



E-Blast

June 2006

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Greetings!

Welcome to June's edition of Cool Space Locator's E-Blast. We hope you enjoy learning about Pittsburgh's Brookline neighborhood, RIN, artist co-ops, and what others love about Pittsburgh. If there is a topic you would like to see covered in a future E-Blast, let us know at info@coolspacelocator.com.

• **Next Workshop on June 22**

Right Size It: Find the Right Size Space for your Small Business

Are you a start-up or existing business in need of office space and don't know the first thing about the current commercial real estate market? Or are you an existing business with future downsizing or expansion space needs? Need to know whether you should purchase or lease a space? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you should check this out!

Thursday, June 22, 2006, 4:00-5:30 PM

[Click here for more information on the workshop or to register.](#)

• **Renovation Information Network helps Small Businesses with Their Building Improvements**



Pittsburghers gather for the

Tens of thousands of people gather in celebration and support of cities' professional and collegiate sports teams. The participatory events allow fans to ride emotional rollercoasters while demonstrating their home town pride.

While sports can help shape the identity of a city, bring it national attention and add a certain amount of credibility to its status as an important urban center, they also can help people remain connected to a city from which they have moved away. In addition, the draw of excited ticket-holders to areas surrounding sport arenas helps energize cities and spurs economic activity.

Pittsburgh is very fortunate this year when it comes to professional sports; along with hosting to the 2006 Major League Baseball All-Star game in July, it is home of the 2006 Super Bowl Champs.



The Community Design Center of Pittsburgh (CDCP) is now offering Renovation Information Network (RIN) consultations to small businesses in the Pittsburgh region. RIN is a program that matches home- and business- owners with architects, landscape architects and interior designers for renovation consultations. This partnership, intended to encourage quality investments in renovations done by small businesses, extends to small businesses within a 10-mile radius of Pittsburgh, including businesses that participate in the URA's Pittsburgh Mainstreets program.

RIN offers a comprehensive verbal consultation with an architect to discuss existing building conditions and explore options and ideas for improvement. For up to two hours, business owners will tour the building with an architect, who will share ideas on potential structural improvements on both the interior and exterior, as well as discuss issues such as building codes, zoning and façade regulations, ADA requirements and security. While the consultation is verbal and does not include any drawings, the business owner will receive an Action Plan, a handwritten review of each topic discussed in the consultation.

In August of 2005, the Oakland Business Improvement District (OBID) was awarded a \$4,000 grant from the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) to go towards the renovation of a small business in the Oakland Mainstreet district. OBID chose to award the grant to Nate Mitchell, owner of The Natural Choice, a barbershop and hair salon specializing in dreadlocks, braids and any hairstyle that does not utilize chemicals. When Nate first set foot in the storefront at 109 Meyran Avenue, it didn't look much like a barbershop. "It was a completely raw space, a shell," he said. "No plumbing, no sinks, one light - that was it." The amount of traffic Nate has seen come through the modest 1,000 square foot space since opening in 1997 has taken its toll, making many minor repairs necessary. As his business grew, however, he found himself with less time and resources to invest in the renovation he really wanted.

RIN matched Nate with architect Mary Cerrone, AIA, for a two hour design consultation in the store. Five months after Mary's visit, Nate implemented many of her suggestions, adding his own \$5,000 to the \$4,000 from the URA grant in the overall project to date. Nate says he is pleased with the help he got from the URA and RIN to help his business continue to grow. "When people walk into a place where the vibe is good, they'll come back. We

want to make this place a staple in Oakland, and make our customers happy."

RIN consultations are intended to provide businesses with renovation, restoration, and construction planning assistance and an overview of the potential scope of work. The fee for a small business consultation is \$250, payable to the Renovation Information Network. However, if your business is a participating member of the Mainstreet program, the URA will underwrite much of the consultation, so that participating Mainstreet businesses pay only \$75 for the two hour consultation. Georgia Petropoulos, Executive Director of OBID reminds businesses that "design matters. The exterior look will either encourage or discourage a potential consumer from doing business with you."

