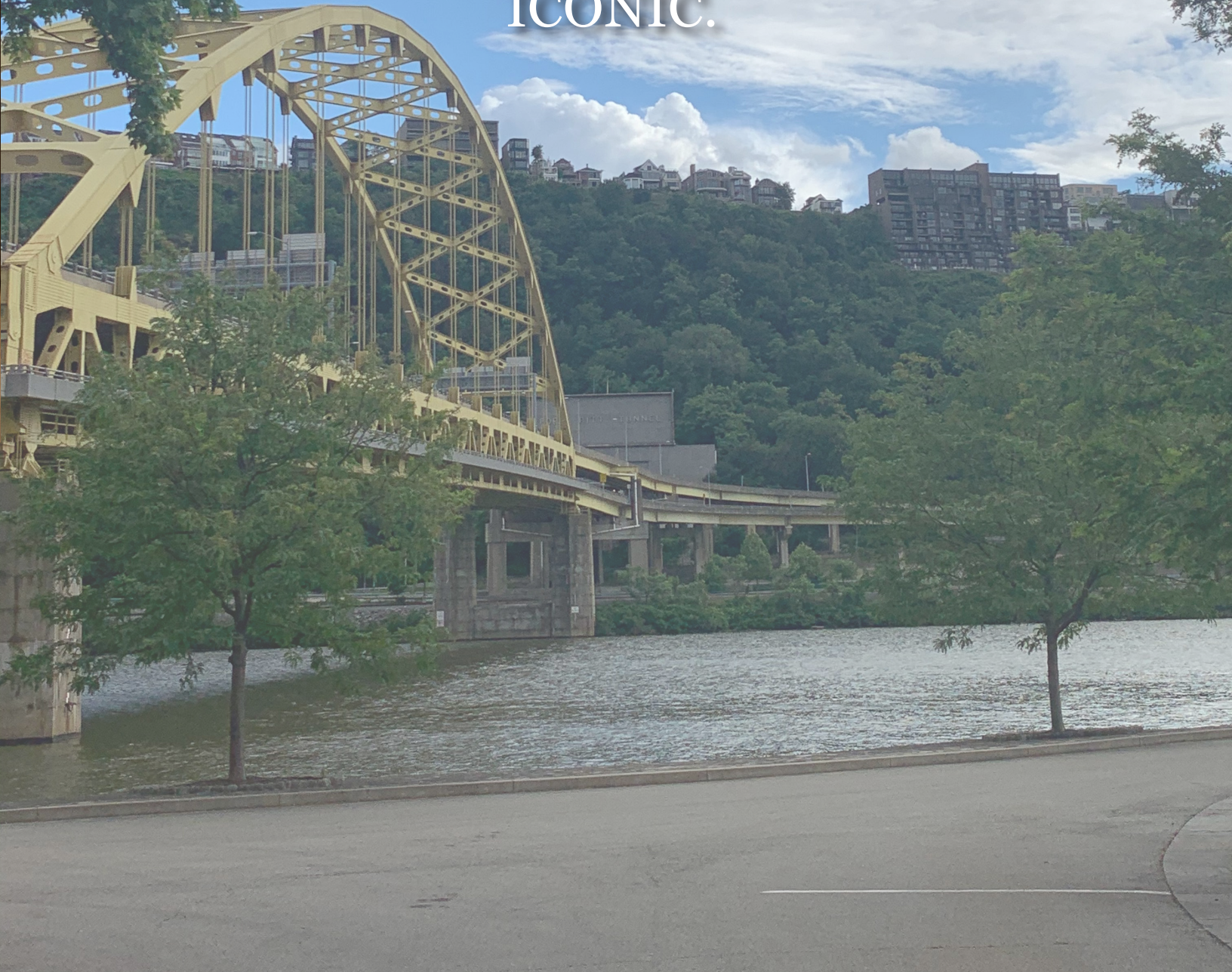


2026



PROFILES

PITTSBURGH IS HOME TO A
WIDE VARIETY OF AMBITIOUS
INDIVIDUALS. FROM
ENTREPRENEURS, TO ARTISTS, TO
PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES, MEET
THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE THE CITY
ICONIC.





Amplifying the voices of Pittsburgh

The couple that brought TEDx to the Steel City

By Charlotte Shields-Rossi



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRIS DALEY

Chris Daley and Bridget Joyce sat in Fisher Hall for a literary journalism class in 2005 and brainstormed story ideas that would demonstrate a unique facet of Pittsburgh.

Bridget, a journalism student, planned on writing an article about the lives of exotic dancers. Michael Dillon, her professor at the time, wanted someone to accompany her to the Cricket Lounge to do field research. Classmate Chris was happy to tag along.

It turned out to be their first date: Three years later, they were married.

"We always joke that our first date was thanks to Dr. Dillon and literary journalism at a gentleman's club," Bridget says.

Twenty years after that memorable first date, the pair is now a Pittsburgh power couple and integral to the fabric of the city.

Chris spends his days as the senior director of digital marketing at UMPC Health Plan and as an adjunct professor at Duquesne. Bridget spends hers as a senior council at Highmark Inc.

On top of their busy work schedules, Chris finds time to fulfill his duties as the marketing committee chair at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, and Bridget attends Allegheny Regional Asset District board meetings.

On top of all that, they still find time for family.

They have two children—three, if you count TEDxPittsburgh.

TEDxPittsburgh is a non-profit organization that hosts conferences for speakers to share ideas in 10 minutes. The Daleys bought a TEDx license a decade ago.

"[TEDx] is a part of the largest set of ideas the world has ever collected in one place and [is] making sure that Pittsburgh has a little slice of the real

estate," Chris says. "With TEDx we try to give people a microphone who otherwise wouldn't have had one."

They collaborate with speakers, figuring out central ideas of their speech. Bridget uses the journalistic skills she employed at the Cricket Lounge when finding and coaching speakers.

"It's really purposeful, and the thing with how we approach our speaker curation and coaching is really to listen," Bridget says.

Leanne Meyer, who works in leadership development, was a TEDx speaker a few years ago.

She remembers sitting behind the stage filled with nerves, waiting to talk in front of the large audience.

Bridget handed out pizza, trying to calm down the speakers, while Chris did a last-minute run-through of a speech.

This moment sticks out to Leanne. It showcases Chris and Bridget's humble and giving ethos.

"[They] embody the best of Pittsburgh," Leanne says.

She says the process that spans finding a speaker to the end of the show is lengthy and filled with hard work. But the speaker and the Daleys don't get paid for their efforts.

"They are giving a gift, a gift to the libraries of the world," Chris says.

Chris's sister Lauren Daley-Maurer has been to a number of the events. The moment Lauren gets the ticket she becomes immersed in a dynamic and engaging environment.

"You're exposed to so many big thinkers," Lauren says. "You walk out changed."

The Daleys love Pittsburgh so much that their house could be described as a museum dedicated to the city. Their walls are lined with art from local Pittsburgh artists. One of

their favorite pieces is a large painting by Baron Batch, a former Pittsburgh Steelers running back-turned-artist who also happens to be a friend.

"If you want to be a well-rounded person, you could do it in Pittsburgh," Chris says.

He says you could go see the best hockey player in the world one day and then go to a world-class museum the day after.

Bridget recalls a time she was in Rome having a conversation with locals about her home. She laughed thinking about how she was talking about Pittsburgh while in one of the most beautiful cities.

They are both advocates and ambassadors for their city.

"If you care about Pittsburgh you have to do something," Chris says. "We're trying to get more young people to move here, stay here after they graduate, because we need that. You know, talent and energy and the creative community in Pittsburgh is really cool."

The Daleys think Pittsburgh is great and plan on staying. They hope that amplifying the voices that give the city its charm will convince people to stay.

"It's so easy to feel hopeful and be excited about the future whenever you are in that space," Bridget says.

When they look to the future, they hope to inspire the next generations of Pittsburghers, starting with their children. Some of Bridget's most vivid TEDxPittsburgh memories are of her two kids on the bright red stage.

It takes a village, and the value of community involvement is something the couple wants to instill in everyone.

"Whatever your cause is, just do something," Chris says. "Something bigger than you." •



Two-Step

Doing the duet of performing and teaching

By Ella Fahey



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAMES WASHINGTON MANNING

After graduating from Point Park University's Conservatory of Performing Arts in 2010, **James Washington Manning** found himself dancing as a founding member of the nationally renowned August Wilson Dance Ensemble.

For such a young artist, it was a surreal experience.

"I wasn't even 21, I wasn't even able to legally get a drink. But I was touring essentially the world with some of the top contemporary choreographers," James says.

As if his work with the August Wilson Dance Ensemble wasn't enough, James has built a presence in the Pittsburgh art world that expands nationally.

He was the first male recipient of the BRAZZY award—an annual award given to an exceptional dancer in the Pittsburgh area—and has worked on numerous television projects with Netflix, Lifetime and Apple TV. He was recently chosen as a member of Pittsburgh Magazine's 2025 class of "40 Under 40," which recognizes 40 individuals under 40 that make significant contributions to Pittsburgh.

Now 36, James is the artistic administrator at Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre. He coordinates productions, supports staff and ensures dancers have what they need—a balance of creativity and organization.

James has found a family within the Pittsburgh dance community, but he also finds immense joy in his growing family at home. He and his husband, Nicholas, recently adopted twin boys, which poses a new and exciting challenge.

As if his workload and two babies don't keep him busy enough, James is currently in the final stages of receiving his arts administration graduate degree from Goucher College, furthering a lifelong artistic education.

Even with his recent success, James looks back fondly on the four seasons

he spent traveling with the August Wilson Dance Ensemble, performing and debuting works from acclaimed African American choreographers like Kyle Abraham, Camille Brown and Christopher Huggins.

"Choreographers that I would have never imagined working with were creating brand-new works on us," James says.

Traveling as far as South America and performing on stages at New York City Center and Jacob's Pillow, which are legendary venues in the dance world, is a remarkable feat for any young performer.

"I was 20, so I don't even think I fully realized how important or how special it was," he says. "I mean, in the dance world, it's a legacy to be able to step on that stage, and I performed at Jacob's Pillow; that was a dream come true."

After completing four seasons with the ensemble, James continued his career in New York, Kansas City and Houston—performing, choreographing and teaching—before moving back to Pittsburgh in 2017.

Teaching and choreographing have become a natural extension of his career. What might have begun as a way to supplement his work as a performer has become a large part of his identity as an artist.

"You may have had your career, you may have had your star quality moments, great. But it's really about investing in what the dancer needs—it's not about you, it's about them," James says.

That pedagogical philosophy has made a lasting impact on his colleagues, including Justin Fortunato, who is the artistic producing director at Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center.

Justin has worked with James on numerous projects and has seen him perform on the stage and work behind the scenes as a choreographer.

"He has a rare ability to pull out the

best of whoever he's working with. Not only with professional actors, but also the work he's done with younger kids in the high school setting," Justin says. "Regardless of the experience or age of the performers he's working with, he approaches everyone with respect, clarity and a high level of artistic integrity."

For many students, James has been both a teacher and a mentor. Kylie Edwards is one of them. She is now a senior at Carnegie Mellon University studying musical theater, but she met James when she was five years old while dancing with the Abby Lee Dance Company.

Her relationship with James grew over the 16 years since they met, and she considers him to be family.

"He just believes in me so wholeheartedly, and I remember particularly during that college audition process, I told him that I had been accepted to CMU" Kylie says. "It was just such a beautiful, shared moment between the two of us because he was just so incredibly proud of me but also like he never doubted for a second that that was something that was on the table for me, even though it's a program that accepts six girls total."

James' love of dance dates back farther than his professional debut. He began dancing at two years old.

Whether it be taking the stage or passing along his knowledge to students, dance has been an underlying motivation for James since then.

"Dance was it, and I think that I did well in school—maybe not as great as I should have—but in undergrad dance allowed me to be successful because I was dancing. I was dancing and then I had academics," he says. "Dance was the key to allowing me to find success. And I don't know if a lot of kids are able to always identify what can lead them to success." •



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATIE BLACKLEY

Covering Mister Rogers' Neighborhood

By Grayce Sullivan

The year was 2020.

COVID-19 was widespread.

George Floyd had just been murdered.

Protesters flooded the streets of the Steel City demanding justice.

Katie Blackley arrived at Pittsburgh's Black Lives Matter protests with her WESA National Public Radio team to cover the chaos and conflict.

"It was an incredibly important time for me to be a journalist, to elevate the voices of people who probably wouldn't be on TV news," Katie says.

There was a protest almost every day that summer. Katie wanted to capture the feel of the city and the voices of the people.

"You show up and you don't mess the story up. And you make sure you're being honest about how you're approaching the story," Katie says.

Katie, a Duquesne University alumna, is a digital editor and producer for WESA, Pittsburgh's NPR news station. She also hosts her own podcast for WESA: "Good Question!"

From social issues to culture and community, Katie is curious about all things Pittsburgh. She finds it fascinating that even though the Steel City is small, it's full of big stories.

"It's a weird-looking place, right? You got these three rivers, these huge hills. But that's also why people wanted to come here. They knew they could move commerce down the rivers, they knew they could put up steel mills," Katie says.

The historical elements of Pittsburgh are just as intriguing to her as the current stories that she writes about.

She believes understanding the past helps her tell richer, more layered stories about the present. Every piece of reporting to her is another thread in the city's ongoing story.

Although Katie didn't major in journalism, she valued the news growing up. Her role at WESA gives her an outlet for curiosity and a platform to make a difference.

Katie's curiosity has led her to many people and places around the city. She thinks outside the box and tells stories that other reporters may ignore.

She believes it's essential to amplify voices that might otherwise be overlooked especially in a busy and ever-changing city like Pittsburgh.

A story she covered about the Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium captured the grief that the staff experienced when the animals they had cared for died of old age.

This story specifically captures Katie's essence and what she values as a reporter: learning about the city and the people in it.

Her empathy and sense of community shape her mindset as a journalist. She believes that every voice, no matter how small, deserves to be heard.

Cindi Lash, the vice president of news at WESA, raves about Katie and her strengths.

"She's very curious about the environment around her," Cindi says.

According to Katie, the city of Pittsburgh is unique. She not only finds the history and architecture fascinating but also people's behavior.

People from the 'Burgh are always looking for ways to give back.

"I don't know if that's true in every city," Katie says.

Katie says another reason why the Steel City is so distinct compared to others is the care the residents have for the community.

"Pittsburgh wants to help its neighbors. I mean, this is Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," she says.

Katie makes an effort to help her neighbors by creating credible news for them to look to.

Katie's colleague, Kiley Koscinski, who is the health and science reporter at WESA, says Katie is reliable, especially during election season.

"It's really comforting to know that when I'm out in the field at an election party, someone is back at the station who's going to get the material for me and handle it with care," Kiley says.

Katie is great under pressure and focuses on informing people in an efficient manner.

"This is a memory of her being super reliable," Kiley says.

As a journalist living and reporting in Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, Katie fits the theme. She is community-oriented and is always looking for a great story.

Whether that be social justice protests or grieving zookeepers, Katie is always curious and always listening. Her work reflects not only the heart of Pittsburgh but also the compassion that drives her to keep telling its stories.

For Katie, journalism isn't just an outlet for her curiosity; it's a way for her to be a part of something bigger than herself.

"I just love the stories ... And everybody has a story," Katie says. •

Luke Henne went to his first Pittsburgh Pirates game at five years old, hoping that one day he could take part in the inner workings of a professional sporting event. Today, 20 years later, he is the communications manager for the team — proving that anything is possible if you follow your dreams.

His journey from being a sports fan to baseball communications manager did not happen by luck. It is the outcome of years of experience and determination to achieve his dream.

“I couldn’t ask for a better path for myself,” Luke says. “But that also comes with hard work. It comes with dedication and loyalty, putting in those long days and those long nights to get to where you want to get.”

Luke grew up in a sports family. His dad played Division II college football, while his mom was a Division I athlete. When he was a kid, his dad would take him and his brother to Pirates games.

Luke’s first taste of the sports-media landscape was at PiratesFest the annual event held by the baseball team. There, they had a broadcast booth that let fans host their own post-game show.

In that moment, Luke saw his future.

“I don’t know where else I would be,” Luke says. “This is all I know. And for me, honestly, at times it is scary to think about, ‘Hey, what if I weren’t working in sports?’”

Luke completed his college studies at Duquesne University, majoring in sports information and media. He involved himself in groups like Duquesne Student Television and *The Duquesne Duke*, where he became the sports editor and later editor-in-chief his senior year.

Although he was building a resume at Duquesne, Luke knew that he would need more experience in order to really put his foot through the sports indus-

try’s door.

Luke began interning with multiple sports teams such as the Pittsburgh Pirates, Pittsburgh Penguins and the Milwaukee Brewers. In these positions, Luke soaked up as much information as he could until he landed a full-time position as the media relations manager for the Cincinnati Reds.

Luke spent a year with the Reds before receiving a life-changing text.

On a Saturday night while driving to a basketball game with a friend, Luke got an out-of-the-blue message from the vice president of communication and broadcasting for the Pirates. He was checking in on how Luke’s past year was. Luke had a gut feeling — something was up. As he was being shuttled into the basketball game, a second text came through. It was a job offer.

He finally got the opportunity to be a part of what he loved back home, while being close to his family.

In just two months, Luke went from the media relations manager for the Cincinnati Reds to baseball communication manager for the Pittsburgh Pirates — a leap that is not often made by 25-year-old within the industry.

Every path to success has barriers that one must go through to learn. This is where Luke thrives.

Luke faced challenges during his first baseball season with the Pirates when it came to understanding how to help everyone as best as possible.

“We are constantly monitoring the stories that are being put out there about us to see, ‘Hey, is that fair criticism or is that crossing a line of professionalism?’” Luke says.

An ordinary person in this position might feel like too much weight is being put on them.

But Luke is not an ordinary person.

He continues to find ways to improve his game to become a better lead-

er and communicator for his team.

Another key focus for Luke is building an image for himself, always working to improve relationships with his coworkers.

“I want to be able to grow in the sense of having those relationships with the players and coaches,” Luke says. “Like, not have it just be such a robotic procedural relationship, have it be a relationship where we genuinely care about one another because that is a big part of this.”

Grace Heidinger, social media coordinator for the Buffalo Bills, worked with Luke during the Pirates’ spring training. She says Luke is passionate about what he wants to accomplish in the profession.

“You get there super early, you’re often one of the last ones to leave. Every day he just showed up ready to do what was asked — 100% every day,” Grace says. “I think that goes back to just showing how passionate he is about sports, his job with the Pirates and how he cares about putting his best foot forward.”

James Leo, media relations coordinator for the Cincinnati Reds, says that Luke’s passion is supplemented by consistency.

“Luke is the same person every single day,” James says. “He’s put in the work behind the scenes to establish himself as a rising star in baseball communications.”

Once a kid with a dream, Luke now begins each day with the Pirates. He not only tries to make the team better but also finds ways to mature and grow as a person ready to take on the challenges the job calls for.

“We’re all working toward the same goal,” Luke says. “We do it in different ways, but we all want to be champions. We all want to be great. We all want to be successful.” •

HOME RUN



The journey from sports fan to Pirates employee
By Jamal Bigstaff



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LUKE HENNE

The Steel City is riddled with Gothic and Victorian architecture — pitched roofs, rounded arches and intricate stained-glass windows — telling the story of Pittsburgh's past.

But **Sophia Ogiso**, associate vice president of CannonDesign, has a different vision for the city. She combines practical designs with bold features to write the next chapter of the city's history.

CannonDesign, an international design firm founded in 1945, is focused on amplifying diverse voices and pushing the boundaries of design.

Working out of the Strip District, Sophia strives to maintain the company's values.

"We have to look at the history," Sophia said. "It's supposed to be meaningful for the people."

But what does meaningful design look like?

What is the story of the building?

How do we represent the people of the area, so it feels genuine for them?

What do we want the people to see and feel when they walk through the building?

Sophia asks herself these questions every day, pushing herself to find new ways to add meaning to architecture.

Sophia's role at CannonDesign consists of detail-oriented work, such as designing a lab to optimize efficiency; culturally focused tasks, such as choosing building materials that reflect the values of an area; and working hands-on with clients to exceed their expectations.

Sophia is also part of an internal incubator at CannonDesign known as AMP, which is designed to nurture creativity and to highlight ideas from across the company.

No day looks the same for Sophia, but almost every aspect of her job includes collaboration and detailed planning. She often spends her days in the city working with clients, balancing the client's needs and goals with the values of CannonDesign.

One of her recent projects is a 300,000-square-foot consolidated state lab

in South Charleston, West Virginia in collaboration with the Office of Laboratory Services, West Virginia University, Marshall University and many others.

Large-scale projects like these have solidified Sophia's reputation as a leader and innovator in the architectural community.

Jeff Murray, an architect and leader for the Great Lakes region's science and technology practice at CannonDesign, led the South Charleston lab team, working closely with Sophia.

Jeff has known Sophia for more than 20 years and believes she greatly impacts CannonDesign by being fearless and innovative. He noted the level of difficulty in her role.

"She will take on any challenge. She is deeply curious," Jeff says. "Although I know her well enough that she definitely gets irritated and frustrated like all of us, she grits through it when things are tough."

As a Pittsburgh native, Sophia has an advantage when it comes to understanding what it means to be a Pittsburgher.

Sophia says the city is filled with grit and resilience; the hard-working, down-to-earth people are what make Pittsburgh so unique.

"We have our own language, and who else has something like Picklesburgh?" Sophia chuckles, referring to the yearly festival celebrating all things pickles. "It's just this really interesting, quirky place."

Sophia moved away from the Steel City when she was a child, but she decided to come back to pursue her degree and to be closer to family.

In 2007, Sophia graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in industrial design with a concentration in mathematics. In 2020, she furthered her education when she received her Master of Architecture from Boston Architectural College.

Sophia credits her family, specifically her husband, for the support she needed to complete the program. She also credits the program's structure and design — an accredited program that is remote and made for working professionals.

"This is kind of what I really have always wanted to do, and now I get to go back and do it and have a very hectic life for a few years," Sophia says.

Before she returned to school, Sophia launched her own business in 2016, Trusst Lingerie. Working with AlphaLab Gear, a software startup accelerator, Sophia was able to use 3D printing to create a new design for bras, specifically for women with larger cup sizes.

She used the design of bridges and their trusses for support to create her prototype — setting her design apart from the competition.

Sophia opened an online store and a single retail storefront with bra sizes going up to a size 46F. She was the founder and CEO until the company ceased production in 2018 and was dissolved in 2019.

Sophia says that being a female founder was one of the most rewarding yet challenging parts of her career.

"There are female investors out there but most of them are men, and it's really hard to pitch to a room full of men that this bra is going to work better than a different one," she says.

Sophia says that it's important to always trust your gut, and when things get hard, perseverance, consistency and creativity are key.

"It's really easy to just say 'That sucked, I never want to do anything like that again because what if I fail again?'" Sophia says. "But that's half the experience, right? It's learning and growing and creating new opportunities. And they don't all work out, but they sometimes turn into new ones."

