



PITTSBURGH TODAY & TOMORROW 2020

ASSESSING OUR REGION

THIS IS THE 10TH YEAR WE'VE PRODUCED THE annual Pittsburgh Today & Tomorrow report—comparing Pittsburgh with regions across the country—and this year's is the biggest by far because Pittsburgh is at a crossroads. Regional job growth has stalled. And Pittsburgh is continuing to lose people—the city, and each of the seven metro counties except Butler. Three features address the topics. First, PNC economist Kurt Rankin looks at Pittsburgh's 2020 economy. Next is a Q&A with municipal expert David Feehan on how to attract people. In a very special report, 30 regional leaders suggest actions necessary to turn things around. There's also a remarkable story about the Pittsburgh land bank's lack of progress addressing vacant and abandoned property. On a brighter note, we explore the feasibility of five winners from last year's contest to improve the region—and they're all promising. Finally, we unveil the results of a major K–12 education survey and report on issues of crime, transit, obesity and premature mortality in this region.

PITTSBURGH'S ECONOMY 2020:

Despite solid foundation, lack of workers will likely choke growth potential

written by **KURT RANKIN**

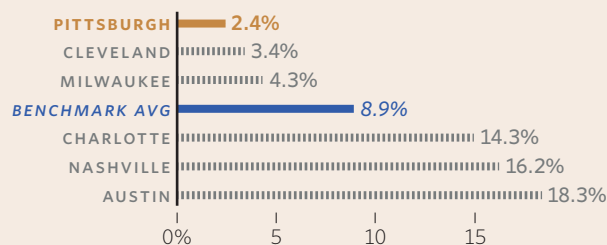
PITTSBURGH'S ECONOMY HAS A DIFFICULT ROW to hoe as we look ahead to 2020. Economic potential through the new year will be supported by stable consumer conditions and business sentiment, but the resources necessary to keep up with demand are running thin. It may be time for Pittsburgh to deliver on the promise of affordability and "Most Livable" titles, or face the prospect of withering on the vine.

Employment growth in the Pittsburgh metropolitan statistical area will finish 2019 essentially flat, with the latest numbers—available through November 2019—showing a year-over-year decline of -0.35 percent. This, after solid gains were enjoyed in both 2017 and 2018. But it is the state of Pittsburgh's labor force that is cause for concern. Labor force is practically unchanged since 2000 and currently sits at about 1.2 million workers. That long-term stagnation, or stability for the true optimists, would not itself be such a problem if the number of jobs in the metro area had not risen to nearly match that level over the past three years, leaving a far more limited reserve of potential workers available to businesses looking to hire going forward.

This is good news for those employed; it is bad news for businesses that will want to hire in the coming year and beyond. Without an infusion of new workers, those businesses will lose out on growth potential, or will be forced to source their products and services from other parts of the state or the United States more broadly, leaving Pittsburgh with growth opportunities squandered.

Pittsburgh has touted itself as an affordable, innovative, "livable" market for decades. Yet the size of its labor force shows that the local economy has not been able to cash in on those qualities. In

Economy: Five-Year Job Growth

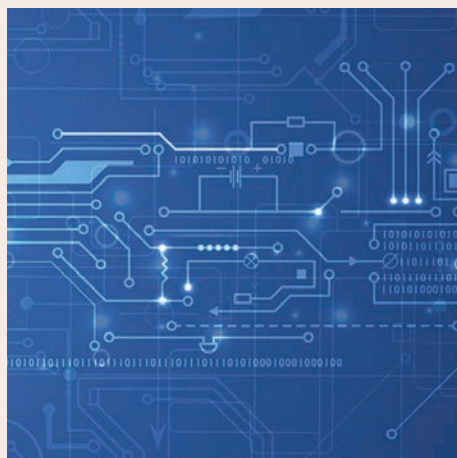


Percentage of MSA job growth, Oct. 2014 through Oct. 2019; highest/lowest among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions. SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

reality, Pittsburgh will have to see costs of living and doing business rise in response to greater demand if the region is to take the next step in its 21st century economic evolution.

Labor market tightness implies that Pittsburgh workers should see a good year in terms of wage growth in 2020. Average hourly earnings are above statewide levels and on par with the national average after sitting between 5 and 10 percent below

U.S. standards for much of the past 20 years. Local wage growth will finish 2019 essentially flat when compared to one year ago. But some of this result can be attributed to a near-constant creation of lower-wage positions, while employers that generate higher-paying occupations have difficulty sourcing workers in Pittsburgh due to the labor market constraints discussed above. Even if near-term wage growth prospects come down from the rafters after posting a 5 percent year-over-year pace



in both 2017 and 2018, consumer price inflation and interest rates will remain subdued in 2020 as well. This will allow even modest wage gains to generate improved purchasing power for households, businesses and borrowers in general. Pittsburgh's local economy may struggle to make its next leap forward, but those taking part in its current state will find plenty of support for their financial condition.

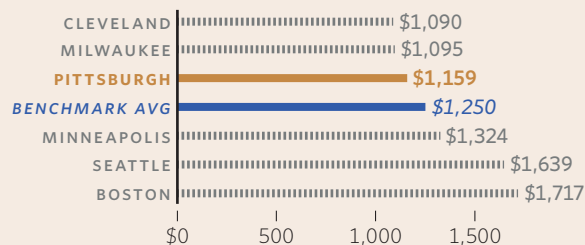
Service industry employment is the clear pacesetter for Pittsburgh's job market heading into 2020. Reflecting business demand, solid gains in professional and business services—which includes occupations such as lawyers, accountants, marketing and all manner of computer systems design and programming positions—indicate that businesses are indeed doing business. Meeting demand from businesses in the region launched employment growth in professional and business services to nearly 2 percent in year-over-year terms in the fourth quarter of 2019. This matched the national average in this industry—a first for Pittsburgh since 2014.

Consumer spending is also on track to remain a driver of job creation in 2020. Leisure and hospitality industries are a good indicator of local consumer sentiment, since local households are the most likely source of restaurant and other entertainment revenues for businesses in an economy that is not tourism-centric, as is the case in Pittsburgh. Leisure and hospitality industry employers also looked to close out 2019 with positive year-over-year growth in payrolls. As long as consumers continue to spend, the outlook for Pittsburgh's local economy will remain positive.

PNC's Small Business Outlook Survey for the state of Pennsylvania, published in October 2019, supports the notion that Pittsburgh's business environment is ripe for continued growth in 2020. Small and mid-sized business owners were surveyed as to their degree of confidence in near-term economic conditions. More respondents expressed optimism regarding their own businesses' prospects, as well as local and national economic prospects overall when compared to the same survey's results from one year prior. With both hard data and surveys of sentiment indicating economic confidence, it seems that Pittsburgh's growth potential need only find a way to attract the necessary labor resources in order to keep growth in the region on track.