To find out more about the Renovation Information Network, visit www.cdcp.org or call (412) 391-4333.

- **Local Students "Heart" Pittsburgh**



Two CMU students came to the horrific realization one day that many of their classmates had moved to Pittsburgh, obtained a degree, and yet never once set foot Downtown. According to one of these students, Natalia Rudiak, Public Policy Graduate of '06, Pittsburgh can "seem daunting" to many, even to those who grew up in the area or have been around awhile. She thinks that there are many who aren't willing to try new things in the area, and so they assume there's nothing worth doing and want out.

That is why she and her colleague developed the "I Heart Pittsburgh" website (www.iheartpgh.com) in fall 2005. The site is a "clue in" spot to help people learn about the area. It is a community-involved forum, meaning that site visitors can post comments about anything they like in Pittsburgh, such as favorite restaurants, stores, and so on. Natalia encourages those that visit the site to leave a post about what it is they love about Pittsburgh. The site is organized by categories, such as food and drink, or by neighborhood.

The success of the site is due to the submissions of Pittsburgh's proud, and as Natalia notes, is truly "for the people, by the people."

Cool Space Locator would also like to know what you heart about Pittsburgh, so send your comments to info@coolspacelocator.com so that we can share what you love with others!

• Artist Collectives/Cooperatives



Westbeth circa 1970
Photo by Richard Meier



Pittsburgh Brewhouse
Located in the South Side

In New York City, standing just across the West Side Highway from the Hudson River, is the world's largest artist community, according to its website. This community lives together in a large converted building, built in 1894, once owned by Bell Labs. Roger Stevens, Chairman of the National Council for the Arts, and J.M. Kaplan of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, took ownership of the building in 1967 under their newly formed non-profit, the Westbeth Corporation. Kaplan, who had previously worked to provide artists with living and studio spaces in New York, saw this building as an opportunity to do the same on a much grander scale. The renovation of the building was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Richard Meier, allowing artists to move into its 383 live/work units. The building also accommodates theaters, recording studios, communal studios such as print shops, and meeting areas, among other things. The Westbeth Artist Community (www.westbeth.org) is still in operation today and has housed the likes of world-famous artists such as Gil Evans, Diane Arbus, and Merce Cunningham.

The Westbeth project is an example of the exceptional synergies that arise from such artist housing situations. The artists within collaborate and inspire one another, and their dense proximity alone generates an artistic atmosphere which is unattainable in most environments. Also, it is the collective voice of the many artists living there which have allowed the community to sustain against the odds. There are hundreds of examples of such groups and the benefits of coming together in collective housing situations, both nationally and internationally. In some, artists can work in collectives in a loose and undefined way; others are designated as collectives and have clear guidelines for participation. Some collectives have become registered organizations such as non-profits or limited liability corporations (LLCs).

Creative inspiration and collaborative projects can be easily initiated by the proximity of artists and the ease of access they have to one another in collectives or cooperative housing situations. The benefits of these circumstances sometimes extend beyond the creative, with groups gaining collective purchasing power and ease of political mobilization.

Although not all artist collectives live cooperatively, it would seem as though those most tightly organized do. These groups can share not only ideas, but also the cost of owning or renting space. Artists actively use rentals, condominiums, cooperatives, or owner-operated buildings as live/work space. While it can be daunting to think about owning a property either cooperatively or privately, it can be a tremendously stabilizing force for the artist group when done under the right circumstances.

Important considerations for artists and their live/work space should center mostly on the issue of space, both to work and to show. In addition to living space, the tools of an artist's trade may take up significant space. For many artists, sizable doorways and tall ceilings are critical. Can an artist run a business out of their living space to create income without paying additional rent for commercial space? Questions such as this are important to an artist struggling to make a living.