Aligning with CannonDesign's mission, Sophia is always working to create something better than before. When it comes to the future of Pittsburgh, she is very optimistic.

"It's just such a great city, and I'm excited for my kids to grow up here," she says. "We just need to keep retaining the talents and the people, and Pittsburgh will keep growing." •

Telling Pittsburgh's story one building at a time

By Katherine Williams



PHOTOS BY KAITLYN HUGHES

'We're out there every day'

Get to know a friend of the riverfront

By Penelope Lee

Pittsburgh is home to more than 35 miles of great outdoor trails. **Madelyn Dayton** is one of the people to thank for the maintenance of them.

Madelyn, the communications and development coordinator for Friends of the Riverfront, says with a smile that she has been driven by environmental concerns her entire life.

"I was just kind of like, always outside," Madelyn says. "There's pictures of me as a baby, just covered in mud."

Friends of the Riverfront works to maintain and keep the quality of Pittsburgh's natural spaces. In 2024, that work included organizing 75 volunteer events, planting 485 trees and cleaning up more than 90,359 pounds of litter.

"We're out there every day ... planting hundreds of native trees, removing invasive species, improving the ecological health of the trail corridor," Madelyn says.

Madelyn started college at the University of Pittsburgh undecided about a major and eventually found her way to environmental science because of a professor who made a lasting impact.

"I took a class called environmental

issues with a professor, Mark Collins, and we still keep in contact," she says. "I think that class really prepared me for doing intensive research."

Mark speaks highly of Madelyn.

"She tends to be quiet, but when she does speak, I think people listen because it's always well thought out," Mark says.

Outside the classroom, her friends also noticed her growing passion for the field.

Kayla Resh, her roommate at Pitt, watched Madelyn find her path.

"You could tell that she really liked environmental science because she would come back and would talk about the class, and you could just see that she really liked it," Kayla says.

Like her path to her major, her path to Friends of the Riverfront was almost accidental. Pitt required her to complete an internship, so she went on Handshake and began her search.

She came upon a listing for a trail development role. She had little to no knowledge of the trail, and she found that her world had almost been confined to Oakland.

After landing the position, she set out

to boat launches across the Three Rivers, discovering new parts of Pittsburgh she had never experienced before.

"I was able to explore so much of Pittsburgh, really, seeing everything," she says.

What began as an internship evolved into a part-time remote position after graduation, and eventually, she returned to the 'Burgh to continue her work with Friends of the Riverfront in person.

"I never saw myself working at a non-profit ... Everyone who works here is just so nice and they care about what they do. They go above and beyond," she says.

She and her coworkers are a small team, but have a big reach.

In 2024, Friends of the Riverfront hosted 1,654 volunteers, totaling over 4,390 hours of volunteer work.

Madelyn finds these volunteer opportunities to be a fun way to get involved in the community.

"It's a great way to meet new people, and just get outside," she says. "You can just take two hours out of your day and go out on the trail and explore a new part of the trail, but also, help care for it."

All of these efforts are elements of the organization's success, yet there is a strong need to communicate with the public. Madelyn is helping to do just that.

Madelyn says that one of the biggest challenges is maintaining visibility.

"People don't know the trail is part of the same system or that we're the ones managing it," she says. "That's one of our priorities, helping people realize, 'Hey, it's us.'" •



PHOTO BY JOSALYN MCMILLAN



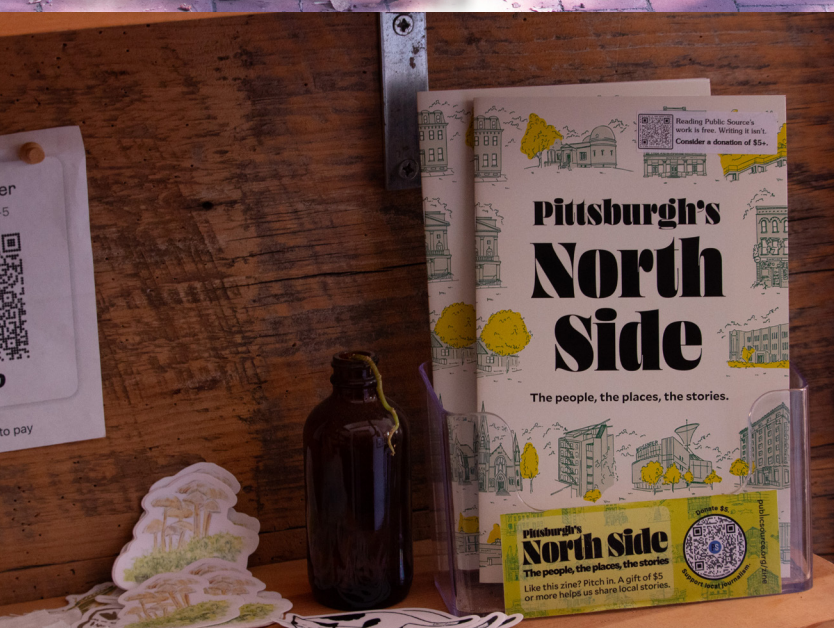
A curious mind and a busy red pen



PHOTOS BY KAITLYN HUGHES



Creating a strong
community through
storytelling
By Josh Imhof



Halle Stockton may have been born to be a reporter.

As a child, she didn't just open her birthday cards to look for money. She copy edited them. Each year, she was fascinated by the grammar of the birthday greetings, sometimes more so than what they actually said.

"I loved taking the red pen to things. Oh my goodness," Halle says.

Her grandmother, who often wrote the cards, did not.

"She didn't appreciate these things," she says.

Eventually, she graduated to interviewing family members, where she wielded a karaoke microphone. She inquired about childhood curiosities, like how to do the laundry and what her parents were up to.

Today, she takes her red pen and curiosity to the stories produced at *Pittsburgh's Public Source*, one of the city's leading investigative news platforms, where she is editor-in-chief and co-executive director.

Halle began her professional career at *The Daily Collegian*, Penn State's student-run newspaper. The expectations were high.

Students were not just accepted onto the staff, but had to first pass through a candidate semester where they would write a few stories that would be evaluated by the editorial board.

"That was really strange, and it was challenging," Halle says. "I remember going through that candidate semester and being not so sure about myself."

Confident or not, she persevered, making it onto the staff and writing throughout her freshman year.

Then, the summer before her sophomore year, she received a phone call from her editor-in-chief.

She was being offered the crime and courts beat.

It was perfect. All of her hard work

paid off. She had made it past initiation and worked all year to get to this moment. Now all she had to do was say...

No?

She hung up the phone and for 30 minutes, Halle sat in contemplation.

For 30 minutes, *The Daily Collegian* was without a crime reporter.

For 30 minutes, Pittsburgh did not have its future storyteller.

Then, Halle changed her mind.

"It was kind of a turning point for turning me into a real journalist," she says.

From then on, Halle spent the semester listening to police briefings and keeping tabs on the latest court cases. These experiences provided her with a solid foundation for writing, while also honing her reporting skills.

Despite the knowledge gained, Halle realized as she matured that there were more aspects to crime than just the act being committed. Instead, she found it is a deep-rooted issue based on economic, educational and social backgrounds that is often represented through blanket coverage.

"That only feeds into stereotypes that are harming our society and our ability to trust one another and to participate in community with each other," she says.

After graduating from Penn State, she wrote for the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* before making her way to Pittsburgh.

At *Public Source*, she has made it a clear priority to embed herself within communities to gain the trust of those that the outlet writes about. This goal was furthered when she first met former *Public Source* executive director Mila Sanina.

"I believe that journalism should be everybody's care, everybody's responsibility, and this storytelling skill needs to be really fostered in the community," Mila says. "It's so important that the culture in any community sees it as a common effort."

Halle and Mila worked together with-in this mindset, becoming close collaborators.

"I think that for me, it was early on that I understood that [she] would be my partner," Mila says.

Through their work, the pair and the rest of the small *Public Source* team were able to gain the trust of local communities that may have second-guessed their work at first.

"We've had so many turnarounds from people where they'll give us a chance, and let us spend time with them," Halle says. "That makes me get misty eyed."

Halle says there are others who may not mistrust the media but are not aware of its importance.

"We need more than just the news junkies to see that journalism is relevant in their everyday lives," she says.

But Halle doesn't just inspire new readers, but also up and coming journalists.

She used to oversee the internship program at *Public Source*, where she met intern Emma Folts. Emma took on a multi-story project about sexual assault on college campuses in Pittsburgh, which she says was fulfilling, but sometimes difficult and emotional.

"There were a lot of questions that I had as a relatively young reporter. I was 22 at the time, and this was the most significant reporting project I had taken on at that point," Emma says. "I don't know if I would have been able to take on a body of work without the guidance and mentorship that Halle provided me."

Through her own work and her mentorship of others, Halle continues to shape the future of Pittsburgh journalism, one community at a time.

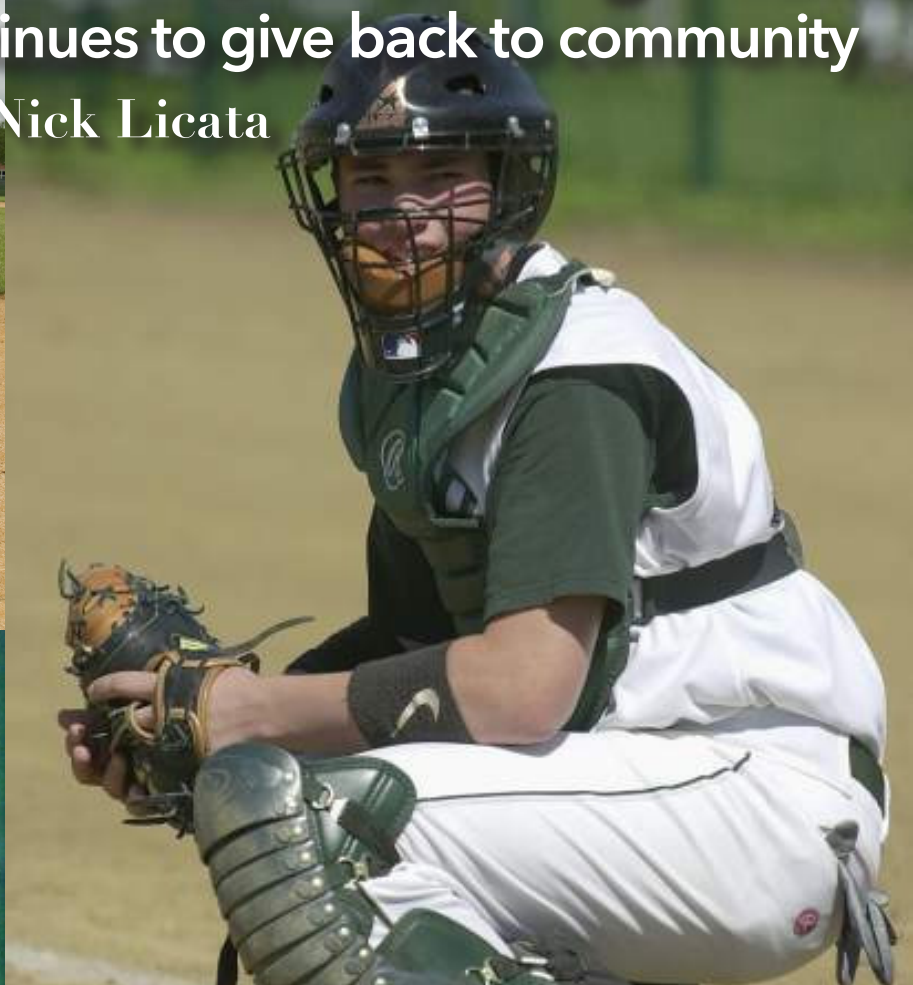
"Those good interactions hopefully snowball and there's more of that, and people get more willing to engage in civic issues and care about something that goes beyond themselves," she says. •



Ballplayer, broadcaster, 'Pittsburgh kid'

Major league player continues to give back to community

By Nick Licata



COURTESY OF PINE-RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

In the 2013 National League Wild Card Game, the Pittsburgh Pirates beat the Cincinnati Reds 6-2 in Pittsburgh's first postseason appearance since 1992. No Pirate understood the significance of the win more than second baseman **Neil Walker**, who was devastated in the stands of Three Rivers Stadium watching his hometown Bucs lose in their last postseason appearance 21 years prior.

"Knowing, personally, the tears I shed when Sid Bream slid into home plate to knock us out of the playoffs in the early 90s, and then fast-forwarding [to] that wild card game here in 2013. Being a part of that was the iconic moment for me ... It was something I'll never forget," Neil says.

Neil is widely credited with helping the

right-handed pitcher, for giving him the blueprint to succeed in the MLB. Neil's career mirrors much of his father's, as both were born in the Pittsburgh area, and both excelled at Pine-Richland before they went on to "The Show."

Deviating from his father's footsteps, Neil has found a new career behind the microphone. In 2021, after retiring from professional baseball, he returned to the game in a new role as a color commentator for the Pirates' radio and television broadcasts. The role gave Neil the opportunity to still be involved in the game he loves while allowing him to spend more time with his family.

"You don't really appreciate it quite as much as a player," Neil says. "You kind of have your blinders on. You're so focused on

person who is from the city and knows how much the team means to the city," Dan says.

Despite playing for the Bucs organization for the majority of his career, Walker had opportunities to represent five other franchises, with stints on the New York Mets, Milwaukee Brewers, New York Yankees, Miami Marlins and Philadelphia Phillies later in his career.

Regardless of where he was, Neil always returned to Pittsburgh in the off-season. After his retirement, he returned again to pursue his new career.

"We always loved it here," Neil says through a smile. "I always loved it here. I always felt like this was home. And even when I was playing other places, this always felt more homey. You always kind of felt like everybody in the community was pulling for you. And I think that there was a lot of value to that."

Walker now returns that value back to his community. He helps run baseball camps for kids in the Northern Allegheny County area, paying forward the lessons he learned at a young age and helping to foster the next generation of baseball players.

At camps, Walker gives out character awards to young athletes who exude leadership qualities. Josh Imhof, an attendee of one of Walker's camps and a former Pine-Richland student, earned one of the awards presented by Walker as an elementary-level student.

"It meant a lot to me," Josh says. "To hear [that validation] from someone who was like a hero of mine, it was really cool. To have someone who comes back and uses his platform to give back to his community ... I think it's huge."

As he's shifted from a ballplayer to a broadcaster, at his core, Walker has always remained a Pittsburgher.

"If you put all of that stuff into a nutshell, more than anything, my love for the city, my love for the game and my love for this organization is hopefully what I'm remembered for," Neil says. •



Pirates break their 21-year-playoff curse and would go on to hit the third-most home runs for a switch hitter in the franchise's 144-year history. As the team looks to get over those same troubles again, Neil has shifted his impact from the field to the press box, giving him a new appreciation for the game and a reimagined impact on his community.

Dubbed the "Pittsburgh Kid," Neil was born and raised in the Gibsonia area and attended Pine-Richland High School. He credits his father Tom, a big-league

the game that day or the next day or trying to win the series. Sitting up here, you're able to take a step back and really enjoy the game."

Neil offers listeners a unique, insider perspective as both a native of the city and a veteran ball player. Dan Hart, the Pirates' director of media relations, has spent the last 26 years with the ball club and witnessed Neil's journey through the organization firsthand.

"Neil brings a great perspective to Pirates fans as both a former player and as a



Young entrepreneur cleans up food waste in innovative ways

By Tristen Chang

One spring afternoon in Rockwell Hall at Duquesne University, **Nolan Sulpizio** peeked at his phone under his desk during his sales fund class.

“No phones in class,” his professor warned.

“I’m cutting a deal!” Nolan fired back.

While his professor assumed Nolan was texting friends, he was actually negotiating for the startup he had recently launched: Clean Plate Innovations.

A year later, Nolan continues to successfully close deals as CEO of Clean Plate Innovations, which is a startup that utilizes AI technology to tackle the worldwide issue of food waste.

Nolan’s entrepreneurial endeavors began at 16 with a lawn care business, and by the end of college, he was already experimenting with startups. The idea that would put him on the map came during his final semester on a late Tuesday night in the Entrepreneurship Excellence Room at Duquesne. While discussing problems to solve, a friend mentioned food waste.

“I immediately thought back to freshman year at Hogan Dining Hall and how much I wasted and felt bad about it,” Nolan says.

Memories of being raised in a food-insecure household and his grandma telling him to finish his

plate made him realize he had found his mission.

The company uses cameras and artificial intelligence in large-scale dining operations, such as cafeterias, dining halls and institutional food services, to scan plates as they’re returned from diners to the kitchen. Uneaten food is tracked in real time, allowing the system to monitor and record exactly what food is wasted and in what quantities. By analyzing this data, kitchens can identify waste patterns, adjust production and accurately predict consumption trends to dramatically reduce food waste.

Growing up in an Italian family in West Chester, Pennsylvania, where food, family and business were inseparable, Nolan learned early on the value of hard work and ingenuity.

“Zeal and drive and commitment is what you have to see in an entrepreneur, and he exhibits all of those,” says Richard Longo, director of the Duquesne University Small Business Development Center.

Nolan’s dad leads multiple companies, his older brother blazed a trail through business school and his “pop-pop” owns a restaurant. For Nolan, every holiday dinner, birthday celebration and family gathering wasn’t just a meal—it was a lesson in resourcefulness.

“It is in his DNA—entrepreneurism,” says Ronald Dick, an associate professor of sports marketing at Duquesne who taught Nolan twice.

Behind the scenes, Staci Offutt, the director of the Center for Excellence in Entrepreneurship at Duquesne, helped guide Nolan as his mentor and advisor. She became his biggest motivator, challenging him to go to Techstars Startup Weekend, a three-day program where aspiring entrepreneurs can experience what it’s like to have their own startup.

“I wasn’t even supposed to go,” he says. “She deserves every praise.”

With only an hour to prep, Nolan and his team squeezed in one final run before delivering their pitch at Techstars Startup. This caused them to lose two minutes of presentation time, but despite the delay, his team delivered flawlessly.

The result? Second place at Techstars Startup and six months of free office space.

Walking into the office for the first time and sitting down at an empty desk, Nolan thought to himself: “What the hell do I do now?”

This led to the startup journey that blended operational problem solving with a commitment to sustainability—now known as Clean Plate Innovations. •



MONTAGES

POPULAR THOROUGHFARES
MAKE UP PITTSBURGH'S 90
NEIGHBORHOODS. GET A GLIMPSE
OF HOW THEY HAVE CHANGED
THROUGHOUT THE STEEL CITY'S
HISTORY. AFTER 200 YEARS, SOME
OF THE SAME FAMILY-OWNED
BUSINESSES REMAIN, BUT THE
CITY HAS ALSO MADE WAY FOR
NEW FORMS OF COMMERCE.



PHOTO BY TRISTEN CHANG

Past and present co-exist on East Ohio Street



By Josh Imhof



It's a quiet Monday afternoon on East Ohio Street as Lauren Bradley, co-owner of Annex Coffee, begins to close up shop. The business occupies one of the many decades-old buildings on the street that serve as a reminder of what once was, and what could be.

This one in particular used to be a shoe store.

It's been a slow day, and Lauren speaks with a customer as a woman comes in from the street.

"Miss, could I please get a cup of coffee?" the woman asks. Her tone suggests it's been a while since she has caught a break.

"Sure," Lauren says.

She prepares the roast and gives it to the woman for free.

"[East Ohio Street] is really made up of a lot of individuals with a passion or a dream, which is like myself," Lauren says.

Annex opened in 2017 and is one of the many small businesses that line the street. The once-flourishing artery of Pittsburgh is now on the cusp of an economic renaissance.

"In the 50's, East Ohio Street was a booming place," says Bruce Klein, owner of Bernie's Photo Center, which sits across the street from Annex. "We would stay open until 9 at night on weekends. With all of that retail on the streets, it was natural for residents to come shopping."

Bruce inherited the shop from his father; the business' namesake, and remembers a time when each building was filled, and there was a store for everything.

But times changed rapidly on the street when urban development decimated a portion of the neighborhood.

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, multiple blocks of houses, businesses and streetscape were destroyed during the construction of Interstate 279, which connects the North Hills to the city. The shops that were left were cut off from what remained on the other side of the parkway.



PHOTOS BY JOSH IMHOF

At the same time, Allegheny Center Mall opened just a half mile west of the struggling thoroughfare, and the mall's big-box stores took a portion of the customer base.

"You have to reinvent yourself," Bruce says. "It's the type of thing where you have to change with the times."

Bernie's managed to stay afloat by leaning into the specialty aspects of their business, such as repairs and photo developing. However, not everyone made it.

Since then, the street has continued to see ups and downs.

"It's frustrating at times, because it feels like we're right there. We're right there," says Al Grasso, co-owner of Allegheny City Brewing. "We're at the precipice of being a very vibrant neighborhood for all sorts of people to hang out."

These frustrations came to a head during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the 2010s, East Ohio Street had begun to stage a comeback. Many of its vacant storefronts had been filled with upstart restaurants and locally-owned businesses.

"Nuisance bars" and other aspects of the area that gave it a bad reputation had been largely shuttered.

The street was coming back to life.

Then, the lockdowns began.

"Everyone did what they could do just to stay afloat during Covid," Al says.

Businesses that had just gotten their foot in the door had to close, and others had to find a way to bear down and dig in to weather the storm.

Allegheny City Brewing closed its taproom and sold its products through a window. Annex Coffee had to close its doors entirely.

"That was a pivotal point because we obviously didn't know what the future looked like, and with owning the space and living above the space, it took some consideration," Lauren says. "We were



faced with having to close or to continue on with the business. We definitely wanted to continue."

The entrepreneurs adapted, and managed to reopen in 2023.

Now, over five years removed from the pandemic, the street is getting back on its feet.

Siempre Algo, which opened its doors in 2018, has become a destination restaurant for people both in and out of the city. Prantl's Bakery and Farmer's Daughter Flowers attract hungry commuters and those looking to woo their loved ones with elegant bouquets. Bistro-to-Go has been voted one of Pittsburgh's top caterers.

"Some of the very best restaurants in the city are in this neighborhood. And if you look at what's to come ... They're starting to do some really fun stuff," Al says. "It's just going to take a little bit of time for the word to get out." •



GAME DAY



North Shore in black and gold

By Tristen Chang



PHOTOS BY TRISTEN CHANG

The streets of Pittsburgh's **North Shore** hum with energy hours before the kickoff of an October Steelers vs. Browns game.

Fans dressed in black and gold head toward Acrisure Stadium carrying snacks, drinks and Terrible Towels. The aroma of grilled sausages, bratwurst, pretzels and roasted nuts drifts through the crisp autumn air. Laughter, chants and music ripple among the crowd. Car horns blare from decorated Steelers vehicles, while voices echo across the river. Flags sway from lampposts, and banners for local businesses and fan groups hang over the streets, adding to the festive atmosphere.