Offsetting the spending-oriented service sector job gains in 2019 were, essentially, the remainder of Pittsburgh's industrial base. Year-over-year payroll declines were seen from the heavy manufacturing, construction, and transportation and utilities

Economy: Weekly Wages



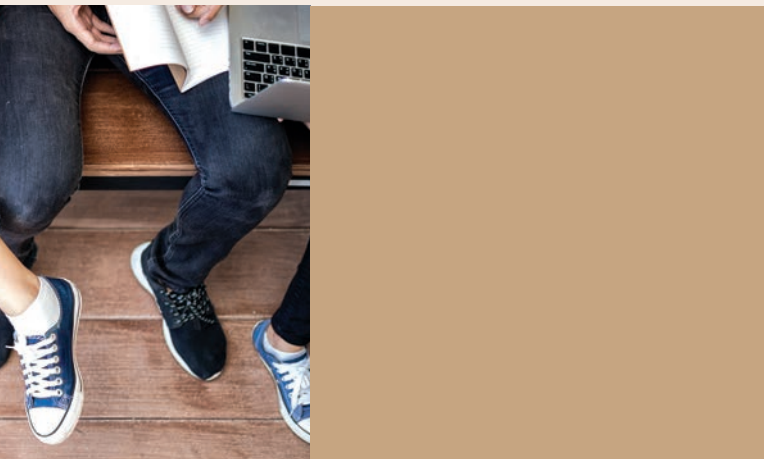
Average weekly wages in MSA; Pittsburgh and highest/lowest among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions. SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

sectors, to the region's bellwether education and health care and finance industries. All sectors with the exception of manufacturing had enjoyed robust hiring through 2017 and 2018, however. So a slowdown does not come as a shock—especially given the ever-shrinking pool of labor resources that would be needed to fill such skill- and training-dependent positions. Again, Pittsburgh's need to attract a new, sustainable wave of workers is highlighted as such a broad array of dynamic industries look unable to maintain hiring momentum.

Pittsburgh's housing market is reaping the benefits of economic stability. Homebuying demand is supported by mortgage interest rates that are far below historical standards, which are likely to remain so for several years as inflation is well-contained, long-term bond yields are subdued, and the Federal Reserve shows no inclination toward tightening monetary policy. The real driver of home price appreciation in Pittsburgh, however, is a shocking lack of any rebound in new homebuilding in the metro area since the end of the 2008 recession. Residential permit issuance remains at only 25 percent of its housing market pre-bubble era pace—around 1,000 new single-family permits being issued per year versus consistently 4,000–5,000 from 1990 through 2006. This lack of supply growth ramps up competition among homebuyers, resulting in home price appreciation that should remain between 4 and 5 percent year-over-year in 2020. This is above the expected national average of near 3 percent. And it is noteworthy that above-average home price growth has not been experienced in Pittsburgh, outside of recessionary periods, since the early 1980s. These housing market conditions will conspire to put new homebuyers at a disadvantage in terms of affordability in the coming year, but conversely, existing homeowners will enjoy a boost to their household balance sheets.

In summary, Pittsburgh's economic strength is broad-based entering 2020. Supply-side constraints in labor markets and housing markets threaten to keep Pittsburgh from achieving its full growth potential over the next few years, but some degree of continued gains are assured by the local economy's all-around solid fundamentals. ■

Kurt Rankin is an economist with the PNC Financial Services Group.



ATTRACTING PEOPLE TO PITTSBURGH

How do we do it?

DAVID FEEHAN, PRESIDENT OF CIVITAS CONSULTANTS IN MARYLAND, IS A recognized expert in downtown revitalization. For more than 50 years, his work has helped improve dozens of cities and neighborhoods in the United States and elsewhere, including Minneapolis, Detroit, Austin, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh Today spoke with him about ideas that might help increase population in Pittsburgh and southwestern Pennsylvania, a region that has lost some 400,000 people since 1969.

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What are the key characteristics of places that are successful in attracting and retaining people?

A friend of mine said, “Cities are the stage on which we celebrate our communities, especially the downtowns. All of us working to save our cities are producers, directors and the cast of the production. And every day there is a new production.” Our job is to create a place where people want to be—places that are comfortable, inviting, exciting; places to go to socialize, eat, drink and be entertained. And sometimes the entertainment is just being there.

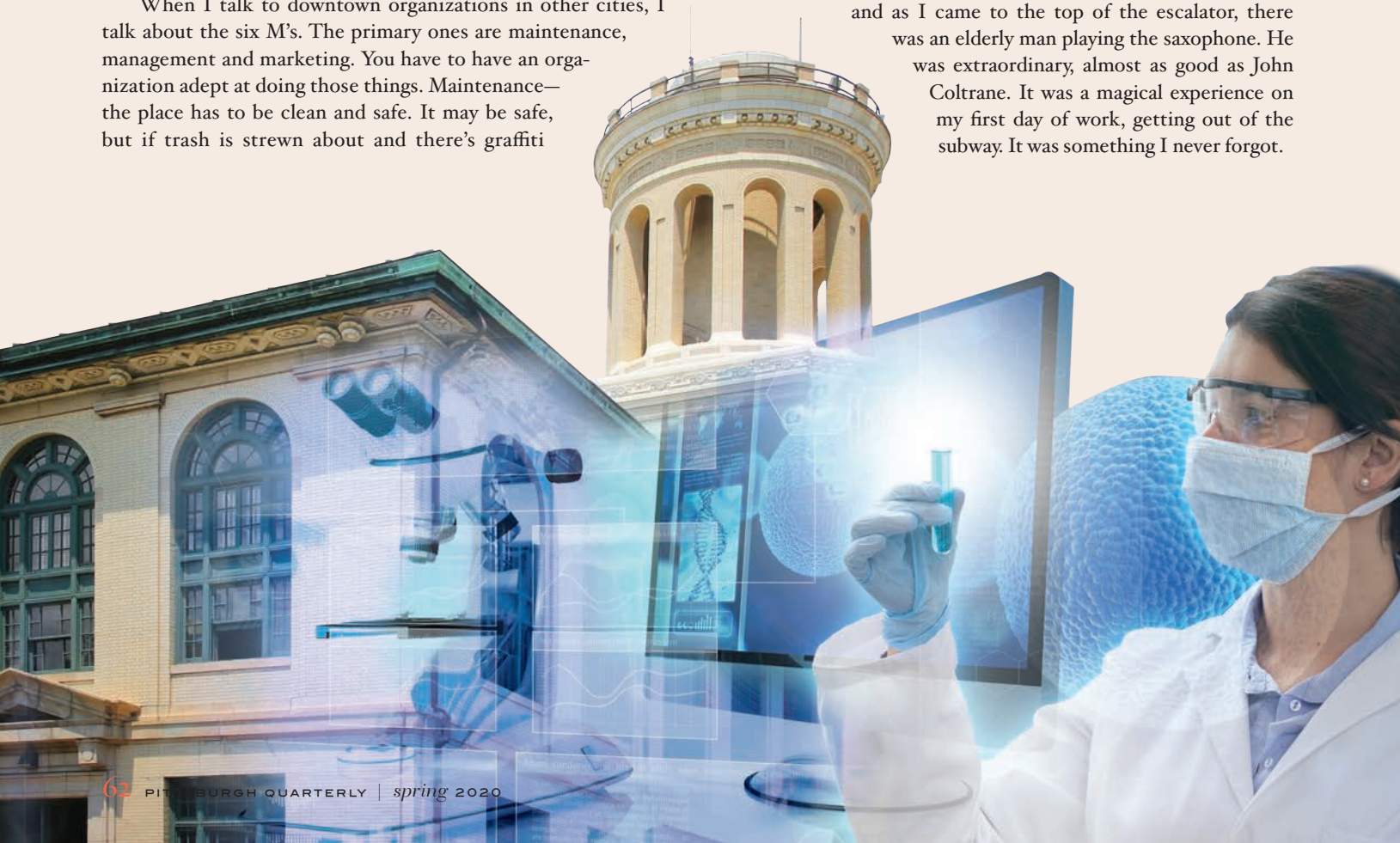
That’s the kind of shift cities have to make if they want to attract people. It’s a shift from just thinking about having jobs, affordable housing—the basics. Those are the table stakes. They just get you into the game. They don’t win you the hand.

