

C O L U M N S



16:62 Design Zone

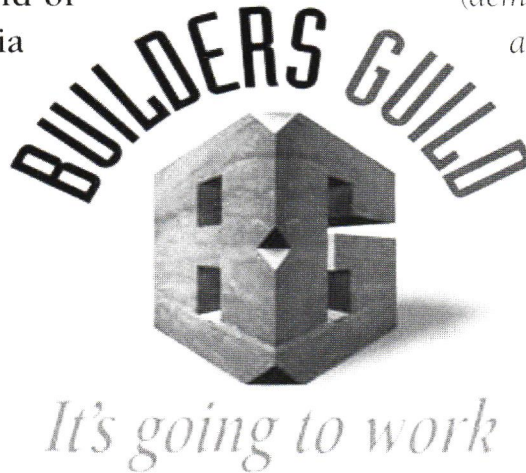
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Zoning in on Creativity By Tracy Certo



One person can make a difference in Pittsburgh and the people mentioned here are proof.

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On the cover: Since 1999, hot haute hot at 22nd St. off Penn Avenue has offered a modern primitive fusion of furniture and unique and exotic objects from around the world. Photo by Tracy Certo.

In this issue you will learn

how a drunk in a bar inspired a young designer from New Jersey to move to Pittsburgh (p. 6) and how architects are helping to keep people fit and our city diverse (p.4)

Although it wasn't planned, there's an underlying theme in this issue: behind every story and column are people—sober or otherwise—who are really making things happen. From the go-getters in Lawrenceville and the Strip District who make up the Design Zone to Steve Quick whose conversation with his personal doctor led to a new direction for AIA Pittsburgh. Not to mention the students and architects at the recent charrette at the Carnegie Museum (p. 12). And the perfect match of Design Awards 2005 with the 16:62 Design Zone, a great idea from Mary Irwin-Scott (p. 6).

The 16:62 Design Zone itself was a gem of an idea from Joe Kelly of Kelly Custom Furniture and Cabinetry who visited the Pearl District in Portland, Oregon. He discussed the idea of rebranding the burgeoning community—similar to the Pearl District—with others and in no time, an organization was born.

It's interesting, noted Steven Casey, AIA, who works in the Strip and sees new galleries and stores opening almost weekly, how it was declared a Design Zone and then truly became one. Like everyone interviewed for this story, Casey enjoys being part of it. And he does his share of work with other Design Zone businesses, including the Crane Building where his office is located, and street fronts in Lawrenceville, another factor contributing to the area's dramatic change. What Casey really likes about the Zone is the fact that it's made of real communities. The architect expects to see a tremendous impact on his neighborhood when the Armstrong Cork Building nearby is recast as 300 new condos.

Another complex, the Blackbird Lofts, will have quite an effect on the Lawrenceville area when completed, including street level artist studios. Seeing artists in action will only add to the allure of the Design Zone.

As mentioned in the article here, the transformation of Lawrenceville to an artsy community was driven by a number of factors, starting with the exit of the mills and the resulting cheap real estate. People such as Mark Mentzer, an artist and professor at Carnegie Mellon University, and Jerry Wilson of Wilson and McCracken, bought buildings in Lawrenceville decades ago, before there was even a hint of revitalization. Wilson purchased a 100-year-old firehouse which he got for a song. Mentzer needed studio space and liked what he saw. "It's a really good neighborhood and a great group of people," Wilson says. And it's safe, he assures. (I can attest to that. On a busy Saturday I parked and locked my car on Butler St. not knowing the back window was wide open, purse in easy range, only to return hours later with nothing missing.)

It takes people like Mentzer and Lewis—and Janice Donatelli—to get a good neighborhood back on its feet. Janice owned an antiques store in Lawrenceville and she begged "everyone" to open a much-needed coffee shop in the area. Finally, in a what-the-hell moment, she opened her own: the Coca Café, which soon became the best kind of a community center. When someone walked in one day not too long ago and offered to buy it, she sold, only to open another business, this time with Linda Metropolis. Their store, Artemis, features a sizeable selection of environmentally-friendly products for any and all parts of buildings, from the infrastructure to interior design. (Check out their amazing tile.) It's the only shop of this kind in the tri-state area, says Donatelli, who gets a lot of business from out of state through their web site.

It's hard for one person to make a difference in New York, says designer Quinn Leonowicz, whose humorous story is featured here. But one person can make a difference in Pittsburgh, he says and the people mentioned here are proof. It's one reason why Quinn and his girlfriend chose to move here. Well, that, and the sage advice of an inebriated gent in a bar. And hey, cheers to that!