Above the throng, a handmade pope's hat towers in a sea of team colors. Pope Yinzer, Donald Zadach, draped in a black Papal robe lined with Steelers ribbon, waves and poses for photos.

Children and adults gather around, laughing at his playful antics. His presence captures the city's humor, loyalty and deep-rooted pride in the team.

"Every year gets better," Donald says. "Fans make me come back. Nothing but the best. North Shore is the greatest area there is."

Supporters assemble not just for football but for a long-standing tradition that unites Pittsburgh.

Families, college students, long-time residents and mascots converge to cheer on the Steelers. In Pittsburgh, the game is more than a contest, it is a pulse connecting generations through devotion, joy and shared identity. Each attendee displays allegiance with jerseys, handmade signs and creative outfits, contributing to the North Shore's colorful spectacle.

The T light rail delivers fans from all over the South Hills and Downtown to the North Shore. At street-level stations, riders step off and join the flowing crowd moving toward the stadium. Shoulder to shoulder, they follow the rhythm of distant drums and cheers.

Vendors offer jerseys, scarves and snacks, while strangers exchange smiles and friendly banter. Children wave tiny Terrible Towels, toddlers skip beside parents and college students sing familiar chants. Even the youngest wear black and gold, absorbing the pride passed down through families.

Nearby, a mother guides her children through the bustling streets. They wave their miniature Terrible Towels and giggle while dodging a rolling football from a corn hole game.

Bill Merz, known as Terri Bill, clad in a Terrible Towel overcoat, steam-punk hat and glasses, navigates the crowd with a broad grin. He waves and tips his hat with a showman's flair to a family taking photos.

"The experience of walking up these streets is what keeps me coming back every game and every season," he says.

Music pulses throughout the area. Electric guitars, brass instruments and drumlines mix with cheers, producing a soundscape unique to Pittsburgh. Older men drive by in custom-painted Steelers cars, waving to onlookers. Towels twirl overhead while beer flows freely, and corn hole games continue as vendors call out their goods. Drummers maintain



a steady rhythm guiding the crowd, while street performers entertain with flips, tricks and routines. Costumed Steelers mascots weave among spectators, engaging with children and adults alike.

Tailgating forms the heart of the celebration. Fathers flip burgers, friends share stories and neighbors gather over food and drinks. One Pittsburgh-born father laughs as his youngest tosses a napkin into the air, joining chants from a nearby college group. Small clusters huddle around grills, swapping tales from past games. Students sing team songs and teach chants that have echoed for decades.

Every corner of the North Shore brims with movement. Shouts travel through alleys and streets, each moment adding to the citywide celebration.

As Acrisure Stadium comes into view, the roar of the crowd grows louder. Horns, cheers and music combine into one steady rhythm. People move together, a wave of excitement

and color carrying the energy of generations. Every step is filled with tradition, memories and the thrill of the approaching kickoff. Ordinary streets become alive with celebration. The North Shore feels electric, every corner vibrating with the pride of the city.

For Pittsburgh, game day is more than a game. It is the people, the energy and the shared love for the team that has shaped the city for decades. On the North Shore, football is a ritual, a festival, and a heartbeat that brings everyone together. Even after the final whistle, fans linger, talking, laughing and celebrating. They carry the neighborhood's spirit home until the next game. The excitement doesn't end with the day; it continues in children's laughter, stories shared between neighbors and the eager anticipation of the next season. It is a living tribute to Pittsburgh's devotion to its team.

"Other cities just don't do it like they do here," Bill says. •



Shiloh Street coffee and ice cream courtesy of Todd the God

By Ella Fahey



On the west side of Mount Washington's Shiloh Street, a blooming cherry tree stretches across a bright blue sky painted on the side of a brick building and permanently frozen in time. The cherry blossoms sprawl across the mural, backed by a distant green hill. On the hill are a few small houses, spread out and scattered.

The mural is beautiful, but a passerby would not realize that this piece was commissioned by the owner of the shop across the street as a permanent reminder of a cherished memory from his teenage years.

Howard Todd, also known as Todd DiFiore, also (and most especially) known as Todd the God, is the owner of both DiFiore's Ice Cream Delite and Grand Brew, which have been a key part of Mount Washington for 33 years.

Todd commissioned this mural in 2007 to remember an afternoon he spent with his high school girlfriend at Settlers Cabin Park in 1977. In the distance, one of the homes pictured is his own childhood home.

The relationship did not last, but Todd treasures his memory of that day. He wants to remind himself of it daily.

"Having an ice cream store was always my dream, but it's also my prison. So, I make it a prison that I want to be in by putting up things I love," Todd says.

Inside Grand Brew, he makes a similar effort to surround himself with reminders of his favorite things, his favorite memories and his favorite people.

Behind his coffee bar, memorabilia lines the wall. Each item commemorates small but important moments of his life like his first beer, and the bigger moments, like the birth of his grandchildren, in whom he takes great pride.

Action figures, mugs, political merchandise, a DVD of "The Sopranos" fill the space. Many of these treasures tell a story, although some just make him smile.



PHOTOS BY ELLA FAHEY

Todd has gone to great lengths to make his presence on Shiloh Street unapologetically his own, and in doing so he has made himself a key part of the neighborhood.

“My friends make fun of me for my pink and purple awning, but it’s not pink. I call it ‘money magenta,’” Todd says. “The incline, the view of the city and my awning ... I made myself a part of this place and it draws people in.”

It does draw people in. Many of these people are locals who have found a sense of community on Mount Washington one that is grounded in the friendships that they make with people like Todd.

Sarah Furtado moved to Mount Washington on Halloween in 2024. She met Todd as a customer shortly after her move to the area, and now he greets her like family.

“I don’t really go into the city much,” Sarah says, “I have everything I need right here.”

Furtado drops by Grand Brew with her dog, a pug named Chief, who is affectionately referred to as ‘Butkus’ by Todd.

Another regular of Grand Brew is Wayne Ferens, who moved to Mount Washington in 2021 after retiring from the engineering industry.



He loves living on Mount Washington because of its stability and convenience.

“It’s convenient to have everything within walking distance,” Wayne says. “There’s a variety of businesses and it really hasn’t changed much over the years — it’s a stable neighborhood.”

As a bachelor, Wayne doesn’t like to cook for himself, so he enjoys the offerings of the area. He often stops at Grand Brew for a cup of coffee and some conversation with Todd and whoever else might wander in.

Todd extends his hospitality to new visitors and passersby. On his counter, a small sign states that his café is “Cash Only.” He practices a “pay it forward” policy with his customers — never turning people away but asking for a good

review or asking them to “pay it forward” in some other way.

His good faith in his customers is not misplaced. Upon a Google search, both DiFiore’s and Grand Brew are littered with reviews gushing about the owner and his special Chai Latte. Many customers come back and purchase both another coffee and the coffee from their initial unpaid visit, all while thanking Todd for his generosity.

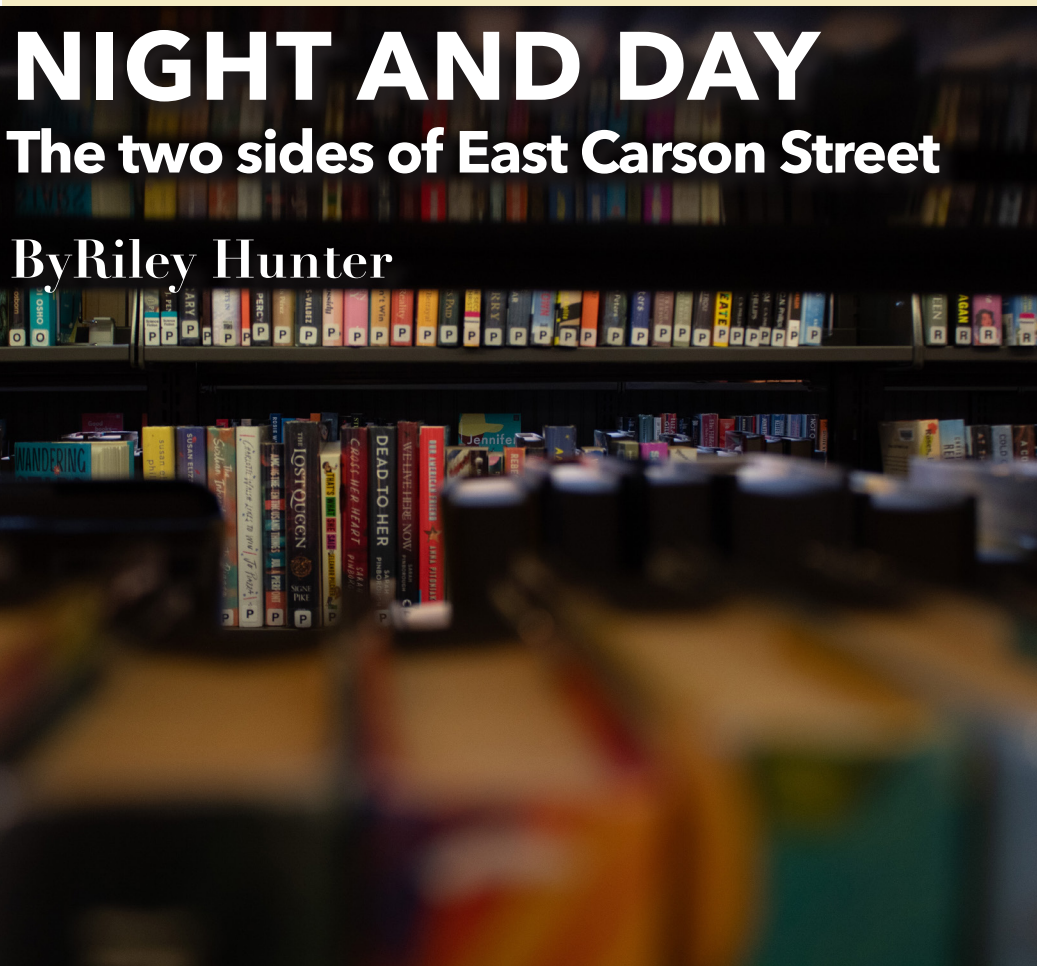
Alongside being known for his “money magenta” awning, Todd is also known for his Chai Latte — his most popular menu item.

“I tell people, if this isn’t the most delicious chai you’ve ever had, I’ll give you a hundred dollars,” Todd said. “Nobody has ever felt like they could take my money.” •

NIGHT AND DAY

The two sides of East Carson Street

By Riley Hunter



other neighborhood.

Carlee Shasko has worked at the Culture Shop for years. The shop, which sits on East Carson between 16th and 17th Street, sells eclectic jewelry, clothing and other goods seven days a week.

“My typical day (has) probably like 20 to 30 customers a day, seven or eight hours here, and no one really outside,” Carlee says.

Suzy Waldo manages the South Side branch of the Carnegie Library. She lives in the city and praises the street as a key aspect of a bustling neighborhood.

“It’s actually a really nice place to live,” she says. “We have a really great elementary school, Phillips Elementary. We do a lot of work with them. And then there’s a really great Head Start program. There are a lot of non-profit organizations down here that help people, like the Brashear Association. I’m on the board of the Chamber of Commerce. I want to say in the last 30 days, something like 28 new businesses have opened.”

At night, however, the street takes a turn. A turn that, some say, is for the worse.

Jaysin King is a tattoo artist at Carson Street Tattoo. He says that the street has become dangerous over the past years.

“It’s a pretty big difference between day and night,” Jaysin says. “A totally different crowd comes out at night, which scares off potential customers. It used to be a lot busier down here before people were scared of the violence.”

Tanner reiterates this idea.

“During the nighttime, it gets a little crazy,” he says.

The street is known for its nightlife and activity, and for its crime and violence that occurs at night.

Although crime is down in the South of the city overall, the street has seen a slow uptick in crimes.

During the summer of 2025, law enforcement responded to several reports of unruly crime, according to CBS News.

“One can say East Carson is Pittsburgh personified,” Tanner Steely of the Carnegie Library of South Side says.

He couldn’t be more correct. The street, laid out over 200 years ago, is a diverse, vibrant hub of family homes, shopping and nightlife.

Over the years, East Carson Street has developed a reputation that balances culture and chaos where murals, music and street festivals thrive beside ongoing concerns about nightlife-related crime and disorder.

“It kind of has every bit of demographic on this side of the city,” Tanner says.

East Carson Street, located in Pittsburgh’s South Side, was designated a National Historic District in 1993 and has a rich history as an immigrant neighborhood, originally harboring countless Slovak, Polish, German and Italian families.

My, how things have changed.

By day, East Carson Street is like any

In October of 2025, two violent crimes resulted in death. One fatal shooting occurred inside a barber shop on the street. Within a week, another man was dead in a shooting that occurred on the 1200 block of the street.

These instances have given the street a bad reputation that it can't seem to shake.

"Can't even go out and have a good time without fear of being shot," Jaysin says of the incidents.

Still, some believe that crime does not define the street.

"It isn't nearly as dangerous or as scary as people think it is," Suzy says. "I've been out on the street in all manner of hours and conditions. And I've been fine."

Outside of the crime and its bad reputation, East Carson Street is known for its rich community and culture.

"I think if you actually live here, you meet more of the people here," Tanner says. "You realize that there are children going to school, and these people come outside. I remember one time there was a power outage, and everybody came outside. Instead of everybody panicking or whatever, everyone was just sitting out there, just talking, chilling. People were pulling out lawn chairs, and we were just sitting there. It was really cool."

Jaysin shares a similar sentiment.

"I love being a tattoo artist here," he says.

Natalie Jones, a Duquesne alumna who lives on the South Side, believes that the richest culture comes from the outskirts of East Carson Street.

She says that bars and businesses in the area contribute greatly to a deep cultural tradition on the street and the surrounding streets.

Despite its controversies, East Carson is a rich historical symbol of all Pittsburgh has to offer: It blends history, community, and business and defines the South Side as a rich cultural hub. Residents, business owners and visitors alike see an area that embodies the grit and heart of the city. •



PHOTOS BY JOSH IMHOF



A tear glistens on Linda Webb's cheek in the gentle glow of the industrial chandeliers hanging overhead.

"Whether its joy, happiness, sadness, whatever, I have never seen a live performance not affect somebody in some way," Linda says, her voice crackling with emotion. "We need more affection."

While on a trip to visit their son, Linda and her husband, Randy, discovered Liberty Magic. Nestled in the heart of Downtown Pittsburgh, the intimate speakeasy was the host of an Acoustic Tuesdays event, featuring two live, local artists.

Escaping the cold outside from a transitioning October that turned the city's green leaves to an autumn flourish of red, orange and yellow, the Webbs enter a lobby that greets them with eccentric trinkets, taxidermies and tchotchkes.

Lining the walls of the entrance are antique magician props including

handcuffs, playing cards and an eerie puppet dressed in a tuxedo and a top hat peering down at guests. On an opposing wall, around 100 decks of cards, each one uniquely colored, towering over the guests below.

Ominously welcoming guests as they step into the 65-seat, four-rowed theatre is a vintage Zoltar Speaks fortune teller, looming between a wall of antique magician posters and a curtain separating the outside world from the artful ambiance of the performances within.

The Webbs are two of around 60 guests that trickle into the cozy and secluded theatre, tucked into **Liberty Avenue**, filling the venue with jovial laughter and excitement. The diverse crowd entering in the theatre has representation from almost every stage of life.

A few groups of young adults in their 20s and 30s balance out an older crowd of couples celebrating a date night. Representing the farthest end of the spectrum are two ladies in the front

row, whose gray hair contrasted their vibrantly patterned shirts. Irremovable from their faces are smiles that reflect the same emotions as Linda—an appreciation for live art and affection.

Also in the crowd is Pittsburgh City Councilman R. Daniel Lavelle, who was elected as the President of council in January 2024. Across from him is former Pittsburgh City Controller Michael Lamb, who served the city from 2008 until 2024. Not lost on the crowd is the impact of having the local officials' support at events like Acoustic Tuesdays. Both men are met with applause from those in attendance.

Oliver Hufford, a student in the city, peeks through his thin wire frame glasses and adjusts his eyes to the stage lights as he looked out at the crowd before beginning the show. He sets up his music stand and his tattoo-riddled arm begins to play his acoustic-electric guitar with an offset sound hole.

"Thank you all for coming tonight," says an earnest Oliver, who sings about eccentric themes, including his three-legged cat, Tripod.

Pittsburgh Downtown Neighbors Alliance (DNA), a nonprofit devoted to providing opportunities and events to the local community, hosts the event every other Tuesday free of charge for attendees. Executive Director John Valentine emphasizes the importance of having accessible live art and the economic and emotional impact that it can have on residents of all ages. •



“Art and the artists are a part of the fabric of a Downtown community,” John says. “Downtown is the region’s core and music and art draw residents, tourists and businesses here.”

Pittsburgh DNA hosts a multitude of events Downtown, including Candlelight Crescendo, Street Festival and Downtown Dialogues, as part of their mission to stimulate community growth. These affordable amenities are part of a process to create outlets for people to revitalize Pittsburgh’s night-life, John says.

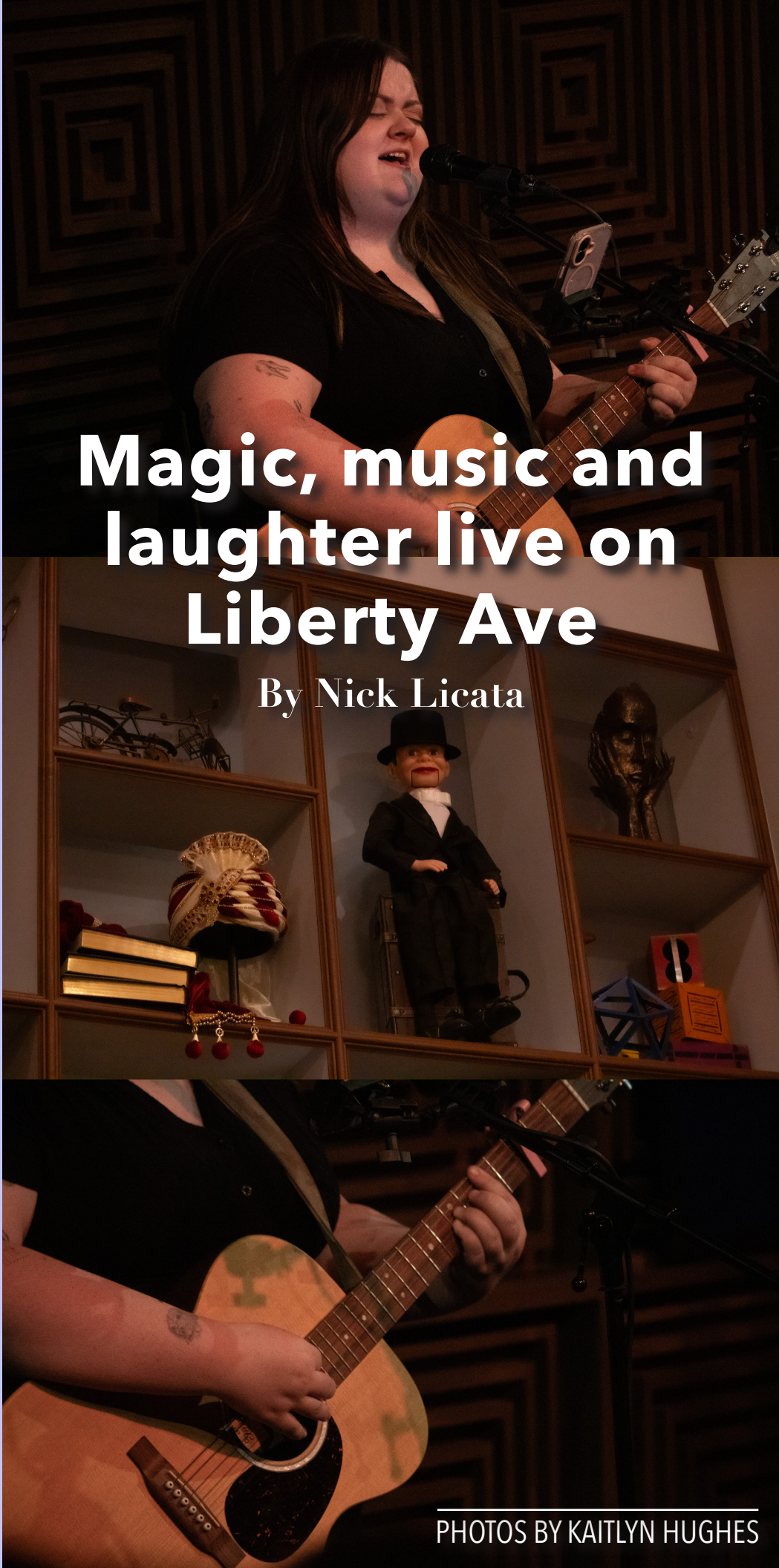
Second to perform is Megan Paullet, spelled like “‘Paul let’ the dogs out,” she jokes as she introduces herself to the crowd. Megan performs with just an electric piano and gives her rendition of popular songs such as “Valerie” by Amy Winehouse and “Believe” by Cher.

She also introduces the crowd to new songs that would be released in 2026, including an impassioned performance about an ex-boyfriend who claimed that he loved her after spending the prior night at another woman’s house. This song is met with “whoops” and cheers as she navigates octaves to reach higher notes, blurring the line between the audience and the performer.

Megan closes her performance by affirming her excitement to return to the venue, which seems to be the overall sentiment of the crowd.

“I think that as an artist, having the opportunity to engage with an audience in such an exclusive atmosphere is exhilarating,” Megan says. “You really have the chance to connect with who you are performing for.

“What DNA has created is a space for artists to share music that they have poured their heart and souls into creating. Live events like Acoustic Tuesdays are critical.” •



Magic, music and laughter live on Liberty Ave

By Nick Licata

PHOTOS BY KAITLYN HUGHES



COURTESY OF HOWARD BENDER



Howard Bender spends his Saturday mornings at The Terminal in Pittsburgh's Strip District drawing caricatures. He typically sells seven or eight a day: \$15 for black-and-white, \$20 for color.

"[It's] enough to get me by," Howard says.

Howard, a soft-spoken, humble man, is a successful comic who has worked with both DC and Archie Comics.

Howard grew up in Pittsburgh, and as a child he visited the Pittsburgh Produce Terminal or Pennsylvania Fruit Action & Sales Building, watching fruit being unloaded out of big trucks. Now, The Terminal has been renovated into a place for brunch, shopping and nightlife.

Howard isn't a stranger to change. He recently started accepting credit cards for his drawings.

"You have to adapt with the changes," he says.

Just down the street in front of St.

Stanislaus Kostka Catholic Church a sign reads in gold lettering: Ad maiorem Dei Gloriam i.e. "For the Greater Glory of God." Polish immigrants worshiped at the church, which was consecrated on July 31, 1892. With services in their native tongue, it reminded them of the world they left behind.

The church's Baroque and Romanesque architecture serve as a time capsule in a neighborhood undergoing dizzying change.