When I talk to downtown organizations in other cities, I talk about the six M’s. The primary ones are maintenance, management and marketing. You have to have an organization adept at doing those things. Maintenance—the place has to be clean and safe. It may be safe, but if trash is strewn about and there’s graffiti

everywhere, people won’t think it’s safe because they think no one is in charge. Marketing—you have to tell people you’re there and why they should come. Management decides what happens, who is producing, who is directing every day.

You have to do those things well or you’re not in the game.

The last three are moments, memories and magic. We remember special moments. They create memories and those memories are what keep people coming back. Pittsburgh isn’t Orlando. It’s a cold-weather city. It doesn’t have 30 million people a year coming to visit because Disney is there. You have to rely on repeat business. The way we do that is to create special moments and memories, and the moments have to have some magic to them. Those moments can be educational, experiential, aesthetic, escapist. When I first moved to Washington, D.C., in 2001, I was coming out of the metro station at Farragut Square and as I came to the top of the escalator, there was an elderly man playing the saxophone. He was extraordinary, almost as good as John Coltrane. It was a magical experience on my first day of work, getting out of the subway. It was something I never forgot.



Q What do you tell cities and towns about how to make themselves distinctive?

You want to be distinctive and appealing in ways that you end up as the number one choice when people are choosing where they are going to live or where they are going to move their business. There is no satisfaction in finishing second.

Cities need to develop an understanding of the “X factor.” If I say Hollywood, what do you think of? You probably say, movies. If I say Nashville, you probably say country music. If I say Vegas, you probably think gambling; Orlando, you probably say Disney. What would you say is the X factor for Pittsburgh? Pittsburgh has some wonderful things, but I don’t think it’s figured out how to package them. I don’t think Pittsburgh has an X factor.

Q You’ve written that one strategy for attracting and retaining people is to make a place more attractive to women. How is that done and why is that important?

We did a survey of some 130 women leaders. What would you say is the most hated aspect of coming to a downtown or business district from a woman’s point of view? Parking, especially parking garages. One woman said she hated the parking garages because they were dull, dirty, dark and dangerous. The second is the absence of clean, safe restrooms. Another question was, “What color is downtown?” Most women said gray. One of the reasons downtowns are like that is they were primarily designed by men. The people who control the professions that design downtowns—the architects, urban planners, real estate developers, construction people—are predominantly men and they are designing places that appeal to them.

Women today either make or influence most of the retail decisions, health care decisions and residential decisions. They are so influential in so many parts of the economy. They control more than half of the private wealth in this country.

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It's not a matter of making the little lady happy. It's realizing the immense power women have in the economy. That's why downtowns and business districts and cities have to take women much more into account than they have.

Q You've done work in the Pittsburgh area. What are some ways the region might improve its ability to attract people from other places and convince them to settle here?

Pittsburgh is doing a lot of things right. It has some of the pillars in place that are going to help. Pittsburgh is recognized as a pioneer in medicine and health care. Carnegie Mellon is ranked as one of the top technology universities in the country. The revitalization of Downtown was absolutely essential. Downtown has become the anchor it needs to be.

But there doesn't seem to be an overall strategy yet that is going to produce the people power that Pittsburgh needs to move forward. That is the key. When businesses look at places to locate, surveys show that a top consideration is whether they can get the people, the talent they need to build their business. That's where Pittsburgh isn't finishing Number One.

We're not going to see a growing population if we only focus on whites and African Americans. We have to be more open to immigration and people coming from other countries. I would work on a strategy to attract Hispanics. They have a lot of characteristics that contribute to the economy and, I think, would match up well with Pittsburgh.

And Pittsburgh has to figure out that X factor—what is it you want Pittsburgh to be known for when it is competing against Nashville, Orlando, Austin and other places. If you ask someone what they think of when they think of Pittsburgh and they say, "the Steelers," that's all well and good, but the Steelers aren't the reason people are going to move to Pittsburgh. ■

David Feehan is president of Civitas Consultants and an expert on downtown revitalization.

CLEVELAND 11,000 – PITTSBURGH 1

In the battle to combat blight, Pittsburgh's land bank is a bust

written by **JEFFERY FRASER**

THE HOUSING BUBBLE HAD BURST AND THE nation was reeling from recession. The City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County were feeling the pain more than most places in 2009. Foreclosures were mounting by the thousands, and Fannie Mae and other lenders were desperate for a way to off-load the abandoned properties filling their books.

They found it in a land bank, a nonprofit corporation that emerged as a haven for abandoned properties with the mission of turning them around. A novel stream of revenue enabled Cleveland to acquire vacant houses and lots, demolish blighted homes, and rehab and resell others to arrest the abandonment eroding neighborhood housing markets.

During its first 10 years, the Cuyahoga Land Bank acquired some 11,000 vacant houses, lots and businesses, even a few shopping malls. And returning them to local tax rolls reaped nearly \$1.4 billion in higher property values, sales, tax revenue and other benefits, a recent analysis of its work suggests.

Some 180 land banks operate in the United States, including two in southwestern Pennsylvania. Few, however, can match the scale of Cuyahoga County's impact. And that's particularly true of the land bank created in 2014 to tackle the City of Pittsburgh's vacant property problem.

The Pittsburgh Land Bank has acquired only one tax-delinquent property in five years—a vacant lot in the Larimer neighborhood of a city that counts 20 percent of its taxable property as vacant.

The Cuyahoga Land Bank has the advantage of being one of the richest in the nation. Its \$8 million-a-year budget is 10 times what the Pittsburgh Land Bank has to work with.

But southwestern Pennsylvania's other land bank has managed to do more with less money than the one serving the city. The Tri-COG Land Bank, which opened in 2018, acquired 32 properties in the Mon Valley and east suburbs by the end of 2019. It entered this year with 18 more on its acquisition list and the expectation of adding 30 properties to its inventory by New Year's Eve.

"This work is incremental, house by house, lot by lot. But, it's important," said An Lewis, executive director of the Tri-COG Land Bank and Steel Rivers Council of Governments. "Blight is like cancer. If you don't treat it, it will definitely grow."

COST OF INACTION

The problem is more than the ugliness that empty weed-choked lots and abandoned houses with drooping rain gutters and broken windows inflict on neighborhoods. They carry a staggering price paid in public dollars and lost equity for homeowners with the misfortune of living nearby.

Vacancy and blight consume upwards of \$10.7 million a year in code enforcement, police and fire services in the 41 Allegheny

County municipalities covered by the Steel Rivers and Turtle Creek Valley councils of government. Municipalities lose \$8.6 million to delinquent property taxes. Nearby properties lose up to \$247 million of their value, which robs municipalities of another \$9.7 million in tax revenue, a blight analysis commissioned by the two groups reports.