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.

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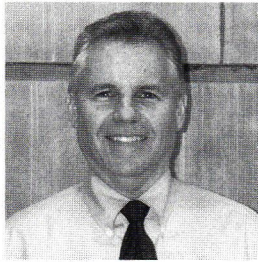
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Building Healthy and Diverse Communities

By Stephen Quick, AIA

AIA Pittsburgh has recently become

involved in two major initiatives: the Western Pennsylvania Obesity Task Force and the Diversity Initiative. Both have an impact on our members and point to new directions for the practice of architecture and for AIA Pittsburgh.



As we expand the definition of architecture to include the design of communities in addition to the design of buildings, we broaden our horizons and our influence.

Sometimes the opportunities we create for ourselves are surprising.

The Obesity Task Force, begun about a year ago by the Medical Society of Allegheny County, has already grown into a state-wide program. The Medical Society, representing physicians throughout the county and similar to AIA Pittsburgh as a professional organization, chose to be pro-active in educating its members and the public about the problem and begin to initiate local programs to address it. Led by Terence Starz, MD, the task force has brought together a number of organizations and people with the ability to do something about the obesity problem. Represented are doctors, the major hospitals, health care insurers, educators, the local press, drug companies, and, yes, AIA Pittsburgh. Why, you ask?

Dr. Starz happens to be my personal physician who, during a check-up told me about the BMI chart and some of the medical issues involving obesity. I asked him if he had heard Dr. Richard Jackson, formerly of the Center for Disease Control, speak about the relationship between community design and obesity. He hadn't, but quickly understood the impact of design and asked for our participation on a new task force he was organizing. Well, one thing led to another and the AIA is now an active participant on the task force. So far, Tom Briney and I have been involved and we'd like to encourage others to join us.

AIA Pittsburgh presented the impact of community and building design on obesity and health at a region-wide obesity conference held at Pitt's Institute for Public Policy. We are also helping to spread the word that the design of communities is critical to addressing our region's and nation's obesity problem. And we are beginning to network with other members of the task force, helping to make linkages between architects and other professions.

In a related initiative sponsored by Highmark that focuses on early childhood obesity, Wanda Wilson at City Planning is leading a built-environment sub-committee to identify physical design parameters and pilot projects. Other

committees are contributing ideas including: increasing community awareness, obesity "tool kits" for local doctors, and establishing safe walking routes to schools. The United Way, working with neighborhood organizations, recently announced that they will be funding programs based on these ideas in four Pittsburgh neighborhoods. AIA Pittsburgh is involved there, too. This in turn has spurred discussions of the possibility of integrating a "healthy community" agenda, centered on early childhood obesity design needs, into affordable housing in-fill projects in two Pittsburgh neighborhoods.

The other area of recent AIA involvement is the Diversity Initiative, a new task group comprised of Pittsburgh minority organizations, professional organizations and major employers. This one addresses two important issues: how to attract minorities to Pittsburgh and, once here, how to retain them. Led by representatives of the American Bar Association and several minority non-profits, the Initiative was introduced to AIA Pittsburgh by the Allegheny County Medical Society. The medical connection comes from the hospitals' difficulty in retaining foreign doctors once they've completed their residency requirements, a concern expressed by all of the involved major employers. What makes this initiative different from ones in the past is the active involvement of some of Pittsburgh's largest employers. A region-wide issue, it's fundamental to keeping Pittsburgh competitive. Leading our Chapter's efforts are Ken Lee, AIA and Art Sheffield, Assoc. AIA who invite you to a kick-off event on September 22nd at 5:30 at Dowe's on 9th. A number of our member firms are helping to sponsor the event and, for a nominal \$5.00 cover charge, you can meet some of Pittsburgh's finest professionals and begin working for a better Pittsburgh.

Healthy communities are sustainable communities, whether it is our community of AIA architects or the neighborhood communities where we live. As we expand the definition of architecture to include the design of communities, we broaden our horizons and our influence. All of the participants on the Obesity Task Force and the Diversity Initiative—new connections we are making—have welcomed our participation with open arms. The feeling is reciprocal—who would have ever thought an architect and a doctor had much in common or a major employer would understand the linkage between livable communities and human resource problems? We can continue to surprise ourselves with the new opportunities we can create for ourselves. We just need to adjust our design perspective.