It is important to keep in mind the breadth of the term "artist cooperative." While some people instantly focus on the cooperative living aspects of this type of agreement, it can also extend into other realms of empowerment through increased numbers. An example of this would be the Creative Eye artists' cooperative for photographers and illustrators in New Jersey which assists artists by focusing on the forces affecting the marketplace and working to help shape industry conditions and distribution rights and channels.

Pittsburgh has its own example of an artist cooperative. The Brew House Association is a group occupying the old Duquesne Brewing Company of Pittsburg building at the corner of Mary and 21st Streets in the South Side neighborhood. The most distinguishable feature of this landmark is the enormous 60 x 60 foot clock which, when installed, was the largest single face clock in the world. The artists living in this huge space maintain a gallery and theater as well as individual studios. The rents are kept very low with the understanding that each person or group will commit time and energy towards the general upkeep and improvement of the old building. Non-resident members of the cooperative also provide service to the building in lieu of dues. For more information on the interesting story behind the building's acquisition, read "The Art of Enlargement" by Sharmila Venkatasubban (Pittsburgh City Paper 2002). The outcome of their efforts has resulted in the preservation of a historic building and the creation of a sustaining artistic niche in Pittsburgh.

• **Featured Neighborhood: Brookline**



Brookline Boulevard



The "Cannon"

Situated just within Pittsburgh's southern border, over Mount Washington and up another hill from Downtown, sits Brookline, a walkable neighborhood of "character, charm, and convenience." Today the tight-knit community claims a lively business district, the second largest residential tax base in the City of Pittsburgh, and one of the city's lowest crime rates. It is clear residents and business owners here take pride in their community and history. For instance, Brookline boasts having the City's oldest existing firehouse, built in 1909.

Like much of the Pittsburgh region, Brookline can track its history to pre-revolutionary times. Despite the turmoil between pre-Revolutionary War settlers and area Natives during Pontiac's Uprising in 1763, settlers continued to pioneer the area to take advantage of prime farmland. After the American Revolution, veterans received plots of land for their military service, so agriculture continued to increase. These war veterans, reminded of their former home in Brookline, Massachusetts, chose the name "Brookline" because both communities shared streams and a hilly landscape. Originally, Brookline lay outside of Pittsburgh's city limits in West Liberty Borough, and the community remained farmland until the turn of the 20th century. In 1908, the City of Pittsburgh annexed the growing West Liberty Borough, including Brookline.

Much of Brookline's growth was due in a big part to transportation improvements in the 20th century. The streets were still dirt-paved until 1901 when the appearance of streetcars fueled both population and business growth. In 1904, the opening of a trolley tunnel further eased transit between downtown Pittsburgh and neighborhoods south of Pittsburgh. Vehicular traffic still had a long and difficult trek to get to the city. Cars needed to be hoisted up or down either side of Mount Washington until the Liberty Tunnels, completed in 1924, drastically reduced travel time. Brookline's growth accelerated to shape the neighborhood we recognize today, especially along Brookline Boulevard from Pioneer to Queensboro Streets. While the mix of stores has changed and the trolley has disappeared, the boulevard still remains the commercial focal point of Brookline.

Today, the main drag of Brookline Boulevard reflects the community's banner vision as a neighborhood of "character, charm, and convenience." Most of the corridor's businesses line

one side of the street, and houses face them from the other side. As patrons exit the businesses, the houses across the street radiate a residential charm. Convenience takes the form of transportation, with quick access downtown via the Liberty Bridge, and nearby bus and T service. Some choose to bike their way around town.



Carnegie Library-
Brookline Branch



Brookline Boulevard sidewalk

The businesses themselves are an eclectic blend of specialty and neighborhood shops that cater both to big-city and small-town tastes. Visitors can find a peaceful Italian-styled meal and caffeinated pick-me-ups at three neighboring vendors: the Moonlite Café owned by Luciano and Sandro "Sonny" DeFelice, the humbly-named No Name Coffee Shop, and a new coffee shop, Nikko's. The East Mediterranean makes a presence on the street with Pitaland, an emporium of fresh foodstuffs from Pita to olives, and the eatery It's Greek to Me. Anytime between dawn and dusk is good for sweet treats from Kribel's Bakery and the Party Cake Bakery, with racks of doughnuts, cookies, pastries, and made-to-order goodies.