Nearly 24,000 vacant properties reside in the city of Pittsburgh, including 7,500 structures. Their delinquent taxes cost the city \$4.8 million in lost revenue a year, according to a study by the Center for Community Progress, a national land-recycling nonprofit. Another \$4.8 million is lost in property values that have been downgraded by blight. Police, fire and code enforcement services add another \$2 million, raising the total annual cost of blight in the city to \$9.1 million.

Government systems that address vacant, tax-delinquent property often exacerbate the problem. Cumbersome tax foreclosure systems, for example, discourage buyers interested in turning them around. In the city of Pittsburgh, it can take two or more years to clear the title of a single property and send it to treasurer's sale for auction.

"Most states, unfortunately, have processes that are drawn out for years," said Kim Graziani, vice president and director of national technical assistance at the Center for Community Progress. "And time is the worst enemy of vacant, tax-delinquent properties."

'LIKE A FIREHOSE'

Ohio adopted legislation in 2006 that expedited the tax foreclosure process statewide. The Cuyahoga Land Bank was created in response to what happened when the new law met the crippling recession and housing crisis that visited the region one year later.

As 2007 approached, the rate of foreclosures and delinquencies "were spiking like crazy," said Gus Frangos, president and general counsel of the Cuyahoga Land Bank. By the following year, the numbers had almost tripled. "It was like nothing we'd ever seen. These properties were coming out of this expedited [foreclosure] process like a firehose."

"We needed to create an entity to take these properties in, triage them and try to turn lemons into lemonade."

He helped win bipartisan support for a state law allowing Ohio counties to give land banks a share of the penalties and interest collected from delinquent property tax settlements and a reliable source of funds, without which, he argued, they'd be "like a car without an engine."

It's a law Pennsylvania doesn't have. In Cuyahoga County, the land bank's stake in delinquent tax settlements accounts for 90 percent of its more than \$8 million annual budget.

The Cuyahoga Land Bank's reach is long by U.S. standards. With a staff of 32, it has moved aggressively against vacancy and

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blight to help mend local real estate markets that had been wounded by recession. It acquires vacant properties at a rate of about 900 a month. And in 10 years, it demolished nearly 7,000 properties for redevelopment, rehabbed 2,100 houses for resale and helped neighborhoods assemble properties to advance their revitalization plans.

SLOW-MOTION LAUNCH

Pittsburgh is a different story. The Pittsburgh Land Bank has developed slowly since it was created by city ordinance as an incorporated public entity in 2014. Five years later, it still had no staff of its own. Only in January of this year did the board hire an interim executive director.

The years were mostly spent putting together a board of directors and working out the policies and procedures for doing battle with blight, with Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh staff handling the administrative duties. The land bank's strategic plan outlines a cautious approach. It describes 2018 as a pilot year, with a \$800,000 budget mostly financed with public and foundation dollars. As of January of this year, one vacant parcel had been acquired.

"I think the board right now is looking at taking it fairly slowly to figure out where there are choke-points and problems in the process," said Nathan Clark, the URA's director of real estate and associate counsel. He referred questions about policy and future

decades-long advocate of creating a land bank to deal with vacancy and blight in the region.

"The land bank is in dire need of both financial and human capital to make it a functional land bank," said Chris Sandvig, director of policy for the nonprofit, a membership organization for groups working to revitalize Allegheny County neighborhoods. "There has been some debate recently whether the land bank is the best tool for this type of work. We feel strongly that it hasn't been given the opportunity.

"Aside from the one property that has been acquired, it hasn't been tested to see whether it's a success or failure. We will not know that until we have the resources available and try to use this system at the scale we had hoped to see."

PROGRESS IN THE EAST

During the Tri-COG Land Bank's first 18 months, its staff of three fanned out across the eastern suburbs of Allegheny County, inspecting 125 vacant properties and acquiring 32 of them as they worked out the kinks in the land bank's blight recycling strategy.

The land bank recently put its first properties on sale. And its budget anticipates adding another 30 to its inventory this year, an annual harvest Lewis said could grow as the land bank matures.

Decisions to acquire properties are based on community needs and redevelopment strategies, not on whether there is a buyer in hand. The land bank, for example, is working on an agreement that would make it the property-acquisition arm of an initiative in Etna, Millvale and Sharpsburg for expanding affordable housing options as local market prices rise.

The scale of a land bank's ambitions is tempered by the risk of acquiring more vacant properties than it can afford to maintain and usher to market without them languishing as eyesores. Like others in the state, the Tri-COG land bank lacks a dedicated funding source. The state law that established land banks is mute about how to fund them. "Pennsylvania creates wonderful enabling legislation, but with no money," Lewis said. "That's only half of the solution."

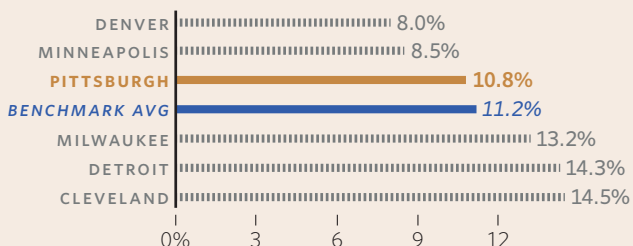
Foundation grants totaling \$1.5 million account for the lion's share of the revenue the land bank has to work with in its first three years. It gets about \$200,000 a year from a fee it charges its member municipalities that's based on the amount of delinquent property tax they collect—a deal the land bank had to negotiate with the county and each of the 25 municipalities and four school districts it has recruited so far.

But the more than 27,000 vacant properties identified in the Mon Valley and east suburbs presents a problem too large for the land bank to handle alone.

How big of a bite land banks take out of blight also depends on the efficiency of tax foreclosure systems and how well municipalities perform basic property services. "Even if they have all the money in the world," Graziano said, "land banks can't truly reverse disinvestment if there aren't mechanisms to prevent properties from going into decline and active tax collection and housing and building code enforcement. The land bank, ultimately, is the last-case scenario." ■

Jeffery Fraser is Pittsburgh Today's senior editor.

Demographics: Poverty



Percentage of MSA residents in poverty; Pittsburgh and highest/lowest among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions. SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey one-year estimates, 2018

plans to the Rev. Ricky Burgess, a city councilman and chairman of the land bank board of directors. Rev. Burgess did not respond to requests to discuss those issues.

The land bank isn't expected to look at acquiring privately owned vacant properties anytime soon. One agreement it has been drafting would give it a pipeline to thousands of vacant houses and lots the city owns from years of taking them in tax foreclosure. Once transferred to the land bank, they would be readied for market and offered for sale. As of January, that was still a promising idea waiting to happen.

At the December meeting of the land bank board, several community nonprofits that hope the land bank can help their neighborhood renewal efforts implored the board to do more, starting with hiring a staff and securing adequate funding. One of them was the Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group, a

Bold Action Needed

REGIONAL LEADERS
ADDRESS POPULATION
LOSS AND
PITTSBURGH'S
FUTURE

Editor's note: At a time when the Pittsburgh region is continuing to lose population and has been seeing regional job losses the past few months, we asked a group of regional leaders to respond, in 200 words or less, to this question: What action do we need to take to create the kind of growth, vitality and dynamism that will stem our population loss and catalyze a strong future?

