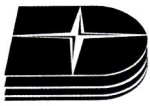


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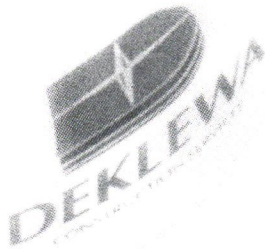
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The Mysteries of (the University of) Pittsburgh

By Tracy Certo



Students entering college today expect more, says the research. Their standards are higher in all areas—design, comfort and privacy, and— oh yes,— academics. And why not?

Days after talking with University of Pittsburgh

architect Park Rankin, AIA for this issue of Columns, I went to see author and former Pitt student Michael Chabon (*Wonder Boys*, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, and most recently and exceptionally, *Kavalier & Clay*). Chabon, 38, whom I also quote in the article, (p. 6) reminisced at the Carnegie Lecture Hall about his time in Pittsburgh, focusing on Oakland.

He talked about Jay's Book Stall where he once worked...his 3 a.m. trips to the Original Hot Dog Shop where he feasted in a drunken state...and even his brother's childhood love of these foil-wrapped bars of paradise called Klondikes which came from a restaurant by the strange name of Isaly's.

He relayed the story of how, during a visit to Pittsburgh at age 12, he and his brother got lost in the basement of the Carnegie Museum. That's where, he said, they store politically incorrect exhibits like the saber-toothed tigers whose fangs were so long they must have starved to death. They eventually found their way out of the Carnegie only to descend, like Alice in Wonderland, down the never-ending stairs into Panther Hollow, home of the Cloud Factory.

Chabon's vivid descriptions and strong sense of place held the sometimes sleep-inclined lecture crowd spellbound. But there we were, with those saber-toothed tigers below us, and the Cloud Factory beyond, alert and loving it.

I couldn't help but think that if I was in marketing for the University of Pittsburgh—and maybe even Carnegie Mellon—I might get a copy or video of Chabon's talk and send it to prospective students.

Everything else is being done to recruit students these days: new and more private dorms, student centers that are not only convenient but also beautiful, even coffee kiosks scattered throughout campuses to sweeten college life.

Students entering college today expect more, says the research. Their standards are higher in all areas—design, comfort and privacy, and— oh yes,— academics. And why not? They're coming from smaller families with bigger houses and single bedrooms, says the research. When they get to college, they expect a similar standard.

And just where do you think they get those high standards? That never ending line at the Starbucks kiosk in the Cathedral is lined with professionals as well as students. Convenience? The boomers' birthright, next to instant gratification. Who among us wouldn't have loved being catered to more in our school days? (Note: the cafeteria food is actually good these days.) Park Rankin noted that the attitude toward students used to be, "You're lucky to be here." Now the same can be said, in a different light I suppose.

With the trends in campus architecture, students are indeed lucky.

Compare the Bouquet Gardens, Pitt's new dorms of suites with the old Litchfield Towers with its pie-shaped rooms. As a friend said, it looks like someplace she would have moved into after she made it, not while in school. Even the names are significant: Bouquet Gardens/Litchfield Tower: Where would you rather be? Higher expectations seems to be an effective strategy bringing about better design, more green space, and more amenities.

Keeping with the subject of schools, Christine Mondor AIA, (p. 12) updates us on High Performance Schools in PA. The greening of schools is becoming a holistic process that considers the environment, cost effectiveness, and more than ever, the health of students. Pennsylvania is taking the lead in creating a healthier environment in schools and it's impressive. New standards are being set and in some cases, students are getting involved. Working with the project architect, Hayes Large Designs, Carrick High School students are helping to compile a list to green their school that includes HVAC, daylighting, and non-toxic finishes.

In addition, the students in the high school shop class secured a grant and bought and fixed up an area house based on sustainable design principles. They are now working on their second green renovation of a house.

With involvement like this at such an early age, these students are likely to expect even more when they arrive on campus. As we learn from recent trends in campus architecture, that can be a very good thing.

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On the cover: Interior of the HUB. Penn State University.
Photo Copyright Ed Massery.

AIA Pittsburgh serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and AIA Pennsylvania. The objective of AIA Pittsburgh is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields.

AIA Pittsburgh
211 Ninth Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
Telephone: 412/471-9548
FAX: 412/471-9501

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The Merry Month of May

by Anne J. Swager, Hon. AIA

May is a momentous month.

There is a hotly contested mayoral race which will be decided in the primaries. Carnegie Mellon will graduate another group of eager architectural interns, many more of whom will stay in Pittsburgh than in years past. And AIA Pittsburgh volunteers and staff will spend the better part of two days and countless additional hours helping the communities of Homestead, West Homestead and Munhall see the possibilities of renewal in their communities.



Unlike the homogenous suburbs, the feisty Steel Valley area has the variety of housing, the ethnic character and the commercial core to stage a comeback as a "new town". The community, through David, has asked for our help.