On a Sunday morning, the pews are packed. Couples with young children sit in the back ready to make a speedy getaway in case one of their babies gets fussy. Life-long parishioners sit in the front, among the scaffolding lining the stained-glass windows; renovations are common in a building over a century old.

Some people are dressed to the nines, others wearing the pajamas they slept in. They sing "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven."

Among the flock is Derris Jeffcoat, the sacristan and historian for St. Stanislaus. He tells stories of how the church has persevered through disaster.

On Saint Patrick's Day in 1936, a catastrophic flood damaged the church. Nine months later Pittsburgh Banana Company had an explosion because of the flammable ethylene gas bananas produce. The powerful blast blew out the windows at St. Stanislaus.

He brags about how worshippers have come from all 50 states and 120 countries even an astronaut came to mass once.

Proud of his church and knowledgeable about his history, Derris says attendance has skyrocketed because of the recent foot traffic in the area.

"One of the benefits to all the visitors to the Strip District is that we serve as a church of convenience, people in for sporting events, shopping, vacations," Derris says.

Non-parishioners visiting the city for sporting events usually attend the 4 p.m. mass, giving them ample time to shop around. They might stop at Yinzers in the Burgh.

The store has been open for 20 years; the walls are filled with writing from thousands of shoppers.

“Happy 50th birthday mom! 1st NFL Game in the Burgh”

“GO BIRDS”

“From Texas go Steelers!”

Owner Jim Coen has staked his claim on three buildings in the area, and he spends his days helping people find what they need.

“I’m the face of the store. I always make jokes that when you go into Kohl’s you don’t meet Mr. Kohl,” Jim says with a laugh.

Employees are always willing to lend a helping hand to any customer. With two stories and an outside display help is often needed. They sell almost any Steelers memorabilia imaginable — birdhouses, thongs, poker chips, Rubik’s Cubes and even batteries.

During football season the store is crammed. Yinzers in the Burgh has garnered international attention.

“[The store is] off the charts, you know customers come in from all over the world and we build a really good client base,” Jim says.

His business has also experienced lows. He says business owners have to put out a lot of fires. In April of 2020, the term took a more literal meaning when a lithium battery exploded in one of the stores.

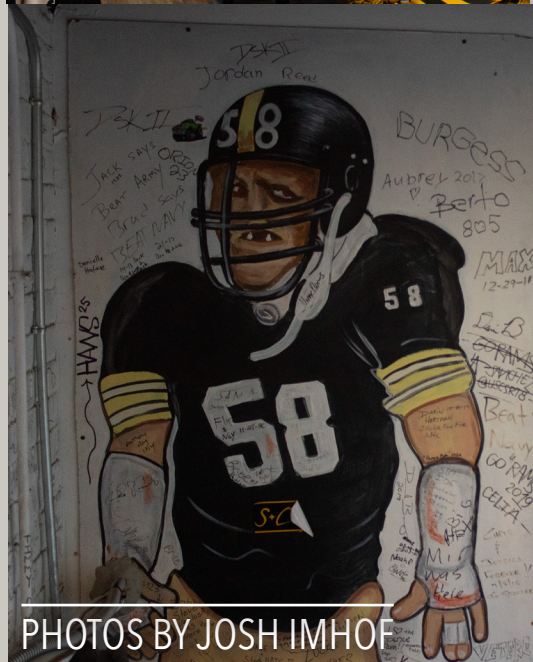
Coen had to overcome many issues as a business owner; he perseveres because of his love for the city.

“The people of Pittsburgh are special,” Coen says. “The passion that they have when it comes to sports, and just about everything. I think it’s our back-grounds, it’s the history of what we created.” ●



The Strip is yinzer central

By Charlotte Shields-Rossi



PHOTOS BY JOSH IMHOFF



Butler Street is the nexus of change in Lawrenceville

By Jamal Bigstaff



Mark Wagner remembers taking over Wagner Shoes, which opened in 1854, 10 years ago. He describes **Butler Street** back then as a neighborhood that was in a rough spot.

“There just wasn’t a whole lot of money in this community for people to invest in businesses in Lawrenceville,” Mark says. “In the front of the store, we had a big cage that we actually closed [over] the whole facade every night because we were worried about burglary and breaking and entering.”

Butler Street was once considered dangerous and plagued by petty crime and prostitution. Over the past few decades, though, the street underwent change and became an attraction for young clientele.

From old family-owned businesses to a recently opened bar for the younger crowd, the street reveals the stories of what the community once was like and the vigorous thoroughfare it has become today.

Arsenal Bowling Lanes has been a cornerstone of the community since 1938. A.J. Golembiewski, the current owner, has lived in Lawrenceville since he was six years old. He’s been going to the bowling alley ever since he’s now 31.

“It kind of kept me out [trouble],” he says. “So, I’d come up here and bowl every so often,” A.J. says. “It was one of the last refuges for me as a kid to get away from it. Another kid here, when I started working, he was he was 10, 11 years old. And he would come in for the kids league. He still comes here to this day.”

A.J. and Mark say the spark of new life has enlivened Butler Street, and its popularity with young adults has represented an improvement in the area.

Aiding the transformation of Law-

renceville, a few organizations still try to host events where residents and business owners can socialize and network.

Lawrenceville United hosts gatherings on Butler Street such as a cooking tour and festival called Blossom. During these festivals, residents, friends, families, local businesses owners and tourists get to enjoy time with each other. This allows businesses like Arsenal Bowling Lanes and Wagner Shoes to get more exposure to a new clientele.

But A.J. says the close ties of community have faded as Lawrenceville has transformed.

“Back in the day, someone’s kid ran over, you see them doing something stupid, smack them on the head,” A.J. says. “You know what I mean? You know, make sure you send them home.”

Carol Hill and Holly Bruzdewicz, a mother and daughter who have lived in Lawrenceville their entire lives, experienced the cultural shift firsthand. Although business owners view the influx of new residents as positive, Carol and Holly see it as disrupting a sense of community.

“It is not the community feeling cause there are so many strangers that moved in,” Carol says. “They do not associate with other neighbors like people used to do in this neighborhood. You knew everyone that lived on your street, and they knew you, they knew your children, and vice versa.”

Both feel Lawrenceville is starting to turn into a “mini-Carson Street,” causing residents to park blocks away from their home.

“It’s made the neighborhood very congested,” Holly says. “I mean, residents cannot even park on the street that they live on because there’s so many people going to ... the bar. They park wherever they want.” •



PHOTOS BY JOSH IMHOF

Old and new on Walnut Street

By Grayce Sullivan



COURTESY OF BRENDA MASER



Maser Galleries is old Walnut Street: It's been open since 1974, and will close its doors this year.

Heat Check is new Walnut Street: It opened about a year ago.

This contrast between old and new is an ever-present theme on Walnut Street, where longtime staples stand beside trendy newcomers.

As businesses rise, fall and evolve, the street continues to reinvent itself.

For more than five decades, Maser Galleries has stood as one of the street's anchors.

Brenda and Ron Maser have run the gallery for fifty-one years, and during that time they've watched generations of shops, restaurants and customers come and go.

The space feels like a time capsule of art and the store's history.

Every wall is covered in unique paintings, photographs and sculptures, all hand-selected by the Masers themselves. There are galleries upstairs and down.

Visitors who descend the staircase are greeted by a whimsical warning sign: "Beware of the Clowns."

Below it lies a collection unlike anything else in the city: dozens of clown portraits, papier-mâché dolls seated in the corner and a striking array of colorful, eccentric pieces.

The Masers' collection feels deeply personal, reflecting their love of art and expression.

They've seen Walnut Street transform dramatically over the years.

"We opened during The Arts Festival, 1974," Brenda says, her voice filled with nostalgia.

Back then, the street was a hub for creativity and local craftsmanship.

"When I first came here, there were just throngs of hippies and lots of independent shops," she says.

In those early years, Maser Galleries sold handmade crafts and jewelry before transitioning into the fine art gallery it is today.

The shift reflected not just their own

growth as business owners, but also the broader progression of Walnut Street itself.

The area changed from a casual, independent-business stretch into one of Pittsburgh's most upscale shopping districts.

"It's become more upscale over the years," Brenda said.

Today, national chains like Lululemon and Apple stand alongside the few remaining independent stores that have been there for decades.

Yet even amid the influx of big-name retailers, there's still space for new independent businesses to make their mark.

Just above Lululemon sits Heat Check, an oasis of vintage clothing and specialty coffee that's quickly become a favorite among young locals.

The store, founded by Ricky Daley, Brendan Kelly and Q Miller-Edwards, represents a new generation of Walnut Street entrepreneurs. They are creative, ambitious and determined to carve out their own space despite the difficulty.

As first-time business owners, they took a major risk opening up on such an expensive and established street.

"It was a lot of money at stake," Ricky says.

With a wife and young child at home, the decision was especially daunting.

"You put everything on the line," he says.

Rent prices on Walnut Street are notoriously high, which is a reflection of its prime location and steady foot traffic.

"It makes it hard if you don't have a ton of resources and a ton of money," Brendan says.

That challenge only made their success more meaningful.

Before becoming Heat Check, the space had been a Pilates studio. The trio had to completely gut and remodel the space.

"There were a lot of difficulties to overcome," Q says.



PHOTOS BY KAITLYN HUGHES

Since opening, the shop has taken off.

It's become a hub for creativity and community, drawing in everyone from college students to longtime residents.

With its mix of thrifted street wear and freshly brewed coffee, Heat Check feels like a modern expression of the same spirit that brought the Masers to Walnut Street fifty years ago.

Despite the vast differences between the two businesses, both share a common thread: a deep love for what they do.

Walnut Street has never stopped changing.

What began as a simple street with independently-owned businesses is now a sleek mixture of old and new.

Maser Galleries carries the history of the street, while Heat Check points toward its future.

Together, they represent the two sides of Walnut Street, which is the old and the new.

In its constant motion, Walnut Street tells a story that continues to evolve. •





TWO STORES, ONE FIGHT

How Forbes Avenue stores push back against large retail

By Penelope Lee



During the early morning on what is considered to be the busiest street in Squirrel Hill, a large red neon sign advertising Littles Shoes glows bright.

Inside, Justin Sigal, the owner of Littles, walks through the store with a smile on his face, checking displays, awaiting customers and talking to employees who have worked at the store for decades.

Right across the street, Sami Melaragno laughs with her co-worker while she works on Riverstone Bookstore's new TikTok marketing video. As the doorbell chimes signaling someone has entered the store, she turns to them with a smile and cheerfully says, "Welcome in."

While Riverstone Bookstore has been open for almost five years, Littles has been around for nearly 100 years. Both stores pride themselves on their personal service.

Staff members in both stores try to make customers feel at home. Not only because they want to, but because they need to — it's something chain stores and websites can't duplicate.

Justin was in kindergarten when his dad bought Littles in 1985. He saw the store grow and watched the changes in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood.

"There are some changes from when my dad took over," Justin says. "The one thing that's consistent is we've always been service-oriented."

With online shopping booming, Littles is leaning into trends and finding new untapped markets on the street to fill their store.

"I mean, kind of got to cater to your local audience," Justin says. "We added clothes, because there's clothing stores missing."

Once a customer is out of Littles, they can cross the street and get some reading recommendations at Riverstone.

Sami, who is the assistant manager at Riverstone, takes her time showing customers around the store to help them find the book that speaks to them. She hires people who love the product.

“We’re book lovers first,” she says. “That’s how you connect.”

The bookstore is not only trying to connect with the community through their service style, but by also hosting events such as Sip and Stitch, where attendees enjoy wine and their favorite craft, and a “Wicked: For Good” movie release party. These events are helping the store bring people together.

“I would like to see us becoming an even bigger community space for people,” Sami says.

At Littles, they make their shop a community space by making sure that the shoes are fitted carefully and not just sold. Customers can shop exclusive styles that Justin and his family have handpicked from across the world.

“We have things you can’t find online,” Justin says. “We work directly with factories in Italy. People can’t Google half the styles we carry.”

Even with the effort it takes to carry this inventory, small business owners are noticing the same interruption: the internet.

Local businesses are continuing to face the harsh reality of the fact that customers can get different prices, more models and in some cases quicker shipping with the click of a button.

“When my dad was my age, catalogs were the threat,” Justin says. “Now it’s the internet. Someone can order the shoe before they even leave the store.”

Online competition doesn’t just affect Littles.

At Riverstone, some customers walk in, ask for a book, listen to recommendations and then mention they’ll “probably get it online later.”

After hearing this dreaded sentence, Sami thinks of one company: Amazon.



“They sell books at a loss,” she says. “We can’t compete with that. None of us can.”

Sami says she hopes to keep attracting regulars and making sure that Riverstone remains a community-based space.

She sees the community on the street not only through everyday customers but also through neighboring businesses on **Forbes Avenue**.

“The other owners of the other stores are patrons of our store as we are of theirs,” she says.

Justin hopes Littles remains at the same location it has been at since his dad took over.

“Just here,” he says. “Right here in the neighborhood.” •



OBJECTIFYING PITTSBURGH

THE STEEL CITY HAS BECOME
RENOWNED FOR SPECIFIC FOOD,
PLACES AND TRADITIONS. EXPLORE
WHAT ITEMS ARE AT THE CENTER
OF PITTSBURGH'S LIVELIHOOD



Bringing August Wilson's childhood home back from the brink

By Ella Fahey

The **August Wilson House** is an unexpected and understated presence on Bedford Avenue in the Hill District.

The restored home from the 1840s is a time capsule that serves as a reminder of the history of the Hill. Its memory propels future arts, culture and entertainment within the community.

Wilson was a playwright who is famous for his representation of African American culture in the 20th century and is referred to as “theater’s poet of Black America.”

Not only did he grow up in Pittsburgh, but many of his 10 plays feature the Hill District.

Wilson spent the majority of his childhood, from 1946 to 1957, at 1727 Bedford Avenue with his mother and six siblings. They lived in two rooms for years, before eventually expanding their living quarters to include another two rooms upstairs.

The home was reopened as a community center in 2022 after a 17-year restoration process.

When Wilson’s nephew, Paul Ellis, first acquired the property, it was a mess.

Ervin Dyer is the August Wilson House chairman, but he worked as a reporter for many years and is currently an adjunct professor in the Department of Africana Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Despite being relatively new to his position as chairman, he has been involved with the house since the beginning of its restoration.

“It was truly dilapidated,” Dyer says. “The roof was falling in, there were needles left everywhere and it was a hazard to even approach.”

But this changed when Ellis approached Denzel Washington during the

filming of *Fences*, one of Wilson’s plays. He took Washington to the House, where the actor was shocked at the state of it. He was eager to support Ellis’ vision to further his uncle’s legacy.

Washington contributed substantially to the restoration funding, but also recruited the help of his friends, including Oprah Winfrey and Samuel L. Jackson, Dyer says.

The two original rooms have been immortalized as recreations of what they might have looked like when Wilson lived there. As much detail was preserved as possible — down to the wallpaper.

One of the walls houses a display case, inside of which are several relics from the house recovered during the restoration process. Among these are more than ten different strips of wallpaper layers that make up a collage of colors, patterns and memories.



When Wilson’s family members examined the wallpaper samples, one stood out — a steel blue with a rusty pink floral motif. It was replicated and now can be seen hanging in the living room.

The kitchen is a small room that consists of a stove, a table, a sink and a refrigerator. A simple space, but the house’s “most sacred space,” in Dyer’s eyes.

“All of Mr. Wilson’s plays are a window into his own life. His family stories live on through them and it’s powerful to picture his mother shaping his world view through her own stories,” he says.

Toward the end of his life, Wilson

was adamant that his childhood home be put to use, rather than becoming just a museum.

As Wilson requested, the house acts as a community center. Most of the space is dedicated to local art installations and classrooms.

The August Wilson House in its current state focuses on being neighborly. This attitude fuels their partnerships with local schools and institutions.

One of the house’s largest community events is the August Wilson Block party, which is scheduled annually on the last Saturday of April — as close to Wilson’s birthday on April 27 as possible.

As a community partner to the house, Duquesne University participates in the planning and execution of this event, largely due to the work of Kathleen Roberts, the director of the Honors College.

Erik Garrett works closely with Roberts to maintain this partnership. He teaches a class each spring in which Duquesne Honors students have the opportunity to promote and volunteer at the block party.

“Our students, particularly in my class, have volunteered to do different activities for children, but also outreach,” Garrett said. “Some semesters we did educational elements as well. We’ve helped with writing and led tours for them as well.”

The August Wilson House is constantly developing new programs and ways to serve the local community.

“We see ourselves as stewards of Mr. Wilson’s legacy,” Dyer said. “As a member of the community, we need to always listen to those around us and ask ourselves how we can continue to support our neighbors.” •

The Big Mac was invented for big appetites

By Nick Licata

Rooted in Pittsburgh's history is one of the most iconic fast-food items in the United States—a menu item with two beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles and a sesame seed bun.

The **Big Mac**, developed in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, ushered in a new era of cheap, accessible food.

McDonald's was originally created as a burger joint to offer quick and affordable meals. After returning from World War II, Michael "Jim" Delligatti saw an opportunity for a location for a restaurant a few miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

Delligatti had experience from working in a few fast-food places in California, including McDonald's, after he returned from the war. He later became responsible for opening more than 50 locations in the state after helping the franchise transition to Pennsylvania from the West Coast.

The location just south of Pittsburgh was a working-class, rural city. Uniontown, a mill town in the heart of Pennsylvania that produced an abundance of steel, was the home of a large, blue-collar work force. Delligatti, upon opening his McDonald's in the area, realized that the single-patty burger was not enough to feed the hungry mill workers, according to Made In PGH.

The mill workers would come to the franchise in between or after shifts but were continually restless and hungry after finishing their small, cheap patty. Delligatti, who had seen the concept before, became enamored with the idea of selling a two-patty burger.

After traveling to a few diners in

Southwest Pennsylvania to research their methods, Delligatti pitched his idea of the "Blue Ribbon Burger" to the McDonald's executives, a double-decker cheeseburger with two beef patties. He believed that the larger meal would help appease the loyal mill workers in Pennsylvania.

What would later become known as the Big Mac was met with immediate disapproval by the McDonald's decision makers. Before going on to become one of their most iconic products, the Big Mac was met with a resounding "no" by the executives.

After further campaigning and per-



suading, Delligatti was cleared to sell his sandwich, which switched names again to "The Aristocrat." The deal stated that Delligatti was only allowed to use ingredients that were already being shipped to the franchise. This meant that the veteran, in a "Chopped"-esque trial, was given a box of ingredients to try and make his vision work, according to Jim's son, Mike.

Delligatti's vision came to life in August of 1967. The first Big Macs sold for 45 cents and featured two beef patties, a special sauce, cheese, pickles, onions and lettuce encased in a bun with a bun layer splitting the patties in the middle. The burger was a resounding

success with the local Southwestern Pennsylvania clientele, according to Made In PGH.

The Big Mac quickly spread to all McDonald's locations and became one of the franchise's best-selling meals. What started as a fix to help hungry workers swept across the country and propelled McDonald's into a national fast-food powerhouse.

It had such a large impact in the community that the former mill town Irwin, Pennsylvania, which is just north of Uniontown, became the home of the Big Mac Museum Restaurant. Located one half mile west of exit 67 on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the museum pays homage to Delligatti's vision and impact on American fast-food culture.

"I would never have dreamed that my creation would turn into a piece of Americana," Jim Delligatti told *The Telegraph*.

The museum also features a 14-foot tall Big Mac statue that towers over guests. The museum was the idea of Delligatti's family, which still owns 18 McDonald's locations. The still-working restaurant also features a Big Mac toaster used in the 1970's and a Big Mac "Sauce Gun," which looks like an instrument from a dentist's office, according to RoadsideAmerica.com.

The Big Mac Museum Restaurant and the legacy left by Delligatti continue to anchor the most iconic fast-food creation of the Southwestern Pennsylvania region. Though not the Polio vaccine, the movie theatre or a commercial radio station, the Big Mac remains one of Pittsburgh's most impactful inventions. ●

Follow the arrow: The story of Kennywood's past and present

By Grayce Sullivan

Kennywood's black and yellow arrow has been an iconic symbol of the Steel City for decades.

The arrow first appeared in 1920 and was used to direct traffic when Kennywood experienced its first wave of success as an amusement park.

"The interesting thing is that Kennywood's arrows endured while those of other businesses faded away—most likely because few businesses have lasted as long as Kennywood, whose first season was in 1899," says Brian Butko, director of publications at the Heinz History Center.

But what about before the roller

Kenny family's heirs willing to sell, the challenge became connecting the hilltop grove to the city.

Previous attempts to build a streetcar line had failed because of neighbors refusing to grant rights of way, but the Mellons found a legal loophole that allowed them to bypass these obstacles.

They secured a right of way by chartering a company to build a public road to the hilltop. Then they legally laid streetcar tracks in the roadbed to bypass the neighbors who had refused permission.

Once the trolley connection was secured, the grove could welcome crowds

Lost Kennywood is a section of the park inspired by its past. It's designed to resemble amusement parks from the early 20th century, giving it a nostalgic appeal.

New rides like Steel Curtain and The Phantom's Revenge bring in young, eager Kennywood fans. With the evolution of technology, these rides offer high-thrill experiences.

Kennywood's rides have evolved dramatically over the years, but the heart of the park remains the people who bring it to life each day.

Among them is Dante Martin, a Duquesne student who works in



coasters and crowds of people?

The area that would become Kennywood wasn't always a funfair.

Back in the 1800s, the area was known as Kenny's Grove. People from all over came to picnic and relax at the park. When the steel mills were booming, steelworkers would hang out during breaks ... and maybe have a smoke, too.

By 1898, the stage was set for Kenny's Grove to transform from a popular picnic site into a formal amusement park.

With Pittsburgh-native financier Andrew Mellon backing the project and the

more easily than before, and the land was officially developed into Kennywood Park.

Attractions expanded beyond simple picnic shelters and pavilions, growing to include rides, games and entertainment that drew people in.

Kennywood is still thriving in the present day, attracting about 2 million guests every year.

One unique aspect of Kennywood, and one of the reasons people keep coming back, is that the park honors its rich history. Old and new rides are mixed, creating a hodgepodge of ride experiences.

food services.

"I personally think Kennywood is a great place to work. It has allowed me to gain important skills such as customer service etiquette and how to work efficiently in fast-paced, sometimes high-stress environments," Martin says.

Kennywood has truly come a long way. From humble beginnings as a picnic grove to a successful and well-loved amusement park, it continues to evolve.

The same arrow that guided early visitors still points guests toward a place where modern and classic thrills coexist. •

Pierogies are Pittsburgh's signature dish

By Charlotte Shields-Rossi

For the past five years, Jody Joseph has been up in the early hours of the morning peeling potatoes.

Her hands cramp but she loves what she does—making **pierogies**, a dish that is synonymous with Pittsburgh.

On this particular morning, she is mixing a spinach and ricotta filling, always measuring the salt by eye. While she is scooping away at Pierogies Plus in McKees Rocks, she offers a theory on why pierogies are such a staple in the Steel City.