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**Patrick Gallagher—
Chancellor, University
of Pittsburgh**

Pittsburgh is blessed with many of the ingredients needed to be economically competitive and primed for growth. It's a wonderful place to live and raise a family. Our universities supply talent and entrepreneurial energy. Our workforce is skilled and famously industrious. Major markets sit nearby—in every direction. And we enjoy a rare abundance of natural and cultural riches.

With so many strengths on record, it's reasonable to wonder: Why aren't we growing?

The short answer is that we lack a strategy that articulates why we want to grow and what steps we must take to evolve. We're like a team full of the most talented



players—but without a coach, a game plan, or a sense of teamwork. As a result, we're losing against "less talented" regions that are leveraging a playbook and cleverly collaborating.

Growth, especially equitable growth, is no happy accident. It requires a clear path forward and asks each partner to be aligned and assiduous in strengthening economic opportunities for all. How intentionally we engage in this work will impact whether or not Pittsburgh grows—and if this growth will benefit the many or merely the few.

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**Sunil Wadhvani—President, Wadhvani Impact Trust;
Founder, Wadhvani Institute for Artificial Intelligence;
and Founder and Chair, Mastech Corporation**

Let's make Pittsburgh's next Renaissance a people Renaissance, built on innovation and inclusion.

I grew up in India and came to Pittsburgh in the mid-1970s to study. I've witnessed this region go from the devastation following the shutdown of our steel mills to become one of the most livable cities in the United States. But even as we've become more livable, we've failed to reverse the population loss precipitated by the collapse of steel.

Here are two ideas to reverse this trend:

First, let's invest in our region's human capital by raising a billion-dollar Pittsburgh People's Prosperity Fund. Over the next 10 years, this will give us an additional \$100 million a year to invest in our students and citizens for educational and job opportunities; entrepreneurs to create and grow companies; and to attract new people and businesses to our region. We can accelerate the creation of our jobs of the future and equip



our citizens with the skills to leverage those jobs. Raising a billion dollars is an ambitious target, but—with the commitment of our corporate, civic and political leaders—we can do it!

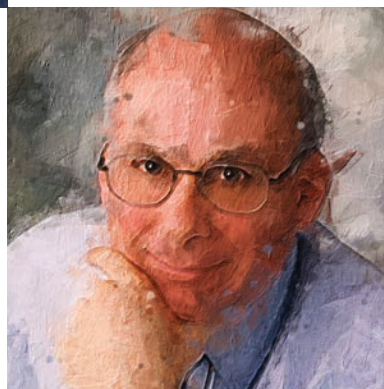
Second, let's commit ourselves to building a more diverse and inclusive region. Not many of us are aware that over half of all young workers entering the U.S. workforce today are diverse—African American, Hispanic, Native American or Asian. Hence any region that wants to grow has to be effective at attracting and retaining such workers.

Unfortunately, our Pittsburgh region is the least diverse of the major metros in the country. This lack of diversity threatens the supply of workers ready to fill current and future job openings, and diminishes our appeal to businesses looking to relocate or expand here. Let's set a goal of increasing the diversity level of our workforce—currently only 11 percent—to that of our peer regions—who are at 25 percent—by 2030.

Pittsburgh's First Renaissance cleaned our air and our rivers. Our Second Renaissance cleaned up Downtown and built our regional infrastructure. Let's make our next renaissance a People Renaissance that embraces innovation and inclusion!

Dennis Unkovic—Partner, Meyer Unkovic & Scott

Size matters when it comes to cities. In this global economy, any city with a small population base is underestimated and ignored even if it is home to leading universities, renowned healthcare, world-class corporations and financial institutions, and winning sports teams. Because of its miniscule footprint, Pittsburgh will remain a second-tier city unless it takes decisive steps forward. The only solution is to merge the City of Pittsburgh (population 302,000) and Allegheny County (population 1.22 million) into a single metropolitan unit. During the 1960s, Toronto lived in the shadow of Montreal. After merging small towns, today Toronto boasts 2.73 million residents—a million more than Montreal. Mayor Peduto and County Executive Fitzgerald need to set aside



their egos and fully support the public referendum needed to create a new metropolitan area and thus a greater Pittsburgh. The world has changed. Small local governments

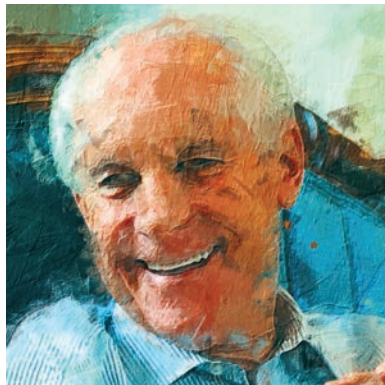
are outmoded and too expensive because of duplicative services. It is time for the Allegheny Conference to return to its roots and serve as an agent for change. Let this be the decade when we take bold action to accomplish great things. We need to embrace the future and place Pittsburgh in the forefront of global leadership.

Jim Roddey—business executive and first Allegheny County Executive

On the surface, Pittsburgh and its 10-county metro is a vibrant, bustling metropolis destined for great success. We see hotels and restaurants opening throughout the area, the new Shell cracker plant promises jobs and expansion, new health care facilities are opening and more are being planned. Yet just beneath that lurks a pending metropolitan crisis. The region is losing population.

The 10 surrounding metro counties have fewer births than deaths, fewer young people remaining and almost no immigration. Butler County is the exception. However, its modest growth is mostly the result of people migrating to the county from the city of Pittsburgh and other areas of Allegheny County; thus the metro area has no net gain. It has become clear that the region cannot sustain itself unless this undeniable trend and its dire consequences are reversed.

The only solution that can slow the losses, stabilize the population and begin to create real growth is some form of



immigration. It will not be easy, particularly if the federal immigration policies remain unchanged. It will require significant investment, the cooperation of local state and federal governments as well as the business, education,

philanthropic communities and organized labor. It will require "all hands on deck."

One possible plan could be entitled "Welcome." In a 10-year timeline, it would bring in 5,000 immigrants from each of six target countries from Asia, Eastern Europe, Central America and Africa. Country selection would be subject to approval by multiple federal departments and agencies.

Allegheny County would have 15 designated locations with 500 immigrants each. And the other nine counties would have 45 locations with 500 immigrants each (an average of five locations per suburban county). Years one and two

would involve planning, approvals and securing of funds. Planning must include but not be limited to housing, job training, jobs, education, health care, transportation, culture and English and citizenship classes. Year three would see 500 immigrants, followed by 1,500 in year four, 3,000 in year five, and 5,000 each in years six through 10.

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Diane Holder—President and CEO, UPMC Health Plan

Increasingly, questions such as “Will you live long enough to live forever?” are less the realm of science fiction than science. Gene therapies and anti-aging research promise to prevent disease, reverse cellular aging and extend the lifespan. Technology, big data and artificial intelligence are rapidly accelerating disruption in health care. The digital age has ushered in novel care strategies including the opportunity to carry a physician in your pocket on a smartphone or own a “digital pet” to lessen social isolation. Innovation is key to reducing the burden of illness in our nation and lowering the nearly 18



percent of GDP spent on health care. Developing advanced industries through innovation is also a key driver for regional growth and economic improvement.