In Mt. Lebanon, which has so many resident architects that we joke about how the AIA should set up a branch office there, there is never a shortage of good architect candidates for open Board and Authority slots. This year, we have a tight primary race for the democratic commissioner candidate in the second ward. Maura Guttman has stepped up to the plate and, as I write this, she is busy knocking on doors and sending out brochures. When Maura was AIA Pittsburgh's President, she exhorted many of you to become politically active from the pages of this magazine. (At the Board meetings, her colleagues called her the *Mayor*, with good reason.)

If elected as commissioner, she will be terrific. She has the energy and the vision to make change happen and the optimism to keep on trying.

Very few of us have the drive to hold public office but we certainly have the smarts to pick good people. Please vote in the May primary whether you live in Mt. Lebanon or elsewhere.

Many of you make a big difference in your community in a variety of ways. Take David Lewis, for instance. Last spring, I played hooky for the better part of one day with David to tour Homestead, West Homestead and Munhall. David moved to Homestead shortly after AIA Pittsburgh sponsored the Remaking Cities charrette in the Mon Valley back in the late 80's. I had heard a lot about his house overlooking the old Mesta Machine works and his legendary dinner parties which I have mentioned here before. He is

known as a wonderful host and has marvelous stories about his exploits. I expected to have a great time. But I was unprepared for how much I would like his neighborhood.

For one thing, I couldn't envision a home above a machine company. But the hills have a wonderful way of isolating you from the immediate surroundings. Getting to David's house involves a couple of hair pin turns—a nice dramatic touch—before entering a residential street lined with older homes including the glorious Mesta family mansion. With the trees in bloom, you don't even see the machine works below. David's house, which he transformed, is a gem. Architects do have such a great way with space. After a terrific lunch and lots of laughs, David and I were off for the tour.

Although I have been to Homestead before and driven through it a number of times, it was only through David's eyes that I realized how layered the community is. The waterfront property is, of course, now a very large suburban style retail area. But minutes away, the commercial core of Homestead boasts wonderful historic storefronts and level walking areas. The commercial core fades up the hill into streets with the ethnic churches and the Carnegie Library and park. Just above the park and surrounding it are some of the beautiful mansions from steel's heyday. Driving through, you can still see the bones of the company homes that the steel companies built for the workers, despite the best attempts by the aluminum siding companies to obliterate the patterns of these houses.

Unlike the homogenous suburbs, the feisty Steel Valley area has the variety of housing, the ethnic character and the commercial core to stage a comeback as a "new town". The community, through David, has asked for our help. On May 4th and 5th, we have a charette scheduled to provide help. If you want to make a positive difference, as I know so many of you do, please consider signing up for this. We could use your help and so could the communities.

It could be a great month for all.



St. John Honored with Harvard Fellowship

The bad news: Richard St. John is leaving the Community Design Center of Pittsburgh (CDCP). The good? He has accepted a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University's Design School. He is the first from Pittsburgh to receive this honor.

The Loeb Fellowship is the only one of its kind in the nation. Founded in 1970, it provides a year of independent study at Harvard for outstanding mid-career professionals in fields related to the built and natural environment.

During his nine-year tenure as CDCP Executive Director, Rick helped the CDCP build its credibility, staff and programs. Some highlights of the CDCP's work during that period include:

- Coordinated \$500,000 Design Fund grants to 100 community revitalization projects, resulting in \$22 million in neighborhood reinvestment.
- Established the Renovation Information Network, an award-winning program that has matched 350 homeowners with volunteer design professionals.
- Built new educational programs, including the web site www.cdcp.org.
- Created Volkswagen Pedal Pittsburgh, which has helped 10,000 riders experience the city's community revitalization and design landmarks.
- Began involvement in Civic Stewardship — as co-chair of the Mayor's Zoning Advisory Group and convening member of the Coalition for Parks and Greenspace.

While we're sorry to see Rick leave, we're delighted that the Board of Directors selected Anne-Marie Lubenau, AIA, as its new Executive Director, beginning July 1.



New Loeb Fellow, Richard St. John, and incoming CDCP Executive Director, Anne-Marie Lubenau, AIA.

Currently Associate Director, she brings with her a decade of experience and knowledge as a registered architect with a passion for community design.

The CDCP is poised to serve new clients and new geographical areas, to expand their role in Civic Stewardship, and to create new products that expand their impact while generating income. We know that Anne-Marie will provide exceptional leadership as they move in these new directions.

On behalf of AIA Pittsburgh, we're pleased to congratulate Rick and to welcome Anne-Marie in her new role. We hope you'll do the same.



◀ Welcome New Member

AIA Pittsburgh welcomes Peter Margittai, architect. A Penn State graduate and South Side resident, Peter practices residential architect design and is married to Michele (pictured, who does our Design Awards). His interests include travel, sketching, reading and skiing.

Correction

Columns regrets the incorrect spelling of Paul Slowik, AIA in the March issue.

To Those Firms Without a Marketing Director

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