“It was a poor thing. Everybody had flour. It was out of necessity. It just happened to turn out really good,” Jody says.

Pierogies have very few ingredients. The dough includes flour, eggs, water and oil and a simple filling is potatoes and cheese. Although Jody likes to get experimental with the flavors: pulled pork, apple pie and taco are a few of her new additions.

Jody has eaten a ton of pierogies over the years, and admittedly she has grown sick of them. But she still enjoys them as a treat every now and then.

Helen Mannarino, CEO and founder of Pierogies Plus, doesn't see herself ever getting sick of the Pittsburgh staple.

She says that if she was stuck with eating one food for the rest of her life, she would pick pierogies.

Helen immigrated from Poland to Pittsburgh 50 years ago taking her coveted, confidential dough recipe with her. With more than 70 years of pierogi making under her belt, she says it is who she is. Pierogies are not just a tasty meal for her. They unlock memories of being in her grandmother's kitchen at the age of eight helping her pinch the dough.

“Every day I remember my grandma,” she says. “Without her this place wouldn't exist.”

As the demand for the pierogies grew, so did the operation, going from four flavors to more than 40 varieties.

Helen expanded the kitchen from 350 to 3,000 square feet and now has dozens of staff members with a specific job—mixing, rolling, filling, pinching and boiling. On the wall of the kitchen hangs a photo, decades old, of a small team in an even smaller kitchen. When Helen looks at it, it reminds her of where she started.



Marcin Dadan grew up in Poland and like Helen he also has a love for pierogies—particularly the sweet variety. While both are furthering Slavic traditions, one is cooking in the kitchen while the other is teaching in the classroom. Marcin teaches Slavic language and literature at the University of Pittsburgh.

He talks about how stuffed dough dishes can be seen around the world—dumplings, samosas and empanadas, just to name a few.

“It's actually hard to find a culture that wouldn't have some kind of a form of pierogi,” Marcin says.

Being a linguist, he is interested in the etymology behind the word pierogies. Pierogi comes from a Proto-Slavic word

which translates to “feast.”

“It's a very communal food. So you can make the food together; that brings people together. There is an opportunity to maybe sing together; to talk about some traditional stories,” he says.

When Eastern European immigrants came to Pittsburgh to work in the steel mills, they missed the “feast” they had back home.

“I imagine those people missing Polish food, you know, it was important for them to

have a connection with other Polish people. In churches, in schools they organized lessons on how to make pierogies,” Marcin says.

What started as a food solely consumed by Eastern Europeans missing the life they had back home, turned into something more. After Poland joined the European Union in 2004, the cultural influence they had on the United States expanded like wildfire. Even restaurants that don't serve traditional Polish food began selling pierogies.

“They became more Instagrammable. There are so many examples of traditional folk foods that have had this kind of second life,” Marcin says. “You can order pierogies in a fancy restaurant. My parents' generation didn't have that.” •

Pittsburgh's sweet tradition: The wedding cookie table

By Katherine Williams

From french fries on sandwiches to chip chopped ham, the city of Pittsburgh has adopted many unique culinary traditions.

But no tradition is sweeter than the **cookie table**.

Often made for large gatherings, particularly weddings, the cookie table has become an integral part of Pittsburgh's culture.

Traditional tables are stacked with hundreds if not thousands of various cookies. The most popular cookies for the tables include pizzelles, peanut butter blossoms, Italian wedding cookies, buckeyes and lady locks, says Andy Masich, president and CEO of the Senator John Heinz History Center.

The origin of this sugary tradition is a bit unclear, with Italians, Eastern Europeans, Scandinavians and Greeks all laying claim to its roots. And many claim Youngstown, Ohio as the original home of the cookie table.

But why even have a cookie table in the first place?

Many believe that the tradition started during the Great Depression, with guests bringing cookies to lessen the financial burden for the bride and groom's families.

Julia Hudson-Richards, a University of Pittsburgh history professor who specializes in the history of food, says that during this time many people couldn't afford to pay for the ingredients for a cake to serve a significant number of guests, so the cookie table became the solution.

"It is delicious, and an opportunity to get people involved without asking for huge financial contributions," Hud-

son-Richards says.

Today, many Pittsburgh weddings include both a cookie table and a wedding cake, often with matching décor or color schemes. Many weddings provide containers or bags, allowing guests to take home the cookies.

But as the tradition has continued throughout the years, many families have become overwhelmed with the time commitment and process of creating a beautiful, complex cookie table.



That's where business owners like Marsha Houston come in.

Houston is the owner of Here for the Cookie Table, a Pittsburgh-based business dedicated to providing couples with a beautiful cookie table display and a stress-free set up and take down process. Houston started her business after creating a cookie table for her own daughter's wedding and she realized how draining and stressful the process was.

"At eleven o'clock at night, when it was over, I looked at the table and wanted to cry," Houston said. "I had to clean it all up, and I'm like no mom, family, friend, relative should have to do this the day of the wedding, they should get

to enjoy the wedding."

Houston and her team of twelve have done more than 300 cookie tables since she opened her business four years ago. The team has done every color scheme and theme imaginable from simple golds and silvers to Christmas- and Halloween-themed cookie tables.

Regardless of theme, many of the cookie tables weave pieces of Pittsburgh into their design or even the cookies themselves.

"We do a lot of smiley cookies. There are a lot of people who get specialty sugar cookies made, anything from terrible towels or Heinz ketchup bottles. Turner's Tea is a big local one, so it's really fun when they have things like that that are very very Pittsburgh," Houston says.

But as the cookie tables have grown, so has their reach, with many people taking cookie tables outside the city of Pittsburgh.

"What's unique about this is how expansively it got adopted," Hudson-Richards said.

Hudson-Richards believes that as the city and cookie table continues to grow it will be more challenging to keep that "Pittsburgh feeling."

"I think it will take effort to maintain that local identity," Hudson-Richards said.

Hudson-Richards is optimistic though, saying that she sees the cookie table as a "really good entry-level tradition" for the college students of Pittsburgh.

Hudson-Richards feels that the college students will help keep the tradition going and will help keep that "Pittsburgh feeling" for years to come. •

Pamela's pancakes merit a presidential endorsement

By Penelope Lee

It's a Saturday morning, and the Strip District's **Pamela's Diner** has a line around the block, with about fifty people in the queue.

This is typical for the Pittsburgh breakfast chain. It has always been a go-to spot for many to satiate their morning hunger, but in 2008, Pamela's had a very special guest.

During his campaign tour, former President Barack Obama sat down with the sounds of clanking plates, sizzling on the grill and the chatter of dining customers.

He ordered a plate of what he called pancakes, but were actually strawberry crepe-style hotcakes, along with a side of bacon and accompanied by some eggs.

After his plate was clean, he left the diner. When he stepped outside the diner, questions about Bill Clinton were flying at him from reporters.

According to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Obama said, "Before I answer this

Jack Dawson, an Ohio native who currently lives in Pittsburgh, couldn't agree more. He says Pamela's is one of his favorite spots in the city.

"I come here all the time," Dawson said with a plate of those same iconic hotcakes and a side of sausage in front of him.

Dawson recalls the fun fact of Obama eating at the diner and said that's what he always tells his visitors when he takes them out to breakfast here.

"People actually get, like, excited when I tell them that," he said.

Pamela's currently has four locations that all serve the exact breakfast menu as the one that Obama ate at. The other locations of the chain love to honor the fact of Obama eating at the chain as well.

The Pamela's on Walnut Street in Shady Side is about a third of the size of the Strip location but customers are greeted with the same enticing aromas

small girl dressed as a ballerina, a Steelers fan captured in mid-cheer, an older couple laughing together, and more.

At the front of the shop, there is a giant painting of Obama smiling while offering his favorite hotcakes.

Obama revisited Pittsburgh in 2024 during Kamala Harris's campaign run with Tim Walz.

Walz got the same idea as Obama, and paid a visit to the diner himself.

He brought his daughter Hope, and they ordered the same popular hotcakes.

Walz even smiled for a picture with the staff after his meal.

During Obama's opening speech at the rally, he went as far as to mention Pamela's and once again raved about the diner.

Cassandra Harris, editor in chief of the *Point Park Globe*, reviews meals and critiques them for her local audience. She calls these reviews "Burgh Bites," and was inspired to visit Pamela's after hearing how he spoke highly of the restaurant.

Harris performed an in-depth review of her experience at Pamela's and wanted to see if Obama was really right about the endorsement he gave.

"At some point in his speech, he said that I just came from Pamela's," Harris said. "We were doing our election issue that week, I figured, why not do an election theme food review?"

After her thorough review and a tasting of the same strawberry hotcakes, Harris came to one conclusion in her article with *Point Park Globe*.

"The only words that came to mind were that Obama was right," she said. •



question, these really were maybe the best pancakes I've tasted in a very long time. Get some take-out."

and smiling faces.

Inside, murals line the walls that depict different types of Pittsburghers: A

Older neighborhoods are flushed with "Pittsburgh potties"

By Josh Imhof

If you live in an old Pittsburgh home, chances are you've seen a lone toilet in the basement. Sometimes it's nestled in a corner, hiding in plain sight. Other times, they are dropped right in the center of the room.

"Almost everybody in the city, especially if they grew up in the urban areas, had one in their basement. Everybody did," says Ron Baraff, director of historic resources and facilities at Rivers of Steel.

But why do these stray toilets exist? And how have they become a Pittsburgh staple?

The answer is complicated.

Legend has it that when Pittsburgh's thousands of steelworkers would come home after a hard day's work, they would need a place to clean off without getting the rest of the house dirty. So, they would come through the basement and use the toilet and shower down there before coming upstairs.

As it turns out, this legend is grounded in truth.

Keith Clouse, a former laborer at Edgar-Thompson Steel Works in Braddock, worked at the mill from 1968-1972.

"You sweat like a pig," Clouse says. "U.S. Steel paid very well, but they worked every penny out of you."

One of the sweatiest jobs Clouse had to work was informally referred to as the "konga line" among laborers. Each person would line up in front of a furnace and one by one, they would heave shovel-loads of materials into it. Temperatures outside the oven reached up to a scorching 2,500-2,600 degrees.

Clouse and his fellow workers would be covered in sweat and ash by the time they got home, something he said

their families and spouses did not want brought inside.

"No woman in her right mind would allow a filthy creature into her clean house," Clouse says.



Instead, Clouse would walk down the basement steps outside of his home, come through the basement door, and strip off his filthy mill clothes downstairs. In the middle of the basement was a shower faucet that he would use to wash the day's soot off.

In the corner, a "Pittsburgh Toilet."

"It's not a myth. Believe me. It's reality," Clouse says.

Still, this toilet's history goes back much further.

In the 1840s, New York City began constructing the first modern, complex sewer system in the country due to the rapid outbreak of disease.

While advanced for its time, the system did not come without its flaws, one of which was the issue of backups. Mounds of sewage and excrement would come bubbling through the pipes and out onto the streets, as well as inside of businesses and homes.

These backups posed a possible public health disaster for the city, and locals needed a way to know when their system was having issues so they could call someone to come fix it.

Enter the basement toilet.

If someone's pipes were to have a backup, it acted as a warning system for residents and building tenants.

"Even if you weren't in the basement, you would be able to smell it, or if you were in the basement, you would see it coming up, and you could contain it," says William J. Martin, a New Jersey architect.

Soon, the design made its way to the Steel City.

"Pittsburgh is pretty notorious, especially in the early 20th century, for not having the greatest sewage system in the country. We weren't known for that. We were known for things like cholera and typhoid," Baraff says.

As this technology developed, the steel industry exploded. With that, the uses of the basement toilet evolved.

"That is the quintessential **Pittsburgh potty**," Baraff says.

Still, not every worker took part.

"It wasn't a thing where you came in because you were dirty from the steel mill here," says Bob Bauder, a former laborer at the J & L Steel Aliquippa Works. "My dad always took a shower before he left the mill and so did I."

Bauder treated the basement bathroom like any other. If the upstairs one was being used, he'd go downstairs. If not, he didn't use it.

So why didn't Clouse also do this?

"They had them there, but to be honest with you, everyone just wanted to get the hell outta there," Clouse says. •

Happy Meal: The story of the Eat'n Park Smiley Cookie

By Riley Hunter

In 1986, Eat'n Park launched their iconic “Smiley Cookie,” a sugar cookie with a smiley face drawn in icing.

But the original cookie originated long before 1986.

It begins in a small Titusville bakery called Warner's Bakery. Former CEO of Eat'n Park Jim Broadhurst went to this bakery every day as a child to purchase a smiling cookie, according to Eat'n Park's website.

Whenever he oversaw the creation of Eat'n Park's first bakery, he wanted to recreate this experience. Thus, the Smiley Cookie was born.

Upon launch, the Smiley Cookie was intended to be a treat just for children. All children get a free cookie with the purchase of a meal, a move that Eat'n Park made to boost sales and convey a message of happiness.

Thomas Freilino is a seasonal employee who, among his other responsibilities, decorates the Smiley Cookies.

“Kids get excited for the cookies, especially during the Halloween season, because we stick candy corn on their eyes,” Thomas says.

But the original emphasis on Smiley Cookies being just for kids didn't last long. The restaurant now sells cookies by the dozen in-store and online to a wide range of audiences.

Thomas says that the Smiley Cookie represents the Eat'n Park image: a family restaurant that promises good food and good times.

“It is their brand,” he says. “It's basically their whole thing, the Smiley Cookie. They're trying to make people happy and exude that that's where you want to be.”

Now, a Pittsburgh icon the cookie is completely synonymous with the restaurant.

The Smiley Cookie reached new heights of recognition in 2006.

The Pittsburgh Steelers had just secured a Super Bowl victory against the Seattle Seahawks, and in celebration, Eat'n Park launched a black and gold Smiley Cookie. According to *Good Food*



Pittsburgh, the restaurant sold 350,000 cookies in one week.

Just three years later, the Pittsburgh Steelers were off to another Super Bowl, defeating the Arizona Cardinals. Eat'n Park sold 500,000 cookies. The following week, another 600,00 cookies were sold.

The late Mac Miller, who was a Pittsburgh-based rapper, even featured the cookie in his song “Knock, Knock.”

But what is it about this simple cookie that makes it so successful?

Michael Pellow, who studied graphic design at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, says that the Smiley Cookie is an effective piece of marketing that evokes emotions when you come across it.

“The Eat'n Park Smiley Cookie is a

simple and iconic design,” Michael says. “The old diner style roots that the restaurant was built on show through in the simplistic, vintage style decoration of the cookie. It has become an instantly identifiable piece of branding for Eat'n Park and serves to sum up the experience of visiting an Eat'n Park — simple and familiar.”

Still, discourse surrounding the cookie itself has surfaced online as people debate whether the Smiley Cookie is a good cookie.

Thomas takes a firm stance that the cookies themselves are nothing to write home about. Rather, he says, the cookies are solely popular for the design.

“The cookies are for anyone with a sense of whimsy and a terrible taste in cookies,” he says.

On the subreddit “r/Pittsburgh” users took to online to air out their possibly controversial opinions under the post: “Eat'n Park Cookies: Garbage or Great?”

“As a cookie, they're just okay. It's the nostalgia factor that makes them good,” one user writes.

“Pure garbage, and yet whenever I get my hands on one ... I'll devour it. Things taste better when they're free,” another Reddit user comments.

Whether you think the smiley cookie is a palatable cookie or not, everyone can agree that their likeness is iconic to the City of Pittsburgh.

It's more than just icing and dough — it's a small tradition that has touched generations of families. And as long as Pittsburghers keep buying them, the Smiley Cookie will continue to be a symbol of joy that stretches far beyond the pastry itself. •

The power and legacy of the Terrible Towel

By Tristen Chang

Fans wave the **Terrible Towel** with energy, shaking it high above their heads as the crowd roars in unison. The sight of thousands of gold towels spinning through the air is one of the most recognizable and enduring images in American sports.

What began as a simple idea in the mid-1970s has grown into a cultural marker for the Pittsburgh Steelers. The towel holds deep meaning for fans, representing tradition, loyalty and shared history. It reflects the pride and spirit of a city that stands firmly behind its team.

“Myron Cope was the one who brought the towel to the attention of the media, and over the years the Steelers have brought out new towels every year,” recalls Mike Andrews, a Terrible Towel vendor since 2003.

In 1975, broadcaster Cope encouraged fans to bring a gold towel to a playoff game. He wanted to create something that would unify the crowd and lift the energy inside the stadium, according to the Heinz History Museum. Many doubted the idea, but once fans began waving their towels, the atmosphere changed. Players felt it, supporters embraced it and the towel quickly became part of the Steelers’ identity.

Longtime fans describe the towel as a force on game day. Joe Lapine, a fan for forty-six years, says the towel transforms the stadium.

“I think it creates a certain aura over the stadium in itself. It brings that extra player onto the field,” Lapine says. “I feel more times than not we have that one-up advantage every time we bring the towel to the games. We’ll be waving it the whole game!”

Isiah Mims, a fan since 2012, says the ritual follows people wherever they watch. For Mims, the towel signals the momentum of a game.

“Even at home, you’ll be sitting there spinning it. It’s like the trademark. Once you see the towel going, third quarter to fourth quarter, or on a third down, you

Cope donated the rights to the Terrible Towel to the Allegheny Valley School, which supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A portion of every officially licensed towel sold goes directly to the organization. Fans often mention this connection with pride, knowing that a symbol they



see the towels going. It’s like, ‘oh yeah, we’re about to go,’” Mims says.

Outside the stadium, the towel also shapes local business and fan rituals. Fans bring it to weddings, tailgates and community events. Some residents keep a Terrible Towel hanging in their front window all year. Others take it with them when they move away, using it as a reminder of home. The towel appears in baby photos, dorm rooms and even in pictures sent from overseas military bases. Over time, it has become both a personal keepsake and a shared symbol of belonging.

The towel’s charitable connection adds even more meaning to its legacy.

love also supports a meaningful cause.

Beyond its charitable and cultural significance, the towel also influences the way fans experience the game itself.

To Andrews, the towel gives fans a simple way to release emotion.

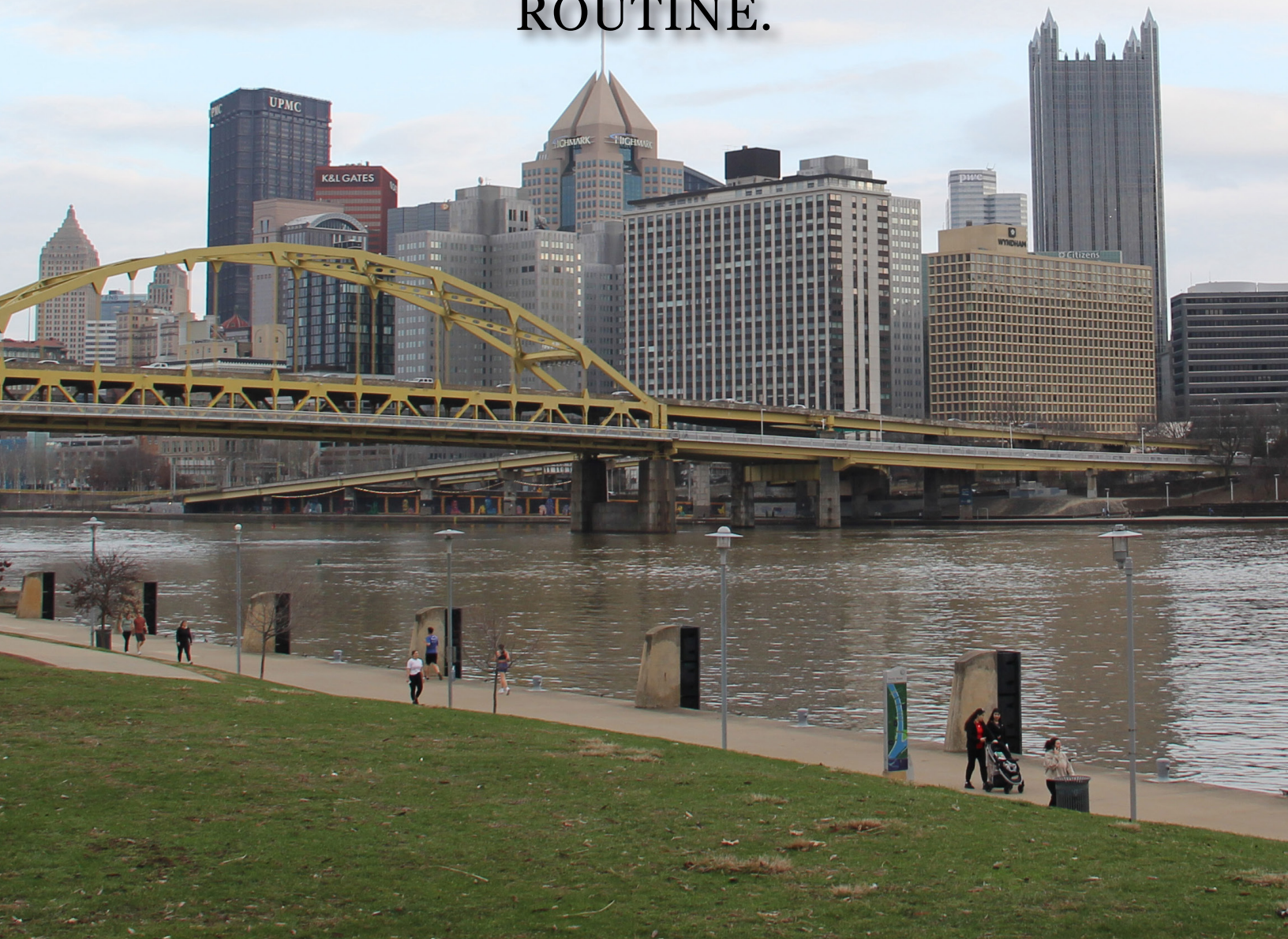
“I think everyone likes to hold something in their hand and shake it, kind of celebrating their excitement and the game. It helps quite a bit. You can see it when you put the game on TV. You see all the people that have the towel, and if it’s a big game, you see a lot of towels,” he says. To him, the connection goes beyond the NFL.

“It’s just part of our culture here in Pittsburgh.” •

COLUMNS

NOW THAT WE HAVE EXPLORED WHAT MAKES THE CITY ICONIC, IT IS TIME TO UNDERSTAND THE NOTABLE MOMENTS IN EACH REPORTER'S LIFE.

HERE, THE JOURNALISTS OUTLINE THE CHALLENGES AND BRAVERY THEY EXEMPLIFY IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY ROUTINE.





Technology, a distraction to us all



Jamal Bigstaff

Imagine going a whole day without your phone, a distraction that causes you to miss out on human interactions and experiences. I never realized how important these interactions were until my senior year of college.

In early March 2025, I was tasked with a 12-day cleanse from all social media platforms by my Human Communication in a Tech Age professor. The assignment unfortunately aligned with spring break, a week when college students get to be free. Instead, I would still be doing schoolwork.