Pittsburgh is home to two of the nation’s top 25 research universities for tech transfer and commercialization. Additionally, it is home to the nation’s only academic medical center that has both a very large, comprehensive clinical delivery system and a large health plan—a laboratory to test methods and models to improve health and cost outcomes. Much of the regional intellectual property for health improvement technology lives in these regional assets. Innovation on steroids attracts and retains talent for high-paying, future-state jobs and competes with other regions which are aggressively investing. We need to further invest in our educational institutions and facilitate a broad regional alignment, enhance public-private initiatives and encourage a statewide leadership effort to build infrastructure for innovation at scale.

Bill Strickland—Founder and Executive Chairman, Manchester Bidwell Corporation

My thoughts are primarily focused on the predicament of African American students enrolled in the public school system. I fully support Dr. Anthony Hamlet, Pittsburgh Public Schools superintendent and his efforts to dramatically improve graduation rates for all of their students; and, he has asked me specifically to join an Ethnic Studies Committee with an emphasis on African American and Hispanic students. Also, as chair of the Pennsylvania Economy League, we have formed a partnership with the public schools with a focus on career education and job placement. This effort, while in its infancy, will have a real impact in stabilizing the migration of students of color because of their inability to demonstrate the academic and experience level demanded by industry. There are literally thousands of children who fit this description. I believe any effort to address population



decline will fall short if this subject is not front and center in any serious discussion of stopping population decline in the Pittsburgh, Allegheny County region. The other significant factor that desperately needs to be considered is the epidemic of mass

incarcerations of African American and Hispanic students who are effectively removed from the population pool because they are in jail and contribute to the decline in persons available to work, live and contribute to the census and overall population count.



Lisa Schroeder—President and CEO, The Pittsburgh Foundation

We cannot rest on the laurels we have rightly earned in spurring an urban transformation that exceeds expectations, because too many of our neighborhoods and outlying communities are suffering starkly from under population and a dearth of basic services. We will not survive and thrive unless we connect our citizens—all of them—with viable employment (and a way to get there), safe affordable housing, robust K-12 education and health care. As broad as is the scale and scope of the need, we have a proven history of tackling seemingly insurmountable problems through an intricate network of collaborations and innovations. (Having left Pittsburgh and now returned, I have learned how special and unusual this community DNA really is.) Let’s now push the boundaries of our attention outward to create a metropolitan hub-and-spoke model of smaller

scale delivery systems. If we can meet basic needs, quality of life will be enhanced by the assets we already have: a plentiful stock of housing, beautiful parks, hills and riverfronts, affordable entertainment, cultural attractions and quality higher education. My dream: We are the city that beat back the wealth-and-exclusivity gap—a really nice place to live that is affordable. And who could resist moving to Pittsburgh then?

Grant Oliphant—President, The Heinz Endowments

If we want to succeed in creating a legacy of hope and opportunity now, for our children and future generations, we must learn to be better at building a sustainable economic base for our Pittsburgh region. Many technology and research companies have either opened or expanded their presence in Pittsburgh recently—part of a booming sector that according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics has added 26,000 jobs to our region since 2007, the fastest growing sector of our economy.

While these companies are bringing



good paying jobs to our region, the benefits aren't reaching everyone, and we need to act to ensure that more of our citizens have access to higher wage employment—and that the knowledge we generate in Pittsburgh is commercialized here rather than in Silicon Valley or elsewhere. In fact, a 2016 Brookings Institution report showed that for the amount our region invests in research and development—two-and-a-half times the national average—Pittsburgh should have 9,000 more jobs in software development and 5,000 additional jobs in the life sciences.

Creative investment and financing, talent attraction and workforce development programs need to improve in establishing an entrepreneurial ecosystem to capture the economy of the future—one that is engaged in science, research, technology and innovation. We need to remove racial barriers so that all may benefit. And we must continue to reduce environmental pollution that places our region at a disadvantage compared with other cities.

Gregg Behr—Executive Director, The Grable Foundation

I love nearly everything about Pittsburgh. I feel lucky to have been raised here, and I'm grateful now to be raising my family here. There is goodness at the core of this place. Public television, Days of Caring, #bethekindkid... such examples of goodness could spring forth only from a place that large numbers of gracious and generous people call home.

But, Pittsburgh, we have to reckon with everything about who we are—the lovely and the unlovely. And this place isn't just Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. Not widely touted (at least not around here) is another label we've acquired along the way: one of America's most racist places. Five years ago, a study of Google search data placed us right smack in the middle of America's most racist corridor, extending from eastern Tennessee to northern New York. Pittsburgh isn't only the Paris of Appalachia; it's as if we're also the capital of a modern-day Confederacy.

We can't explain away millions of horrible online search results. This is us. And how do we explain our mark as one of America's most dismal places for non-whites? Just last year, our city's own Gender Equity Commission laid bare our failing, as the lead sentence in the Post-Gazette's coverage made plain: "Pittsburgh's black residents could move to almost any other U.S. city of comparable size and



have a better quality of life." This is horrifying. And this is us, too.

We have justice to achieve, forgiveness to earn and welcoming to sow. We need to enlist every municipality to implement its own Welcoming Pittsburgh strategy. We need to

recruit Vibrant Pittsburgh ambassadors in every workplace, every school and every house of worship. We need to hang No Place for Hate signs on every entry point in every building across western Pennsylvania.

And what we probably really need is a Pittsburgh version of South Africa's Truth & Reconciliation Commission. Together, we need to talk openly and honestly about the personal and systemic wrongs for which we are responsible.

To quote Mister Rogers, "Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable."

So, let's reckon with who we are, Pittsburgh. Honestly. Publicly. Boldly.

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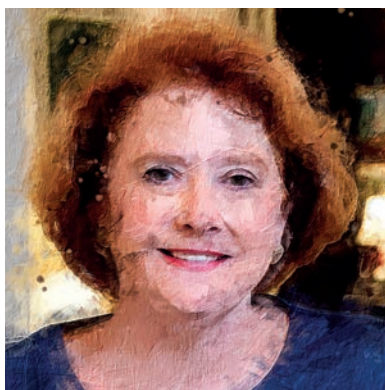
Helen Casey—CEO, Howard Hanna Real Estate Services

Over many years, our public and private sectors have worked together to make Pittsburgh comparable to almost any city in the world. Our incredible arts have choices for all tastes, from antiques to the avant-garde. Our restaurants are hot and our parks are glorious. Our clean rivers and banks teem with boat traffic, bikers and walkers. Our education and medical institutions put us on the international stage, attracting world-class research funding and talent.

Still, we need to grow the region's population.

While attracting national and international businesses, we also need to help local businesses grow here, instead of expanding elsewhere. What incentives can help them reach their goals here? We need programs for small and start-up businesses—not just for tech and energy but also service, support, manufacturing and retail—to help attract people and create jobs.

You can't have a vibrant growing region without a strong core. Downtown must be the jewel in the region's crown,



shining above the rest. We also need better transportation between Downtown and the airport, and we need better, faster and cleaner transportation between city neighborhoods and all of the region's communities.