Brookline also features some incredibly cool public space. One of the newer additions to Brookline Boulevard is the renovated Brookline branch of the Carnegie Library. The environmentally-friendly new building features a wall of windows letting natural light spill into every level of the building, providing abundant light for bestsellers and dusty classics alike. Their menu of weekly activities is constantly updated and caters to everyone from children to seniors.

Before leaving this unique, tree-lined neighborhood, be sure to check out Triangle Park, which residents call simply "the Cannon," at the intersection of Brookline Boulevard, Queensboro Avenue, and Chelton Avenue. This WWI monument is actually a replica of one that was donated during a scrap-metal drive for World War II. For a bit more green space, visit the ballfields and playground at Brookline Park or the Olympic size swimming pool at Moore Park.

Thanks to Linda Dimitroff and Keith Knecht of the South Pittsburgh Development Corporation for their assistance with this article.

South Pittsburgh Development Corporation

A catalyst for some of the the Brookline area's recent revitalization is the South Pittsburgh Development Corporation (SPDC). This group of dedicated volunteers works with community members to promote and improve the district in meaningful ways "through economic, aesthetic and social development." The SPDC emphasizes business district and greenway projects that will continue to make Brookline a great place to live and do business. A current City of Pittsburgh project is the Brookline Boulevard Development Agenda, which includes plans to bury utilities and fix sidewalks. SPDC is continually encouraging businesses in the area to invest in improving building façades and making structural improvements.

Additional initiatives to improve the community include distributing brooms and shovels to Boulevard businesses to encourage cleanliness, awarding the "Golden Broom Award" to three businesses to date for keeping clean sidewalks and inviting storefronts, enacting an annual litter cleanup on Earth Day, installing "Dogi-Pot" plastic dog waste bag dispensers, planting garden beds, maintaining seasonal banners and producing *Brookline*, a photo history book.

The SPDC was formed in July 2001 as a consolidation of Brookline Neighborhood Planning with the South Pittsburgh Development Corporation. For more information about the organization or the neighborhood, contact Linda Dimitroff, President, at ljdimi1421@verizon.net or Jeremiah Dugan, President Elect for 2006-2008, at pittdugan@aol.com, or visit their website at www.spdconline.org.

• New Face at CSL: Sean



Let me start with a bold admission: I don't think revitalizing cities is too lofty or fruitless. My life has revolved around urban space since the cradle—I grew up in Aliquippa, a community northwest of Pittsburgh in Beaver County, and now I live in Oakland—and I've watched communities both crumble and rebuild. Since high school, I've wanted to make an impact on revitalizing city spaces.

I recently completed my BA in urban studies and English writing at the University of Pittsburgh, and I am ready to enter professional life with a bang. I've volunteered and interned with urban- and community-focused nonprofits, where I learned how communications play a role in community development. Now I'm interested in the nuts and bolts of how organizations can actively bring people back to the city.

As a new intern at Cool Space Locator, I hope to deliver an enthusiasm for the bricks and mortar around us every day in the Pittsburgh region. I'm excited to help make real estate a real force in reenergizing urban communities.

About Us

Cool Space Locator, a project of the Tides Center (PA), is a non-profit real estate organization that connects neighborhoods, properties, and businesses in the revitalization of urban communities. We work in the community development realm to promote revitalization of urban areas and walkable communities and match companies with cool urban spaces to create a sustainable future. Aside from working as a licensed real estate brokerage to help companies find space, we work with government, economic and community development agencies, and commercial property owners to help boost the growth of office-based jobs in the great urban commercial districts of the Pittsburgh region.

We are supported by:

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