For my spring break I went to Cancun, Mexico. During this trip, I limited my phone time to only taking important calls and messages. As soon as I arrived, I met a group of students from Michigan State University, including a guy around my age who went to school for business marketing and real estate.

We ended up talking for hours. He and a couple of his friends actually stayed connected with my group throughout our time there. Toward the end of the trip, we exchanged contact info so we could keep in touch.

Because of this social media cleanse, I was able to create great memories and opportunities with

new people. This allowed me to make connections and experience the kinds of human interactions social media cannot provide.

Social media is a place where people can connect with one another from all around the world, but it can also be a way to detach us from gaining actual human experience. A book called *The Burnout Society* by Byung-Chul Han explains what we gain and lose with social media.

Han takes a dive into how we view ourselves when it comes to allowing social media to control us. He suggests that technology, especially social media, encourages people to view themselves as projects, focused on trying to sustain an image for the approval of others. In doing so, we end up mentally and emotionally exhausted.

Prior to the cleanse, my screen time per day was 6 hours or more. That's almost half my day wasted on doomscrolling. Since I did that 12-day cleanse, I've been doing a week-long cleanse at the beginning of every month. This has helped me grow as person. I was an anti-social person before, and my phone gave me an even bigger distraction. But this cleansing

technique has truly helped me engage with the world more.

The World Beyond Your Head by Matthew B. Crawford demonstrates how modern technology, such as digital media and attention-manipulating environments, has transformed human interaction.

For instance, a student is supposed to be taking notes during a lecture, but instead they're on their phone. The next class they have a pop quiz and have no idea how to answer the questions.

Crawford suggests that technology has fractured our attention, making it harder to be fully present in social interactions and that technology encourages us to approach the world and each other as spectators rather than engaged participants.

Technology can be a useful tool as well, but we must understand that we are in control and not allow our devices or social media to control us.

Based on my experience, I challenge you to do a cleanse from any device that takes the most of your attention. Gain an experience that could possibly change not only who you are, but how you view and interact with everything around you. •

What are you?



Tristen Chang

What are you?

It is a question I have been asked on the subway in Atlanta, by a waitress serving me dinner in Florida, by high school classmates, coworkers and even close friends. It is rarely meant to sound cruel, but it always lands the same way—as if there is a correct answer I am supposed to supply.

My dad is Jamaican, Chinese, Eastern Indian and Scottish. My mom is Greek, Irish and English. That combination sounds fascinating on paper, but in real life, it often leaves me standing between worlds invited into all of them but never fully belonging to any.

Before I ever understood why people were confused, I had to face the confusion myself. I do not speak Mandarin, and I do not have a Jamaican accent. My features confuse people. I have been mistaken for Latina, Middle Eastern, even Native American. One time, while shopping at an Asian supermarket with my dad, an older woman spoke to me in Mandarin and grew visibly frustrated when I could not respond. Moments like that leave me unsure which part of myself people expect me to reveal. Saying, “I’m mixed,” never seems to satisfy anyone. It feels as though they want me to pick one label that makes sense to them, even if it does not make sense to me.

We check boxes for our gender,

race, background and beliefs, as if identity were as simple as ticking one square and moving on. Every time I fill out a form that asks for my race or ethnicity, I hesitate. Which box do I check? Black, Asian, White or Other? That last one, “Other,” has always felt like a quiet reminder that I do not fit the categories society has designed. It is strange how something as small as a checkbox can make you question who you are. Yet, no one perfectly fits into any of them. Finding your own identity can feel impossible when the world keeps insisting you pick just one.

Over time, I have come to see that this in-between space is actually a gift. Growing up ethnically ambiguous has led to awkward and funny moments, but it has also opened the door to real connections. I can talk about my grandmother’s Greek recipes with one friend, laugh about my dad’s Jamaican slang with another and share stories about traditions from so many diverse cultures.

Understanding my identity did not just come from conversations—it came from learning how to really see people. As I navigated the blurred lines of my own identity, I found myself paying closer attention to the details in others, the small things that often go overlooked. That shift in how I observed the world ultimately led me toward photography,

where I began to notice what others overlook. A photograph captures a moment, not a category. When I photograph people, I do not think about their race or background. I look at light, expression and emotion. Each photo reminds me that every person is a story, not a label. Seeing through a lens has taught me to be racially unconcerned in the best way. It has shown me that beauty does not depend on color or culture but on the details that make each person unique.

I have realized that I do not need to belong to only one group to connect with people. My identity is a blend, not a puzzle missing pieces, but a mosaic made of many colors. Every piece adds to the whole.

Maybe that is what identity really is. It is not a box to fit into but rather a collage we build as we go. It is shaped by our families, our friends, our experiences, and even our uncertainties. Each person I meet adds another small piece to my understanding of who I am, and I, in turn, add a piece to theirs.

Because who I am cannot be checked off in a box. It is something I am still writing—and still capturing every day. So, when someone asks me, “What are you?” I have started to answer differently. Instead of listing my family’s ancestry or ethnic breakdown, I simply say: “I’m me.” ●

"Sorry, I can't talk right now ... or ever"



Ella Fahey

Ring ring ring ... it's hard to say what's louder, the sound of my phone or the sound of my heart pounding out of my chest.

As a journalism student, I do not have the luxury of avoiding phone calls. I make them multiple times a week — many of them to strangers who have intimidating credentials and busy schedules.

Three years ago, I took Newsroom I — my first reporting-intensive class. My assignments were a cause for daily panic, but that did not mean that not doing them was an option. The concept of 'mind over matter' is something that I subscribe to in theory, but it's easier said than done.

After dozens of phone calls and countless self-pep talks, I can say that it has gotten easier. I can also say that I am proud of myself for seeing it through.

Not many people are in a position where their academic success hinges on their willingness to speak with strangers on the phone, but we talk to people every day, so why does the idea of a phone call still send 75% of Gen-Z into a state of panic?

On average, members of Gen Z spend about six and a half hours on their phones each day — longer than any other generation. More than a quarter of each day spent streaming, texting, scrolling — but definitely not speaking on the phone.

Why?

If I had to guess, it likely boils down to our natural tendency to seek out the easiest, most comfort-

able option. For prior generations, this option was phone calls, emailing or snail mail. For Gen-Z, it's texting, DMing, snapping and sharing.

As we make the habitual shift to typing instead of talking, it makes sense that spoken verbal skills might begin to fall by the wayside — like a muscle that isn't exercised. As we become more and more reliant on the use of convenient and easy channels of communication, more traditional communication methods (phone calls) become more intimidating.

In line with many other parts of our culture, the tone of our digital communication has relaxed over recent years. As content and modes of communication have grown shorter and more concise, many longstanding formalities have been de-commissioned.

As tempting as it might be to move away from phone calls — something that undeniably requires more effort than sending a quick text — I think that it is dangerous to abandon such an important skill simply because there are easy alternatives.

There was no negative experience, no rational fear behind my own phone call avoidance. I relied on the safety net of written communication because it gave me time to refine my questions. It was a desire to remain in my comfort zone.

This wasn't even an issue of public speaking in general. Throughout middle and high school, I actively participated in and coached mul-

multiple public speaking groups. This made no sense.

With neither rhyme nor reason, I pressed on. There was no way around it, so I opted for the difficult (and only) option: through it.

Unfortunately, this triumph is not one-and-done. This isn't like riding a bike. I've learned over time that the more regularly I make intimidating phone calls, the less difficult it is.

Even in the moments when it is still challenging, I think that the lesson I've learned from this is more about dealing with discomfort in general. Calling strangers on the phone forces us to be unrehearsed and to remove the safety net that we have grown reliant on. Scary for a generation that is used to being able to edit and even unsend a text, after it's already been sent.

I don't think that my own anxieties about phone calls are going anywhere. I have learned the nasty lesson that there are some things that I just won't ever enjoy, like hardboiled eggs or snaking a drain.

Instead of treating a phone call like a brick wall, I've begun to view it as a staircase.

Annoying?

Yes.

Slightly inconvenient?

Yes.

Ultimately good for me?

...Yes.

So, when I hear the somewhat dreaded *ring ring ring* of my phone, I let my heart pound, but only for a second. Then I take a deep breath and answer. •

Life between the highs and lows



Riley Hunter

In February of 2025, I was diagnosed with Bipolar II disorder.

My entire world flipped upside down.

After years of struggling with my mood, I started taking antidepressants for the first time. This small pill, 20 milligrams of Prozac, was the catalyst that changed my life.

Within mere weeks of starting Prozac, my mood was out of control. I couldn't control my emotions anymore; I was sobbing one moment and then overjoyed the next.

I would later go on to learn that antidepressants have the potential to induce mania and rapid cycling in those with bipolar disorder, hence the lack of control I had over my own feelings.

How could this happen to me? I always considered myself put together—a good student, a good friend, always on top of everything. This diagnosis felt like everything I thought I knew about myself was suddenly void.

Whenever I was first diagnosed, I called my boyfriend in a panic.

"I have bipolar," I said, voice shaking.

His response struck me.

"I know," he said. "How do you feel?"

The kindness of him and the other people in my life was striking—they held my hand as I navigated what this change practically means. They supported me through the good and bad, and supported me in the time I needed it most.

Bipolar disorder is a chronic mood disorder that is characterized by periods of mania and depression. Chronic means there's no cure for

this disorder; I'll be stuck with this for the rest of my life.

Bipolar disorder is characterized by two different types: Bipolar I and Bipolar II. Those with Bipolar I experience more extreme episodes of mania, which often result in hospitalization. Bipolar II has a less extreme mania, known as hypomania, but more severe depressive episodes. Approximately 2.8% of adults in the United States experience life with bipolar disorder, around seven million people. It is estimated that 37 million individuals worldwide live with bipolar disorder.

No one knows what causes bipolar disorder. Scientists theorize that a mixture of genetic predisposition, environmental factors and other medical conditions play a part in the onset of bipolar symptoms.

Although it impacts millions, bipolar disorder lurks over my every movement.

My whole life, I've heard people refer to their mood swings as being "so bipolar." I've watched celebrities with bipolar disorder, like Kanye West, spiral in the press and be viciously ridiculed for their behavior.

I was terrified. I felt like a stranger in my own body.

My emotions were suddenly not my own anymore. I couldn't control the highs and lows that seemed to come out of nowhere. I was a prisoner to my own mind; I had no power over my feelings as they ruled my every moment.

By March 2025, I was sure this feeling would last forever.

And yet, slowly but surely, the clouds began to part.

I started medication: an anti-psychotic that began to piece my life back together. I went to weekly therapy to practice talking through the overwhelming fear.

Until one day, I woke up and, briefly, forgot that I was plagued by this incessant disorder.

Life began as normal again. I went to class, hung out with my friends and did schoolwork.

By getting enough sleep, sticking to a routine, managing my stress and balancing my diet, I was able to better control my episodes. My depression and hypomania no longer controlled my life.

Still, some days I struggle.

When you live with bipolar disorder, sometimes even the smallest of things can trigger an episode. These are difficult to manage while trying to balance my responsibilities.

I especially struggle with depressive episodes. They sneak up with small warning signs, such as sleeping more and having a reduced appetite.

Before I know it, I am consumed by numbness and exhaustion. I no longer have the motivation to do the things I love, like hang out with friends or read my favorite books. Instead, my days are spent in a spiral, consumed by dark feelings that feel never-ending.

But these episodes do end.

It is estimated that around 38% of Americans have a college degree. For those with bipolar disorder, that number is only around 16%.

I am acutely aware of this statistic as I near my graduation date in May.

It is a date I intend to keep. •

When every meal is a trial



Josh Imhof

It is 11 p.m., and I have just gotten home from my host job at a restaurant in Pittsburgh.

For the entire evening, I have watched primo steaks, buttered lobsters and decadent cakes pass by as servers and other staff eat their elegant leftovers.

Now, it's my turn.

I pull out a container of lunch meat. The slices' pungent aromas fill my nostrils as I lay them onto two flaccid pieces of white bread.

Ham and turkey. My favorite.

I grab a beer, sit down on the couch and get ready to eat. As I take my first bite, my chest tightens and my muscles tense.

I just remembered that I didn't read the ingredients on the label. No matter, I'll go and double check. I take the package out of the fridge and scan it for two words:

Eggs and milk.

My search comes up empty, and I go back to the couch. But even with this information, I cannot shake the feeling that something is wrong.

I stare down at my cold cuts and wonder, "did I read close enough?"

They lay there menacingly as I ponder the question.

We are in a sandwich standoff. Who will blink first?

This ritual will continue for another five minutes until the sandwich is gone, and I have realized that I will be fine.

This anxiety is caused by my food allergies. While laborious, it is not the most difficult symptom of them.

There is a communal aspect to food, and it is something I am often not a part of.

It is the reason I am sitting in my underwear eating a ham and turkey sandwich and not something from the restaurant.

Growing up, it was the same way.

Birthday parties. Turkey sandwich.

Vacations. Turkey sandwich.

Holidays at other people's houses. Turkey. Sandwich.

Everyone else would share laughs as they shared meals. I was there too, but it never felt like I was completely included. To me, their chewing was insatiable.

I feel the same when someone recommends I visit a new city.

For example, when someone tells

you to visit Chicago, it is usually accompanied by them saying you have to try the pizza there. For Philadelphia, it's their cheese steaks. For New Orleans, it's their gumbo. Etc. Etc.

Each of these places' foods hold a significant place within their respective cultures, and it is isolating when I cannot participate in that. It feels as though there is an invisible barrier between myself and the rest of the people around me.

I can connect with them through other methods, but the food always feels like such an integral part of their experience.

There is something universal to it.

However, if you are not part of that universe, it can feel othering.

So if you see someone with allergies not eating, try and find some sort of food you can connect on. Ask what they are allergic to, and look for options that you can try together. It can be as simple as a pack of Smarties or a bag of chips.

If you're feeling extra motivated, strip down and eat a ham and turkey sandwich with them on the couch. You truly never know how much sharing a bite can mean. ●

Russia is firing missiles. Are you coming or staying?



Penelope Lee

When people look at me, they usually underestimate me: professors, friends and my friends' parents. People initially view me as a small, sorority-type girl who lives a superficial life. Everyone in my entire life has viewed and treated me this way.

But not my family—they have never once doubted me.

The expectations are set high as a Lee, so when my dad mentioned the idea of me coming to two of his charity projects in Iraq and Ukraine to work, it was more than an ask. It was an honor.

Spirit of Soccer, a charity I've grown up with, uses sports for development practices to help impact thousands of people in post-conflict and conflict zones. They specialize in education on explosive ordnance remnant education and counter-terrorism. And that's just the elevator pitch.

This type of work is genuinely unimaginable until you're boots on the ground experiencing it.

"Are you coming or staying?" That's what my dad looked at me and said as our suitcases got stuffed into the trunk of a large white van.

On June 1, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky launched an attack against Russian air bases.

The day after this attack happened was the day I was traveling with Spirit of Soccer was on its way to war-torn Ukraine.

There was concern in my father's eyes. I said I was coming, he kissed my forehead and we began our journey to the border.

Strength, disappointment, sadness and resilience were expressions I thought I understood; I didn't until I was speaking directly with multiple people who are enduring war.

Fifteen coaches employed by Spirit of Soccer traveled to Chernivtsi from all over the country for a training session and festival.

Oleksandra Vladimirova, the country manager for SOS Ukraine, greeted me with a tight hug and a large smile. She had driven all the way from Kyiv, a hot spot.

Many of the coaches traveled for hours from hotspots, meaning locations that are being heavily affected by the war.

Days went by filled with training sessions with the team, and on the day before the tournament, the team went to a local soccer match.

At the game, there was laughing, fans cheering and you could feel the positive energy. Then the joy was drowned out when a blasting sound started blaring.

A coach named Kate looked at me and calmly said, "We have to go now."

It dawned on me that this was an air raid siren. I began to panic, but everyone around me was calm.

We walked to a wooded park, and I continued to freak out since I didn't understand why we weren't running to a shelter, but that's where I learned that drones can't see a target from above if you are covered.

In my life, I've been taught how to act during hurricanes or school shootings, but never how to act when an air siren is blowing.

It's haunting to know that this is information that children in Ukraine have to know.

As these thoughts ran through my head, my dad snapped me back into reality by simply telling me to perform my interviews with the coaches.

So there I sat with eight coach-

es and interviewed them while that gut-wrenching siren blared.

I wanted to know how they were so calm during the siren, and was this reaction the same as when they first heard it?

"I remember when I heard it for the first time, I was like paralyzed and scared, and I was really emotional, and I couldn't, like, you couldn't even go to the shower. You couldn't put your clothes off, because you were expecting the siren, and it's like you're paralyzed," a coach named Julia said.

Each coach had a story that left me speechless, but they found that they didn't want war to take control of their emotions or their lives. They don't want it to steal anymore from them and that is why they choose to remain calm.

Before I knew it, the festival was here, and 60 children gathered on a field, and laughter filled the air.

An overwhelming sense of pride filled me after witnessing this and brought me to tears. I was proud of the people I met, of these coaches, of the children and of my father.

As I left Ukraine, my phone pinged and I read a text from Kate, "Thank you for coming and supporting us. It means a lot when people from other countries come. It reminds us that we are not alone."

My trip was life-changing, and that's something I'll always struggle putting into words, but I will always talk about the people who made my perspective on life change.

Being able to experience my father's impact on so many people is inspiring. So even if others underestimate my abilities, I will always live up to my family's expectations. ●

It's more than a game



Nick Licata

After rupturing his patella tendon, my hobbled father was looking for a way to stay in shape and competitive. An athlete and coach his entire life, he was introduced to pickleball by a friend.

Instead of taking him to any gym with a net, my father was taken to Pickleball Island. The campus, a mammoth warehouse in Grand Island, New York, became his new home. The facility houses 12 newly renovated indoor pickleball courts, padded walls and, most importantly, a community of like-minded individuals.

Despite a predominantly older clientele, I, as well as a few other youths, began to be assimilated into the Island by our family members. Every break I returned home, I was badgered with the same question:

“Pickleball today?” my dad would ask like an eager dog holding its leash at the door.

Pushing my prejudices aside, I took my first trip to the Island around Christmas in 2022. I expected a run-down and desolate gym. Unbeknownst to me, I was entering the Mecca of Pickleball.

Upon entry, players are funneled in through a hallway that employs LED-lit “Pickleball Island” signs and walls that are filled with large-scale custom

branding and designs. Members then pass through a fully stocked merchandise area with clothing, paddles and accessories all branded with the Pickleball Island logo.

Naysayers call pickleball a poor man’s tennis, but to me, it bridged a gap between generations. My relationship with my father was a microcosm of that notion.

Despite being 200 miles away from each other, I would get calls multiple times per week from my dad with the same opening statement.

“Hey, I got a great pickleball story for you,” he’d begin. More often than not, the stories were nearly identical.

But pickleball gave us an excuse to talk and a community for us to be a part of. More than that, it reignited his competitive edge.

In January 2025, we took part in a 50/50 tournament on the Island. The rules stated that one member of the team must be over 50 years old, and one member must be under. With both of us qualifying by a long shot, him being 68 and me being 20, we were able to play together.

Essentially, we became the LeBron James and Bronny Jr. of pickleball, until we lost our first two games. Fortunately, we were joined by a close friend of mine and his father, who almost

exactly mirrored our situation. They were continued proof that pickleball was more than just a game.

Despite losing our matches, we had a unique opportunity to have a bonding experience with our dads. The game was more than just points scored or missed. It gave us a reason to all get together.

That sense of bonding has become universal, as pickleball courts have suddenly spread like wildfire across communities. What once was considered a geriatric sport has become a connection-fostering pastime. At the apex of the sport, the best players in the world now make over \$1 million annually through tournaments and sponsorships.

But to us, it was never about pickleball, the flashy LED lights or the jaw-dropping facility. They were simply placeholders.

They represented the true tradition—bonding time. Now, when I go home, I look forward to heading to the Island to play with our group of four. I look forward to heading to our traditional breakfast spot after losing to a pair of ladies whose hair matches my silver-colored paddle.

Pickleball and breakfast on those mornings gave us the one thing we couldn’t have 200 miles apart: time together. •

Me and my moms: Always on good terms



Charlotte Shields-Rossi

When I was in kindergarten, I came home and very matter-of-factly told my Mom and Mama that two women can't be married. I'm sure I heard that from a classmate, who heard it from their parents.

I saw few families like mine. I have a fickle memory and vaguely remember owning a children's book: *Heather Has Two Mommies*. But that was it.

It was just a book — fictional — it wasn't what I saw in real life. In elementary school we would make crafts for Mother's day, I was the only one working double-time. But when Father's day rolled around I sat there twiddling my thumbs feeling out of place. As I got older, I realized that having two moms comes with questions. And doubts.

"Which one is your real mom?"

I hate that question. They both are.

I get my sense of humor and nail-biting habit from my Mama. My know-it-all streak and love for learning comes from my Mom. I got their work ethic, but their love for running must have skipped a generation.

They are undoubtedly both my real moms, I never doubted my relationship to them. But still I wanted a "normal" family, one with a mom and a dad, just like my friends had.

If I did, I could skip out on awkward questions, I thought life would be easier.

Maybe life would be easier, but would it be better? My mothers have always been supportive of whatever endeavor I pursued: Braving the frigid temperatures while I did horseback riding or, spending hours at swim meets to only watch me swim for a few minutes. They were always there cheering me on.

I bought a face-painting kit for summer. I was looking for a new hobby which could turn into a lucrative side hustle. I began using my moms as a canvas and Pinterest as my muse. I painted a bunny on my Mom, a lady bug on my Mama.

Stepping back to admire my masterpieces I realized ... I wasn't very good. When my parents looked in the mirror I'm sure they thought the same thing, but they never said it.

That support didn't stop when I moved 200 miles away to go to college. We call and text every day. When I occasionally go home on weekends, they are always standing in the driveway excitedly waving their arms. Of course, I roll my eyes but secretly I love it.

Distance has only made our relationship stronger, being 200 miles

away I feel closer to them than when we lived in the same house.

Around a year ago, I began to worry that my parents will never know how much I love them. Like most teenagers in high school I didn't treat them that well, I still carry a lot of guilt about that. I can still be mean and ungrateful and like every family we sometimes fight. Sometimes even publicly at Costco. To quell my worries they created a family motto: "Always on good terms" — even in anger we still love each other.

For my 20th birthday they presented me with an infinity necklace, a symbol of "always on good terms." I didn't take it off for months, I don't wear it much anymore out of the fear of losing it, a bad luck sign according to my anxious brain. I still keep it on my dresser, whenever I need to be reminded of how lucky I am. That luck doesn't come from having two moms, it comes from having great parents.

I think family in the simplest terms is just someone that loves you, someone you can always be on good terms with. I think if you have just one person that fits that definition you are pretty lucky, I'm double lucky. •

Finding my voice again



Grayce Sullivan

I was six years old when I first sang for an audience.