We're one of the nation's most affordable regions for homes, but Allegheny County taxes shock out-of-town buyers. When you add taxes to the average home cost, the region becomes less competitive. A \$200,000 home has average taxes of \$500 per month. Also, with baby boomers staying in their homes and working longer, there is a lack of available homes. Builders struggle to build in the needed price ranges because of high municipal and environmental

fees. And construction of all kinds is further limited by a tremendous shortage of workers, despite great training and scholarships.

Finally, to overcome the overall worker shortage, we must seek and embrace diversity at all levels—not just the highly educated. And we must welcome working-class immigrants as we did in the early 1900s.

Morgan Lewis

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Our Pittsburgh office has a broad regional client base and also serves multinational companies located in the United States and abroad. Our lawyers have deep roots in Pittsburgh, benefiting clients in navigating the local business landscape and helping them grow. We serve many of the region's most successful entrepreneurial ventures, as well as global industry leaders in the financial services, energy, life sciences, technology, manufacturing, ecommerce, and retail sectors. Clients benefit from our seamless work across offices in North America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East—delivering strategic legal advice on both a local and global scale.

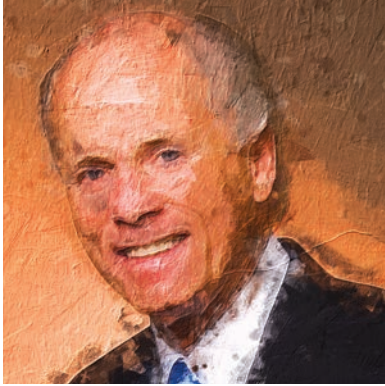
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Bill Schenck—Former Pa. Secretary of Banking; Co-founder and Vice Chairman, TriState Capital Bank

We can win or we can lose. The middle ground is not sustainable.

In 1960, Pittsburgh was the 16th largest city in America. Today it is number 66. The United States' population has nearly doubled since 1960. Pittsburgh has half the residents it did then and continues to get smaller.

We weathered the Great Recession better than many, but from the vantage point of Washington, D.C., or the desk of a major growth company's CEO, we are not an economically vital region high on the list for attention.

We can change that view. Merge Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.

We will become the 10th largest city in the United States. That does not change our level of economic vitality overnight, but it does change how we are perceived by the outside world. It shows that we have come together to take charge of our own destiny, that we have forward-thinking leadership, and that we are a region to be seriously considered when federal dollars are allocated and corporate investments are made.

We can join many vibrant cities across this country experiencing the benefits of growth in population and quality jobs. We can remain number 64, or we can become number 10 and demonstrate that we are ready to go.

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AFRICAN AMERICAN ART IN THE 20TH CENTURY

February 16–May 10, 2020

Organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., this traveling exhibition presents 45 works dating from the 1930s through the 1990s by 34 black artists from the Smithsonian American Art Museum's collection.

SAAM Smithsonian American Art Museum

African American Art in the 20th Century is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Image: Lois Mailou Jones, Moon Masque, 1971; Oil and collage on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, bequest of the artist.

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Farnam Jahanian—President, Carnegie Mellon University

As a university, we stimulate growth by attracting and developing exceptional talent. And while academic institutions will continue to help grow Pittsburgh's reputation as a top destination for innovators, I believe that public-private partnerships focused on workforce development will most effectively drive long-term growth. As society faces an evolving technological future, we must mobilize today to nurture a dynamic, diverse workforce that is prepared for the jobs of tomorrow, including a focus on upskilling



or reskilling the existing workforce. We need community colleges, universities, the private sector, and government to come together to create meaningful pathways for all citizens in this new economy and we must also be deliberate in recognizing and removing the structural barriers that prevent people from leveraging transformative opportunities. Cultivating a competitive workforce in this way will attract and grow the companies that will spur long-lasting economic development in the region. Importantly, in order to make the most of these investments in human capital and retain the region's talent, it is also so critical that our communities are recognized as great places to live, work and play—with excellent schools, parks and green spaces, clean air and water, a vibrant cultural life and accessible transportation.



Esther L. Bush—President and CEO, Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

Too many of Pittsburgh's African American residents face some of the nation's most daunting conditions and consequences of those conditions. Just as the body cannot be well when parts are unhealthy, so Pittsburgh cannot thrive when nearly one-quarter of Pittsburgh residents are obstructed by poor health conditions, unsafe and inadequate housing, below standard educational opportunities, and the resulting low-income job options and high unemployment.

By uniting with regional leaders and fellow Pittsburghers from all walks of life to ensure healthy environments, decent and affordable housing, and educational excellence for all, employers have it within their means to develop a flourishing source of competent potential employees committed to our region.

Ken Gormley—President, Duquesne University

Metro areas like Pittsburgh that are sustaining reinvention and smart growth are those that invest in new workers and reward ventures connected to their region. Many of Pittsburgh's strongest institutions have storied histories that define our place. What can we do to attract and retain the people in the professions and trades that will enrich Pittsburgh?

What if foundations, economic development organizations and other civic structures made place-based investment our top priority, building our existing businesses or investing in new ones with a preference for those that make our location critical to their plan? For instance, urban green industry is revitalizing vacant spaces to create new opportunities in Hazelwood, Braddock and other former steel mill sites that once built our region. The Carrie Furnaces site in Rankin is cultivating investment in a film and entertainment village centered around this riverfront space amid Pittsburgh's



rich history and iconic location.

As a practice, place-based impact investing already prioritizes the positive social and environmental stewardship so important to our region's future. The best plans include all kinds of workers and residents,

and they focus as much on sustainable communities as they do on a sustainable venture.

If the anchors of our region prioritize place-based impact investing, we can stem population loss and reap the benefits of businesses that foster enduring vitality in Pittsburgh.



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“Carnegie Mellon University is positioned like no other institution to define and lead the space where technology and humanity intersect.”

- Farnam Jahanian
President, Carnegie Mellon University

“Walking To The Sky”, © Jonathan Borofsky, (2006)
Jonathan Borofsky is a graduate of CMU’s College of Fine Arts (CFA). “Walking To The Sky” was donated to the university by Jill Kraus, a CFA alumna, and her husband, Peter.

**Carnegie
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Mary Frances Cooper—President and Director, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

Good jobs, good schools, affordability and social infrastructure are elements that attract people to a place and encourage them to stay. Pittsburgh is making efforts in these areas. It is not likely, however, that we will grow our community simply by encouraging people from within this country to relocate to here. The world is full of people who seek opportunity and want to create a good life for themselves and their families, and they could do this here in Pittsburgh. We have an infrastructure in place that can support immigrants, including the public library, which, throughout



our 125-year history, has always helped newcomers as they seek to make their way in their new home and work toward citizenship. Indeed, the founder of our library, Andrew Carnegie, was himself an immigrant. He came to Pittsburgh as a child from Scotland, worked hard and strove to give back to his new community. We need to strengthen and enhance this infrastructure and build up our capacity to incorporate people from various countries and cultures

into our community in a way that enables them to be true to their authentic selves while contributing to the growth, vitality and dynamism that is our future.

Timothy Parks—President and CEO, Life'sWork

Twenty years ago, as CEO of the newly formed Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, I faced the daunting challenge of devising a comprehensive marketing plan for growing the region.