I had a solo in the Christmas concert at my church. As a young girl, I was equally excited and petrified to sing Christmas songs for my parents, friends and the entire congregation. Once the concert was over, I wanted nothing more than to do it all over again.

That experience is how my musical journey began.

As I grew, I continued to sing in church, cherishing every moment on stage and the joy it brought.

But soon enough, the landscape of my musical life began to change. Everything was sunshine and rainbows until I became a teenager.

I shifted from being home schooled to attending a performing arts high school. People often imagine that going to a performing arts school is like living in a real-life musical where students burst into song and everyone magically gets along. In reality, it was a challenging and complicated environment.

This transition turned music from a source of joy into a catalyst for anxiety and competition. It opened many doors, but it also took a toll on my mental health. I was met with bullying and constant comparison to others. My faith was challenged, too.

Singing worship music at church had once been a low-pressure exercise. But now, singing in church made me

feel superficial.

The genuine excitement I had as a child had fizzled out. I realized that I no longer meant what I was singing when I'd sing about "trusting God." Worship no longer brought me joy.

Toxicity in the arts can exist anywhere—even in church. I noticed the rude comments girls would make, such as: "You only got that solo because of favoritism," or "You don't have what it takes to lead that song." These remarks crushed my spirit, and without my trust in God, I could barely stay above water.

During my sophomore year of high school, my anxiety was at an all-time high. I would wake up at five, go to school, scrape through the day and then come to worship rehearsal running on empty. Then, amid all of that, the pandemic began. Even though it was a dark and dismal time for everyone, it forced me to face what I had been avoiding for so long.

I told my parents that singing worship songs on Sundays no longer made me happy. They met me with understanding and compassion. As musicians themselves, they related to my experience and validated it. They reminded me that I should only continue if it filled my cup.

This conversation helped me realize that worship and singing weren't things I had to do—they were things I could choose to do. Once the pandemic subsided, I returned to singing in

church, but only when it felt authentic.

I still have a complicated relationship with worship and the arts, but my love for them is stronger than the struggles. I don't think I'll ever stop singing or creating music.

As teenagers, we all wrestle with identity and belonging. For me, this meant confronting what I truly wanted versus what others expected of me. I had to decide whether I was singing for myself or for others.

Looking back, I think often about that six-year-old girl standing on the church stage, nervous but full of genuine joy. She wasn't performing to impress anyone. She wasn't thinking about competition, favoritism or whether she was "good enough." She simply loved to sing.

For a long time, I lost sight of her. But choosing authenticity and choosing to sing only when it feels honest has allowed me to reconnect with the part of myself that first fell in love with music.

There is a universal pressure to "perform," whether at school, at work, or even within our closest communities. But I've learned that real fulfillment comes from the moments when we allow ourselves to show up truthfully.

When I sing now, I do it because it brings me the same joy it did when I was a young girl singing Christmas songs. This change is what helped me regain my love for music. ●

Vagina. There I said it. Now why won't you?



Katherine Williams

I always knew my parents' jobs were a little unique, a little different than everyone else's.

It wasn't until I went over to a friend's house for dinner that I really saw it. My friend and their family talked about everyday things: school, the economy, the new iPhone 6 all the random, inconsequential stuff that families talk about at the end of a long day.

My family wasn't much different except throw in a leaky bladder, a prolapsed uterus and a handful of complaints about incompetent residents.

That is my family's dinner table talk.

I always envied the kids whose parents had the cool recognizable jobs, the nurses, the firefighters, even the kids whose parents worked at McDonald's, because at least kids my age knew what they did.

Imagine being in middle school and having to explain to your whole class what an OB-GYN is.

Let me tell you, it sucked.

And once I hit high school, the questions and odd looks never stopped. People asking what my parents do, trying to explain what obstetricians and gynecologists are, then giving up when they don't get it and just generalizing it by saying they deliver babies and do surgeries for women's reproductive and urinary systems.

It wasn't until my sophomore year of college that things changed; I was getting a ride with a friend from high school back to our hometown for a holiday break. We were catching up, talking about our plans for the break and how we were dreading the schoolwork waiting for us back in Pittsburgh.

Then she told me about pain she was having during sex and how she

was worried about it for a while. As she was describing her symptoms all I could think was, "Why haven't you seen a gyno for this?"

So, I asked.

She was afraid to go, she had never been, knew she was supposed to, but never felt comfortable going, let alone talking with a doctor about it. So, I called my mom. It was instinctual. Have a problem, consult a professional.

And so it began, I was the middleman in this telehealth operation, when my friends had problems, they called my mom.

A study in November 2024 revealed that 3 of 4 women delayed a visit to the gynecologist, and of those who delayed a visit, 54% said it was due to fear or discomfort.

Thinking about switching your birth control?

Call Kate's mom.

Worried about a weird discharge color?

Call Kate's mom.

Want to know the actual side effects of taking the morning-after pill?

Call Kate's mom.

It became a part of my identity, I didn't know how to help them, I mean I'm a journalism student but I knew someone who did, someone they could trust, or at least they trusted me enough to think they could trust my mom.

And it took a long time for it to dawn on me. Why my friends never wanted to go or had never been to a gynecologist. Why so many of them believed the lies and miscon-

ceptions on the internet and social media about women's reproductive health. Why so many of them barely even knew the correct terms for parts of their own bodies.

Our society made it so. All they ever taught us in school was to put a condom on a banana and to never have sex; we didn't need to know anything else. How could you expect anyone to want to talk about their reproductive health, especially someone who doesn't even have a banana.

So normally this would be the moment where I lecture you, the

reader, about what you should and shouldn't do and about how messed up society is and blah blah blah nobody wants to hear all that.

Because I'm no saint myself, I've felt awkward moments surrounding my own body, my own reproductive health.

But no matter what happens, this issue isn't going to fix itself.

Women will continue to suffer, and young girls will continue to be afraid and uneducated.

And just because you're afraid to have a speculum shoved up your vagina for a routine screening doesn't mean you won't get cancer or some other serious medical condition that could put you and your reproductive health at risk.

So just say it. Talk about it. Vagina. There I said it. Will you? •

HISTORY HAPPENED HERE

UNCOVER THE HISTORY BEHIND
THE LIVELY CULTURAL DISTRICTS,
STRONG MEDICAL PRESENCE
AND HEARTY SPORTS PRIDE THAT
FORMED PITTSBURGH INTO WHAT
IT IS TODAY.





Troy Hill chapel is home to priceless relics

By Ella Fahey

PHOTOS BY ELLA FAHEY

"If this chapel was in Europe, people would be lined up around the block to get in," said Kate Lukaszewicz.

But it is not in Europe — the St. Anthony Chapel is nestled unsuspectingly in Troy Hill and houses the third largest relic collection in the world.

Lukaszewicz has dedicated a large part of her life to the chapel, through personal devotion, volunteer work and by authoring an article for Pennsylvania History on the chapel and its founder.

This collection of more than 5,000 relics includes fragmented bone, cloth and even several intact skulls connected to saints from all eras — from 20th century saints to relics linked to the life of Christ.

It belonged to the Rev. Suitbert G. Mollinger — the pastor at Troy Hill who had spent decades collecting relics. He funded the construction of St. Anthony Chapel personally to house this collection and provide a place for people to view and venerate the artifacts.

Prior to the construction of the chapel, which began in 1880, Mollinger kept the relics in his rectory.

Prior to placement in Troy Hill, he spent years as a traveling priest where he collected relics from different plac-

es. There were families across Europe who entrusted their antiques with him to protect them from being sold or destroyed, which was a common occurrence in the mid-19th century. He also purchased relics to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands.

Mollinger was not only a priest, but also a physician. He arrived in Troy Hill in 1868, where he used the relics as a tool to heal people spiritually while also providing them with medical attention.

The initial dedication of the chapel took place on June 13, 1883 — St. Anthony's feast day. The chapel was built in two stages — the first included the altar, two side altars and the front half of the chapel.

Later, Mollinger also financed the ex-

pansion of the back half of the chapel, including the life-sized Stations of the Cross statues and more pews to accommodate visitors.

This latter-half was dedicated on the same day, just nine years later. On June 13, 1892, the day of the dedication, Mollinger collapsed; He died just two days later.

Across the street there is a small museum which shows Mollinger's personal belongings, as well as canes, wheelchairs and crutches from his former patients.

Since his death, the collection of relics has continued to grow. There are books throughout the chapel to help visitors identify the relics or find the artifacts of saints to whom they have a devotion. •



How a shy millionaire helped Pittsburgh bloom

By Penelope Lee



PHOTO BY KAITLYN HUGHES

One of Pittsburgh's most peaceful spaces, the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Garden, was born out of coal, soot and smoking furnaces. In an age of blackened skies, back when Pittsburgh was known as the "Smoky City," one man saw it as something brighter.

Henry W. Phipps Jr., known for his quiet demeanor, helped shape the public as much as his business partner, Andrew Carnegie, but in a very

different way.

Most know Henry by his last name, due to the enjoyment of one of his most well-known gifts, Phipps Conservatory, a glittering glass structure located in the heart of Schenley Park.

According to Philanthropy Roundtable, Phipps dropped out of school at age 14, borrowed 25 cents from his brother and placed an ad in the paper with the title, "A willing boy wishes work."

Dilworth and Biddle, a company that made iron and railway spikes, responded, and he became an errand boy. While he worked, he spent his nights by candlelight learning bookkeeping.

This determination and attention to detail helped him rise quickly in business. When success came, he used it to help others. Phipps believed that the city needed more than factories; it needed places of beauty and rest.

"I wish to erect something that will prove a source of instruction as well as pleasure to the people," Phipps wrote when he donated the conservatory.

His goal was to create a space where working families could experience nature, learn and find peace in the city.

For the last 125 years, Pittsburgh's public has been able to stop and smell the flowers with the conservatory growing into a 14-room building that houses thousands of plants.

Joe Reed, the senior director of communications at the conservatory, believes the botanical gardens continue to uphold Phipps' gift.

"He would see that everything we do today remains rooted in his pledge," Reed said.

What began as one man's gift has become one of Pittsburgh's most beloved landmarks, continuing his mission of public beauty and education.

According to *The New York Times*, Phipps also targeted healthcare and working-class issues, funding research and treatments for tuberculosis, while also donating \$1 million to homes for the poor in New York City.

The catch is, Phipps never wanted the public to know the extent of his philanthropic efforts and often declined interviews.

Even today, the legacy of Phipps blooms in every visitor to his conservatory, a lasting reminder that one man's quiet generosity can help a city continue to grow. •



COURTESY OF PHIPPS CONSERVATORY

Pittsburgh was the backdrop for an important move in Czechoslovakian history

By Riley Hunter

Representatives of Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and Czech Silesia signed an agreement on May 31, 1918, to form a new democratic state of Czechoslovakia. This deal, later known as “The Pittsburgh Agreement,” was signed in Downtown Pittsburgh at the Loyal Order of Moose Hall.

At the turn of the 20th century, some half a million Slovak immigrants migrated to the United States, with a wide majority of these individuals settling in Western Pennsylvania to work in the steel industry, according to WESA.

Later, as World War I was coming to a close, the allied nations declared their intention to carve out three new states from the Habsburg Empire. The Slovak and Czech people banded together to form the Czecho-Slovak National Council. This effort encouraged the international stage to preserve their cultures from “Germanization” or “Hungarianization” and combine into one sovereign nation.

Ian Anderson is a graduate of Washington and Jefferson College, where he majored in history. He dedicates his time to learning more about the history of the Western Pennsylva-

nian region.

“I would say the overall impact of the Pittsburgh Agreement is about equal to the Czech-Slovak leaders’ decision to join the allies and Entente late in the war,” Anderson says.

Anderson explains that the Red Scare that followed the 1917 October Revolution had very real implications, but the Western Allies were overloaded from their fight with the Germans and didn’t want to get involved in a war with the Russian leader Vladimir Lenin.

Enter Tomas Masaryk, the future first president of Czechoslovakia, who was preparing troops to bolster parts of the front that Imperial Russia had abandoned. This action led to Masaryk and his troops helping with the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War and securing American-made arms and equipment.

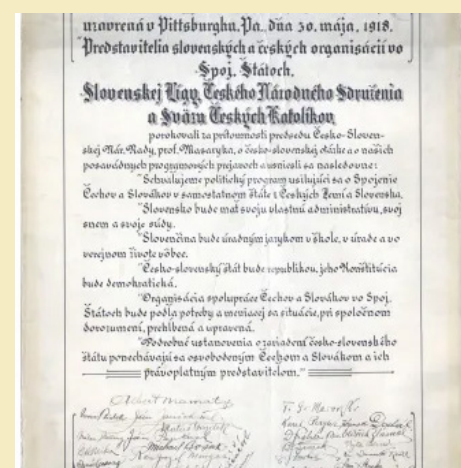
“With being the biggest force involved in direct fighting they gained a lot of trust and clout with the Western Allies, hence why everybody pretty quickly backed their efforts to establish their own state as originally laid out in Pittsburgh,” Anderson says.

According to WESA, the Slovak heritage and culture are extremely

present in Pittsburgh. From Haluski to the Honorary Slovak Consulate to the wide number of social clubs and events about Slovakian culture, Pittsburgh is dedicated to celebrating the Slovak people. In fact, according to census data, Western Pennsylvania is home to more Slovak-Americans than any other area in the nation.

Because of the large population of Slovak immigrants, Pittsburgh became the perfect stage for this historic meeting in 1918.

“Essentially, the Pittsburgh Agreement was the sales pitch to the Western Allies that they secured via acting to protect Entente interests in the latter stages of World War I and through the Russian Civil War,” Anderson says. •



Armored car robbery was nation's first

By Tristen Chang



Pittsburgh's South Hills woke to chaos when a Brinks armored truck carrying more than \$100,000 in payroll rolled toward the Coverdale Mine on March 11, 1927.

Paul Jaworski and the Flathead Gang lay in wait. Two stacks of newspapers lined the road, hiding dynamite wired to a detonator. As the truck passed, Jaworski triggered the blast. The vehicle exploded, killing one guard and injuring two others. Smoke and coal dust filled the valley as the gang pried open the steel doors, grabbed the cash and vanished.

"It was the first armored car robbery anywhere. Its success would lead to future attempts to rob armored cars all over the country," said Tom White, Duquesne University archivist and cu-

curator of special collections.

Pittsburghers were stunned that such violence could erupt on their quiet streets.

But, the escape unraveled quickly.

The stolen car broke down on a back road, forcing the gang to flee on foot. Police scoured bridges, rail yards and hillsides, but the men's knowledge of Pittsburgh's terrain kept them just out of reach.

Newspapers called it the most violent robbery in the nation's history, and readers followed every twist with fear and fascination.

Jaworski was captured in Cleveland the next day, landing himself in the Allegheny County Jail. Calm under questioning, he refused to name his accomplices.

"I never squeal," he told reporters.

His defiance fascinated the public. Pittsburgh had never seen a criminal so bold.

On Aug. 18, 1927, before dawn, Jaworski's brother and two others stormed the Allegheny County Jail. Gunfire erupted as they freed Jaworski, killing one guard and wounding several others.

For weeks, the gang hid among Pittsburgh's factories and alleyways.

The jailbreak shocked residents and humiliated local authorities.

Less than a month later, police cornered Jaworski near Cleveland. Surrounded and exhausted, he surrendered quietly.

Two years later, on Aug. 23, 1929, he faced the electric chair at Western Penitentiary.

Witnesses said he smiled faintly and whispered, "I've had my share. Let it end."

White said many people "don't know the full extent and history of Paul Jaworski and the Flathead Gang. They were involved in numerous other crimes, and Jaworski probably killed around 25 people."

The crater in the South Hills was eventually filled, but locals still point out the spot.

White explained that this heist was "part of a larger crime wave in the 1920s and 1930s," fueled by Prohibition and organized crime.

"Some of these outlaw gangs became romanticized to some degree," he said.

Pittsburgh's memory of that blast still echoes—a reminder of how ambition and desperation once collided on its streets. •



FORGETFUL HERO

By Josh Imhof

Maz's Yankee-killing homer

No outs.

0-0 count.

Bottom of the 9th.

Game seven of the 1960 World Series.

New York Yankees pitcher Ralph Terry warmed up on the mound, but there was no Pittsburgh Pirates batter in the on-deck circle preparing to face him.

"I was just sitting on the bench and thinking that the Pirates have to find a way to beat the Yankees. I forgot I should have been on-deck," Pirates second baseman Bill Mazeroski told MLB.com in 2022.

Mazeroski grabbed his helmet and walked up to home plate with the game tied in a series that many thought would be over in four games. It was incredible that Pittsburgh had made it this far.

"It was like a David-and-Goliath match up," said Anne Madarasz, chief historian and director of the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum. "Nobody expected the Pirates."

Still, Pittsburgh managed to battle to game seven, and Mazeroski had a chance to end it.

As an entire city held its breath, Terry wound up and threw his first pitch.

Ball high. 1-0 count.

Yankees catcher Johnny Blanchard walked to the mound to talk to his pitcher.

Maybe he was worried because the 1960 Pirates were no stranger to late-game wins.

In June, they put up six 9th-inning runs against the Cincinnati Reds to come back from a 5-0 deficit. Pittsburgh catcher Hal Smith, who hit a home run earlier in game seven, said he knew then that the

Pirates were destined for playoff baseball.

"Where do we get our World Series tickets?" he asked his team after the game.

As Blanchard returned to his position behind home-plate, Mazeroski got set in the batter's box.

Terry delivered.

"I tried to pitch him low and inside," Terry later told his manager Casey Stengel.

The pitch went right down the middle, and Mazeroski sent it flying toward the left-field wall. He put his head down and sprinted past first base when he heard the crowd erupt.

He hit a home run.

"It really defined a moment in time for Pittsburgh," Madarasz said. "Pittsburgh had come out of the war kind of dirty and tired, but the war years were

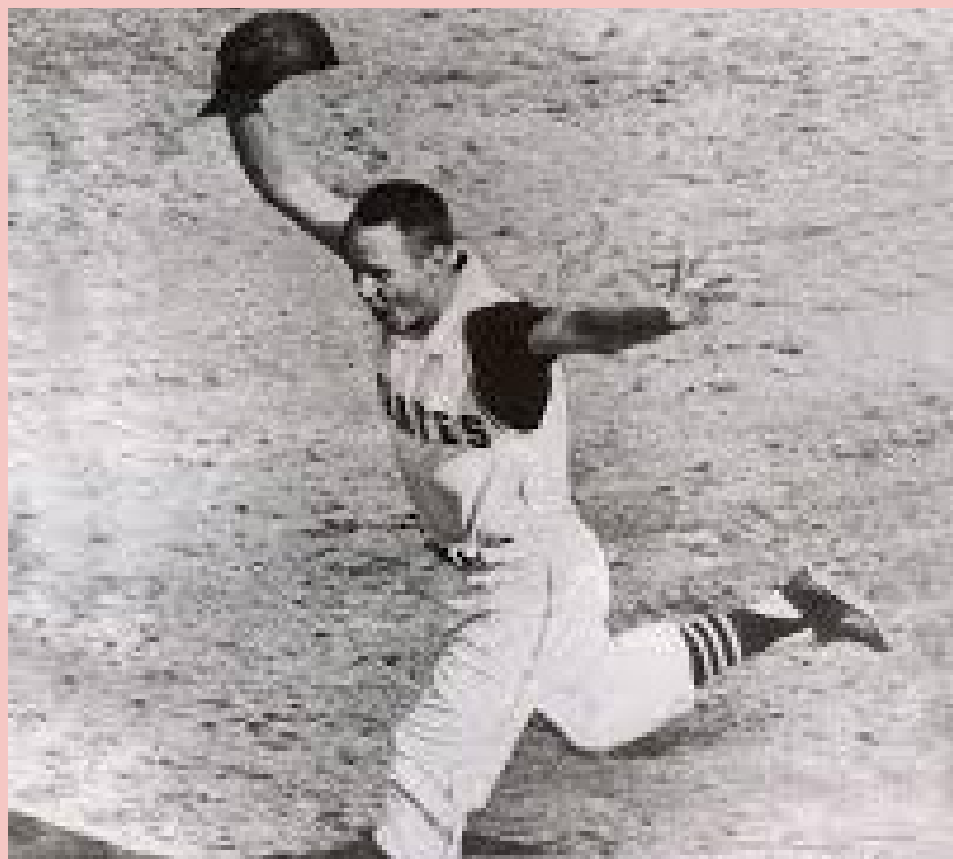
good to people ... Pittsburgh was kind of booming ... I think this got wrapped up with that."

Mazeroski ran so fast that by the time the TV broadcast cut back to him from the ball, he was already halfway between second and third base. As he rounded third, fans poured onto the field.

The Pirates had won the World Series.

Over the next 20 years, they went on to win two more championships, while their black and gold counterparts, the Steelers, went on to win four Super Bowls in that same timespan.

Pittsburgh became a city of champions, and it all started when the Pirates won a series they weren't supposed to because of a hitter who didn't know he was up to bat. ●



Freedom House Ambulance

Pittsburgh's first first responders

By Charlotte Shields-Rossi

In 1966, former Pittsburgh Mayor and Pennsylvania Gov. David Lawrence suffered a massive heart attack at a Pittsburgh campaign rally.

Police officers loaded him into a cramped hearse ambulance and rushed him to the hospital.

With no brain activity, he was taken off life support 17 days later.

That was the protocol in Pittsburgh during that time. Those suffering medical emergencies would be transported by police, who lacked basic medical training.

For Black residents of the Hill District, the odds were worse. Police had slow response times and often refused to transport residents due to racial prejudice.

The issues residents faced bred innovation, and in 1967, Freedom House Ambulance Service made its debut.

It started when Freedom House Enterprises, an organization created to give Hill District residents job opportunities, worked alongside Maurice Falk Medical Fund and Presbyterian

Hospital.

They hired Peter Safar, who treated Lawrence after the heart attack. He was a strong believer he could have survived with proper medical care during transport.

Safar, the father of CPR, worked with Nancy Caroline. The doctors trained Black Hill District residents, teaching them life-saving techniques.

According to the Senator John Heinz History Center, the five ambulances began operating in 1968, answering 6,000 calls that year. With proper medical equipment and training they saved more than 200 lives.

Pittsburghers took notice of the program. In April of 1969, the *Pittsburgh Press* published an article headlined “‘Super’ Ambulances Make Debut Here,” which called the ambulances “mobile intensive care units.”

“[They] are designed to provide emergency room care rather than merely rapid transportation to the hospital.”

According to the 1966 *Accidental Death and Disability: The Neglected Disease of Modern Society*, immediate medical attention and efficient transportation were only seen in active combat zones by the Armed Forces.

Expert consultants returning from the Vietnam War claimed those seriously wounded in active combat had a higher chance of survival than those on city streets.

It wasn't just Pittsburgh residents interested in the program. Samuel Black, director of the African American Program at the history center, says that Freedom House Ambulance Service garnered national attention.

Treatments like defibrillation and tracheotomies, only seen in emergency rooms, were being used during transportation. Medical professionals from around the country studied the paramedics in action.

“The type of emergency medical care it was providing was really groundbreaking,” Black says.

Despite success, seven years later the service was disbanded.

In lieu of Freedom House Ambulance Service, Mayor Peter F. Flaherty created a city-wide ambulance service, with an all-white staff.

Caroline was hired as the medical director, on the condition that Freedom House ambulance crew be kept together. This was quickly violated with crews broken up and paramedics fired.

Although Freedom House Ambulance Service is retired, its legacy still lives on as a revolutionary development in emergency medicine. •





ALL THAT JAZZ

The city's musical legend

By Grayce Sullivan

Long before George Benson became a Grammy-winning jazz and pop star, he was a young guitarist growing up in Pittsburgh's Hill District, which once pulsed with a vibrant jazz community.

He began playing guitar at just eight years old and quickly immersed himself in Pittsburgh's jazz scene, according to a biography of Benson. Benson's rise from child prodigy to successful music icon reflects the city's deep and lasting influence on the genre.

"Figures like Erroll Garner, Art Blakey, George Benson, Mary Lou Williams all spent important parts of their careers here in Pittsburgh," says Benjamin Binder, an associate professor of music at the Mary Pappert School of Music at Duquesne University.

Benson frequently performed at clubs in the Hill District like The Crawford Grill and the Hurricane Club, which hosted countless traveling musicians, according to an article about the Hurricane Lounge by Amanda Ryczek.

"The Hill District had jazz clubs like the Crawford Grill and other venues where jazz flourished in the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, especially," Binder said.

Some of Benson's most popular hits include "Give Me the Night," "This Mas-

querade" and "Turn Your Love Around."

"He didn't even think that he could sing but he just kind of gave it a try," Binder says. "Turns out that he could sing lead."

Although Benson found his greatest commercial success in pop, his jazz roots shaped his signature sound. He drew on his jazz background by incorporating jazz harmonies into pop hooks and fused genres to create music that resonated with his audience, according to KNKX, a public radio station in Tacoma, Washington.

"His musical legacy is that he began as a really brilliant jazz guitarist. But his big successes have been in pop music,"

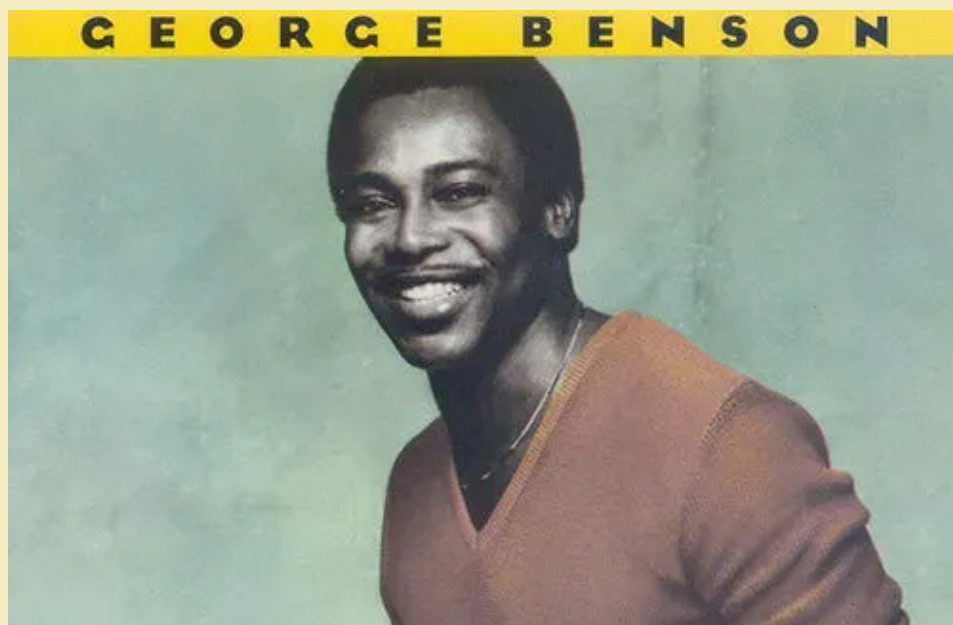
Dr. Binder said.

While Benson's career took him far beyond Pittsburgh, the city's musical culture has fostered innovation across genres.

From jazz legends like Williams and Garner to modern artists like Mac Miller, Pittsburgh's influence continues to be present throughout the music world.

Through musicians like Benson, Pittsburgh helped shape the evolution of jazz and its continuous impact on music history.

The city's jazz legacy remains a vital part of its identity. •



THE FIX WAS IN

The 1980 lottery scandal

By Katherine Williams



"If you've got it, come and get it. If not, better luck next time."

It's Thursday, April 24, 1980, and Pittsburgh's WTAE TV star, Nick Perry has just announced the daily number drawing like he's done every day for the past three years. But unlike every other drawing that's come before, this would be one for the history books.

Why? The numbers drawn: 666.

This daily drawing would soon be known as the biggest PA Lottery fix in history. The scheme became even more notable when Perry's involvement was uncovered.

It all started when Perry approached the art director of WTAE, Joseph Bock, asking him to weigh down all the balls by injecting them with white paint, except the 4's and 6's. Thus limited the possible winning

sequences. Perry also conspired with PA lottery employee Edward Plevel to switch out the original balls with the duplicates, and with stagehand Fred Luman to help with the switch.

But Perry couldn't buy the lottery tickets himself, so he enlisted the help of Peter and Jack Maragos, two brothers from Perry's church who were also partners with Perry in a vending machine company.

After purchasing the tickets, Peter Maragos called WTAE-TV announcers booth—a detail that would later help tie Perry to the crime.

The Maragos brothers bought thousands of tickets at the Dew Drop Inn in Philadelphia. This caught the attention of the owner, who when hearing rumors of a possible fix, called investigators about the brothers and the phone call they made.

The Maragos brothers ended up with over 1,300 winning tickets but when they attempted to claim their prize—\$1.8 million—things quickly turned sour.

Not only had the Maragos purchased an absurd number of tickets, Peter Maragos had friends and family place over \$3,000 in bets with bookies for the drawing, which only furthered suspi-

cions of a fix.

Rumors of a fix grew too large, and a formal investigation was launched with indictments made within six months. Perry and Plevel went to trial, and both were convicted and served two years in prison. The Maragos brothers testified in exchange for probation, and Bock and Luman both pled guilty for lighter sentences.

The fix led to major change. The daily drawings were moved to Harrisburg where it remains to this day. Security measures were increased, the balls today are made of foam and include a microchip, secured in a room with biometric locks and monitored with closed-circuit cameras.

Ewa Swope, press secretary for the PA Lottery, said that in today's age, the drawing machines are repeatedly tested, including a post-broadcast test to ensure proper functionality. To prevent tampering, the machines are monitored by a non-employee witness and are supervised by the PA Lottery security team, drawings staff and independent auditors.

"Everyone should know that what happened in 1980 could never happen again," Swope said. •





REFLECTIONS

LEARN THE INS AND OUTS OF
THE INTERVIEWS, WRITING AND
PHOTOGRAPHY AS THE REPORTERS
LOOK BACK ON THEIR GROWTH
THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER.

Journalism has a personal meaning to it.

It allows you to collect and use every small detailed piece to bring your story to life. You can add your own craft to it to make reporting on a topic you like easy. Magazine journalism has helped me not only create my own style but also helped me to learn about Pittsburgh and myself.

At first, I didn't think that it was going to be this involved. It turned out to be a real hands-on type of class with getting information to build our stories and going out in the field and really designing our stories to fit our voice and how we see things. I essentially learned the

skills of interviewing, reporting and writing. These skills will help me evolve as I follow my career path and my journey to becoming a better person.

This class has not only helped me as a reporter or storyteller but a person as well. Before this class, I was still trying to find ways to break out of my comfort zone when it came to talking to others. Naturally, I am an anti-social person. Magazine journalism forced me even more to step out of that comfort zone in order to get the little details needed for each assignment.

Being from this city, I thought I knew everything about it. The as-

signments I did for class showed me that there is a lot more history to it than the naked eye reveals. For example, the montage assignment truly opened my knowledge about how neighborhoods all over the city have gentrified, evolving for the next generation.

This was my last semester here at Duquesne as I graduated in fall 2025. This class and many more I have taken have given me tools to use as I proceed into the next chapter of my life. The skills I've acquired from this class and the professor will be beneficial to me, and I am grateful that I have the opportunity to take this class.



JAMAL

BIGSTAFF

TRISTEN

CHANG



Pittsburgh has always felt like just another city to me—horns blaring, sirens bouncing off skyscrapers, pigeons crowding subway exits and people weaving through the streets with purpose.

Coming from Melbourne, Florida, a beach town that sits somewhere between “small town” and “city,” my expectations of urban life were shaped by a place where familiarity was woven into everyday routines. My high school graduating class had about 600 students, but no matter where I went, the grocery store or a local restaurant, I could count on running into a childhood friend or an old coach. That sense of built-in community made the world feel comfortably small.

When I moved to Pittsburgh in 2023, right between my junior and senior year of undergrad, I felt abruptly uprooted. It seemed like everyone here had deep

roots: with lifelong friends, family connections spanning generations, favorite local restaurants they’d grown up with and a shared sense of belonging. Meanwhile, I was trying to figure out bus routes and remember which bridge led where. The city felt intimidating, unfamiliar and much bigger than my frame of reference.

One of my first assignments for this class challenged me to pick a neighborhood and simply walk around. I decided that the best way to understand a city was to start at its tallest buildings—right in the heart of Downtown.

To my surprise, I wandered into a soul food festival. Music pulsed through the streets, people were dancing, laughing, sharing food and I instantly felt a spark of belonging. I left that day excited, even eager, to see what else the city had to offer.

Another assignment sent me to the North Shore on a Steelers game day.

I had never been to an NFL game before, let alone a Steelers one. Packed into the T with fans decked out in black and gold, I stepped out into an atmosphere buzzing with energy. People posed for photos without hesitation, welcomed me into their tailgates and invited me into conversations as if I had always been part of the city’s rhythm.

These experiences forced me out of my comfort zone and into the loudest, most vibrant parts of Pittsburgh. And in doing so, I realized something important: behind the noise, the crowds, and the constant motion is a community full of welcoming people. The very things that once made Pittsburgh feel overwhelming are now the things that make it feel like home.

I decided on the second day of my freshman year of college that I wanted to study journalism. I knew that I liked writing, and that was about it. I didn't actually start taking journalism classes until I transferred to Duquesne my sophomore year, when I found out that news writing is very different from the academic writing I was used to.

I spent the majority of my academic career basking in the glory of a high GPA with minimal effort put into it. I never really had to apply myself to my studies to succeed.

That ended when I walked into Newsroom I. I felt like I had to relearn how to write. I remember my very first story not what it was about, but I do remember sitting down to write it.

I opened my laptop and stared at the screen.

How on earth do you write a news story?

This was not a reflection of my work ethic as a student, mind you. I was attentive in class, I took notes, I was sup-

posed to know what to do. It was supposed to be easy!

I agonized over my notes, spent grueling hours scanning my style guide and eventually I sort of figured it out. But I was so focused on the structure and mechanics of the writing that the message of the writing became lost in the formula that I was following.

In all honesty, I've disliked my journalism classes for most of my time in school. I didn't want to drop the major, so I added a second one in digital media arts and have focused more on career options in that realm.

My dislike did not come from my professors or some issue with the structure of the classes, but because it didn't feel like the work that I produced was good enough to justify the time spent planning, interviewing, writing and re-writing.

Magazine journalism began similarly for me. I relied on my formula and wrote a couple of decent stories.

The montage changed things.

I did all of my reporting in one day and went into it with no plan and a *lot* of nerves.

I focused on the heart of the story, and I felt my voice coming out through my writing, breaking the mold that I'd confined myself to for the past several semesters.

In the stories that I've written since then, I've genuinely had so much fun. I've wanted my friends and family to read them, and I'm excited to see them in print.

I still don't think I'm cut out for a career in journalism, but I think that the mechanics, writing experience and confidence that I have developed over my undergraduate years have blossomed this semester.

I hope that I will continue to write to some extent, whether it be freelance work or corporate technical writing. Regardless of where my career might lead me, I am so happy to end my time as a journalism student on a triumphant note.



ELLA

FAHEY

RILEY

HUNTER



“I’m taking magazine journalism next semester, I’m really nervous.”

I probably said this sentence a hundred times leading up to me embarking on my magazine journalism adventure.

The truth is, I didn’t believe I was a good enough writer to have my writing seen by anyone, let alone to have it published in a magazine.

I loved writing more than almost anything else, but I greatly struggled with how my voice sounded and what questions to ask in an interview.

Quite frankly, I didn’t think I was good enough.

And judging by my first story, I might have been right.

The first assignment I submitted to Dr. Dillon was filled with errors and lacked a solid vision of what I

was trying to say in my writing.

The critiques I received hurt me deeply, but they also were very much needed.

Throughout the semester, I have grown, not only as a writer, but as a person.

Now, I am so much more sure of myself and my skills. I have learned how to interview someone better. I have learned to take photographs that capture the essence of my subject. And most importantly, I have learned to write more clearly and concisely to share my message with the audience.

I am proud of my work I did this semester, with a few of my stories, such as my column, being some of my favorite works I have ever written.

As I enter my last semester and

head toward my spring 2026 graduation date, I know I will carry the skills I’ve learned in magazine journalism with me for years to come. The truth is, I don’t want to be a journalist, I want to work in communications on political campaigns. Regardless, my experience in creating this magazine is one of the most important formative experiences I have ever had.

If you have ever had the pleasure of having a class with Dr. Dillon as I have, you will know that he believes in each one of his students. And in his belief, he pushes each student past their comfort zone to produce better work than they ever have before.

I am eternally grateful that Dr. Dillon pushed me.

It took me some extra time to start college, and when I finally did I came to Duquesne with three things: envy for my peers who had started earlier; anxiety about whether or not I would be able to “catch up” to them and disappointment in myself that I decided to take a gap semester.

Nowhere during that time did I consider what I actually wanted to do while I was here. I had a major of course, but I was doing it because it was what I thought I was supposed to do.

Fast forward four years, and I feel like I am exactly where I am supposed to be.

I came into magazine journalism class with a level of hope and optimism I haven’t had since I was a kid. I was en-

tering my second semester as a journalism major and was thrilled at the chance to take one of the cornerstone classes I had heard so much about.

It did not disappoint.

Writing for the magazine was a breath of fresh air from the work I had done at The Duke, not because I don’t like what I do there, but because of the creative freedom allotted to the format.

I crafted narratives based on conversations with historians, told stories of Pittsburgh’s past and learned about those crafting its present.

I was able to retell one of the most iconic moments in Pittsburgh sports history, and then in the same month visit one of its most storied thoroughfares.

The class also gave me the opportunity to collaborate with peers. As a student who graduated high school during COVID-19, this was much needed.

Being around like minded people who may have had different goals in life but had similar ones in the moment pushed me to be a better collaborator, editor and journalist.

It was like I woke up a part of me that had been dormant for far too long.

Best of all, it felt like I had accomplished something that mattered.

Journalism has given me the feeling that I am contributing something to the world that is special to people. Something that is valuable. Something that they can learn from.

I know that I have.



JOSH

IMHOF

PENELOPE**LEE**

I never necessarily wanted to be a journalist. I fell into the major during my freshman year of college because my friend's mother, our local news anchor, let me watch her at work.

After losing the career I thought I would have in ballet, I was scrambling to find something that spoke to me. When I visited her newsroom, I thought, "Well, this seems all right," not realizing that "all right" wasn't the feeling I wanted for my career.

I spent two years in college attending journalism courses. I switched often between the types of jobs I thought I might want, from political to investigative to general news reporting. Even with all these changes, I still hadn't found a type of journalism that spoke to me.

Every time I sat in class, I compared my feelings about the major to those of my peers. They were excited to go out and find a story, whereas I simply wasn't. This feeling intensified when I took investigative reporting. The assignment was far outside my comfort zone: interviewing people convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to life without parole.

This course challenged me. While exploring this new field of journalism interested me, it didn't speak to me. While some of the people in my class felt intuitive in their roles, I felt intrusive.

Even though I was proud of this class's end result, it made me want to expand my studies into a field I felt more passion toward. I decided to

add a public relations and advertising major, along with a pre-law certificate. Once I made that change, I began to appreciate journalism more.

That realization came during our magazine journalism class with Dr. D. I was able to write about topics that genuinely interested me and finally put my heart into a journalism course, not just for a grade, but for myself. I interviewed people in Pittsburgh I never would have met otherwise. I also began relating to my peers' excitement instead of never understanding it.

The course allowed me to strengthen my interpersonal skills and gave me a new perspective on my degree. Even if I don't become a journalist, I know this major has taught me lessons I will carry into my future.

Magazine journalism is a truly special course that combines the lessons from almost all of your previous coursework at Duquesne to create the best possible product. Pivotal in this process is Dr. Dillon, whose fair and helpful critiques push the writers in the class to create work that otherwise might not have been possible.

More than just the workload, the most impactful part of the course for me was the camaraderie between me and my classmates. The course is hinged upon discussion-style lectures that invite full class participation. This allows for everyone in the class to bounce ideas off of each other and receive helpful criticisms and assessment.

Moreover, at the end of the course we participated in a “table read,”

which allowed for us to read everyone’s articles and offer up our analysis in real time. This was incredibly beneficial to my writing process, both receiving affirmation and insightful notes, which prompted me to turn in a piece that I was fully confident in and truly proud of.

A challenging part of this course is its dependency on live interactions with strangers. As students go out into the field to report on a story, they are required to get typically around five sources. This means walking up to five strangers, pleasantly interrupting them, getting their contact information and asking them questions. It also relies on calling or cold emailing historians to ask for their input on your story.

Over the course of the semes-

ter, this became easier with practice and consistency. Through the ever-changing themes of the articles and my vastly different subjects, I was introduced to different people from opposing walks of life, allowing me to create complete stories with first-hand eyewitnesses, emotional testimonies and knowledgeable recounts. Getting over the hurdle of talking to strangers helped me create better work and helped me become a stronger writer.

In this course, the relationships I developed with my classmates fueled my confidence to step out of my comfort zone. That breakthrough allowed me to become a much stronger storyteller and interviewer, which are skills that I will carry with me into my post-grad opportunity.



NICK

LICATA

CHARLOTTE SHIELDS-ROSSI



I'm not a Pittsburgh native. When I came here for school, I admittedly felt underwhelmed. It is not that I didn't recognize the obvious charms of the city, it is that everyone that had lived in Pittsburgh told me how amazing the city was — it felt like a let down. For the first two years of college I stayed in my Duquesne bubble — rarely leaving campus, when I did I would frequent the same places.

Writing for *Off the Bluff* I was forced to be... off the Bluff. Talking to people and going to new places gave me a new found appreciation for the city. Everyone that I talked with was different but

they all shared one thing — the pride they had in their city. The people of Pittsburgh are creative, hardworking and gritty — what's not to love?

Many classes seem to blend together — you are there for a grade — magazine journalism was not one of those classes. I showed up everyday, not because of Dr. Dillon's strict attendance policy but because I wanted to. I tried my hardest on all my assignments, not because I wanted a good grade but because I simply wanted to write a good story.

Magazine journalism didn't feel like a class. Getting real-world experience off campus, table reads in the

media conference room and peer editing all made it feel like an internship.

Off the Bluff was no doubt time consuming and hard work — spending hours doing interviews in the Strip District on a Saturday, driving an hour round trip to write about pierogies, fine tuning my column with Dr. Dillon. It was a labor of love, I truly enjoyed writing and reporting every single story, spending hours writing and rewriting was worth it because I produced something I was truly proud of.

I am eternally grateful for the experience I gained writing for *Off the Bluff*.

Despite being a communications major, I was surprised by how nerve-wracking the reporting in this class turned out to be.

I've always considered myself a naturally talkative person, but I underestimated the challenge of approaching strangers and starting conversations as a reporter. Some people are incredibly kind and willing to talk, while others won't even give you the time of day. Most of the time, I heard variations of the same responses: "I don't have time," or "I don't talk to journalists." It was frustrating, but ultimately just another hurdle I had to learn to navigate.

It took several attempts for me to get over the uncomfortable feeling that I was "inconveniencing" people

by asking questions. But with each interview, I found myself becoming a little bolder. Not only did I grow more confident in who I approached, but I also became more intentional in how I carried each conversation. This class pushed me outside my comfort zone and helped me reach a point where I feel comfortable talking to anyone, whether it's a well-known reporter or a fellow student rushing to class.

Throughout college, most of my classes haven't allowed me to write in my own voice. This course finally gave me space to tap into a more genuine, personal style of storytelling. The shift from formal, sort of robotic academic writing to something more narrative-driven was not easy. It took

time to understand the personalized looseness of the style. But once I did, it made writing feel more natural and expressive. I can honestly say it strengthened my confidence as both a communicator and a storyteller.

It was exciting to write about Pittsburgh for this class. I grew up about forty-five minutes away, but I came here all the time throughout my childhood. Through my reporting, I got a deeper understanding of the city by exploring both the famous spots and hidden gems. The Steel City is truly unique, and I have learned a great deal about it this semester. Reporting on a city I've known my whole life showed me that boldness and adaptability are essential tools for any communicator.



GRAYCE

SULLIVAN

KATHERINE

WILLIAMS



I can be a quiet person, a reserved and calm presence. I've been told I'm levelheaded. I'm nonchalant. I'm hard to read.

Coming into this class, I wasn't very confident in my work as a journalist. I've always felt I was a good writer, but not a great writer. But what makes a great writer? It's the question I seem to ask myself almost every time I sit down at my computer or grab a pen and paper.

It wasn't until I let my friends read my column, that's when I knew my answer. I think that's the piece in this magazine I'm the proudest of. And I think that's why I wanted my friends to read it. I wanted to feel seen; I wanted them to understand. It's easy to see

your friends doing lab reports and bio homework and know what they do. They talk about it all the time, explaining chemical compounds and their stats homework, but no matter what I said, it never felt like they understood what I did. Until now.

Dr. Dillon has said I don't know how many times at this point that one of the greatest compliments a writer can receive is for someone to read your work and to hear and recognize your voice in what you wrote. And even though I've never let my friends read much, if anything I've ever written, they heard my voice. And in that moment, I knew what it meant to be a great writer. Because out of everything I've ever written,

this piece, the column, was the easiest to write. I realized that I was so often limiting myself, trying to be impartial, separate from my work, but not with this piece. Because you can't be separate from your writing, a great writer doesn't do that.

A great writer is one that doesn't pull their punches, a writer who writes for the people, a writer who when everyone is interviewing the family and friends of the someone who was murdered, they are off interviewing the person digging the grave. That's the writer I want to be, the writer I need to be. And I don't know if I'm 100% there yet, but I do know that this class helped me tap into that side of myself and for that I'll be forever grateful.