Then, as now, one of the most pressing and seemingly intractable issues was growing our population both by retaining a higher percentage of the thousands of the region's college graduates as well as attracting others to Pittsburgh. Thus was born the now "infamous" (and perhaps somewhat misguided) character of Border Guard Bob who, through a multimedia



campaign, was created to poke fun at ourselves while delivering the message that before you leave, take another look at the opportunities Pittsburgh offered. Today, with a much improved and diversified economic landscape, we still need to dramatically shift in-migration trends.

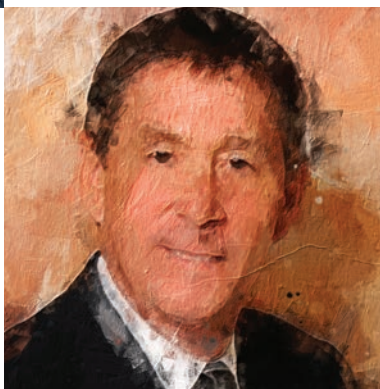
While we must re-double our efforts to invest in and keep our indigenous workforce to adapt to the 21st century economy, I believe we need to embark on a bold, perhaps even provocative, branding/marketing campaign explicitly targeting individuals, internationally and domestically, to consider Pittsburgh as a place to restart or build new lives. As with the endless chase to provide economic incentives to sweeten the pie for corporate relocations, let's create a fund (an immigration Kickstarter fund) to facilitate "familiarization" tours as well as incentive packages for individuals and families to come to Pittsburgh.

We don't need to bring back Bob, but we need to aggressively and unapologetically tell the world that Pittsburgh is an exciting, welcoming and inclusive place.

David Malone—Chairman and CEO, Gateway Financial

Why don't we turn problems into opportunities? Evidence shows clearly that differences in health are striking in communities with unstable housing, low income, food deserts and poor transportation, etc.—resulting in a substantially disproportionate share of accelerating health care costs (estimates as high as 50 percent of our region's total health care costs). These same communities are plagued with dismal high school graduation rates and generational poverty. We also know that appropriate intervention that connects people with readily available services can dramatically improve the lives of those born in these underserved communities.

There are a myriad of initiatives working on parts of the problem. However, it would be far more effective if we would come together and work on a unified and organized plan. We have the resources, and the problem is relatively small here compared with other regions. Why can't Pittsburgh become the first region in America to solve this problem?



Highmark and Allegheny Health Network are focused on the fact-based vision initially developed by the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and inspired by work from organizations such as Catholic Charities and Mission of Mercy. It is being implemented by the community-based initiative

"One Northside," led by the Buhl Foundation and Project Destiny.

The goal would be to connect every family with existing providers. The result would be declining health care costs, increased graduation rates, a more robust and diverse workforce and countless neighbors having a chance to share in the prosperity and dignity deserved by all.

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Jane Werner—Executive Director, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh has always been a city for families. I'm constantly amazed at the generations that stay in the region and all of the "expatriates" who find their way back home when it's time to start a family. It's a great place to raise children. That's especially true for families of means. Unfortunately, children whose families are at the lower end of the economic scale tend to lose out. I propose that every decision we make as a region is made with all children at the center. The pre-K proposal, put forth by the county executive, is a great place to start but what about our elementary, middle and high school citizens? If we become known as a region committed to all children, no matter their economic status, then we become a region focused on the future. Our air and water would get cleaner, our educational system would be stellar, our infrastructure and housing would improve, our health care would focus on the most vulnerable, immigration to Pittsburgh would become desirable, wages would rise and our arts would become even more vibrant. We would truly become Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, filled with people who think of children first.

James McQuade—President and CEO, Dollar Bank

As I see it, two issues greatly impact Pittsburgh's ability to maintain significant growth. First, we must

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connect our region's workforce more readily to the business environments where they are needed. Our public transportation system is woefully behind the demands of the community. Why is there still no high-speed connection between Downtown Pittsburgh and Oakland, which is Pennsylvania's third leading center of commerce? Our business centers will thrive when we connect our intellectual capital with our centers of business. This has been demonstrated in the explosive commercial growth of East Liberty and its proximity to Pittsburgh's universities.

Reinforcing this idea is the topography of our region, which begs for high-speed mass transit. Communities in the east, north and west could benefit from the high-speed connectivity utilized by south Pittsburgh communities.

The same can be said for the transportation void between Downtown Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh International Airport. Our public and private leaders must make doing business in this region seamless. One



starting point is airport accessibility.

Second and closely related to transportation is our need to maintain an adequate supply of affordable housing for our workforce. How can a region satisfy the growth of the service sector and trades that keep our infrastructure working without providing affordable housing for these individuals? We have seen the significant benefit homeownership offers individuals, families and communities, but they cannot take advantage of these resources when they are priced out of the housing market.

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A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of several modern skyscrapers with glass facades. The buildings are reflected in each other, creating a sense of height and urban density. The sky is a clear, bright blue with some light clouds.

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Laura Karet—President and CEO, Giant Eagle

To build a robust, inclusive economy, we need to supercharge efforts to attract businesses to the region and ensure that the ones already investing here, prosper. We must continue to innovate and infuse technology in all sectors of the regional economy and attract and retain diverse talent who will propel our companies and region forward.

Much of this work begins with a commitment to remove employment barriers for everyone by creating a workforce culture where all skills, talents and abilities are cultivated. At Giant Eagle, we are doing this by partnering with local colleges and universities to retain young talent through internships and apprenticeships, such as developing one we recently launched with Community College of Allegheny County to develop and

train store leaders, meat cutters, cake decorators and CDL drivers.

Our Technology Annex, which will soon open in

Lawrenceville, will provide an opportunity to attract technical, digital and creative expertise.

And collectively, we must also focus firmly on making our region—and world—a more sustainable place through reduced plastics, carbon and waste.



Stefani Pashman— CEO, Allegheny Conference on Community Development

I envision multi-colored communities with people of all backgrounds living, playing and working side by side—all sharing in the prosperity of this place. I envision a Pittsburgh with connectivity that allows for communities to interface and flourish.

Imagine leading the world on communications and transportation technology solutions that make interactions seamless. How do we lead on 5G adoption so we increase



economic opportunity and access to social services such as education, employment and health care? How could we improve remote learning via new technologies to make sure our whole region benefits from our educational assets?

What if we were the leader in autonomous public transportation—connecting workers to jobs and employers to customers—making it possible for anyone to get between two points in the city in no more than 15 minutes and to surrounding counties within 45 minutes while cutting in half the number of private vehicles?

What if enhanced connectivity removed physical and social barriers that fuel misunderstanding and hatred? If we could build on our legacy as a place that tries new things and solves problems through technology, we would be a more prosperous Pittsburgh.

David Finegold—President, Chatham University

Becoming a Green Talent Magnet—

As we enter a new decade, the world and Pittsburgh face many daunting challenges and exciting opportunities. Topping both lists are climate change and the environment. Scientists tell us if we don't achieve dramatic changes in our CO2 emissions by 2030, then we're likely to suffer devastating effects from global warming. But introducing the innovations needed to avoid disaster is also a \$30 trillion economic opportunity. Pittsburgh is well-positioned to be a leader in this green



revolution, and in the process, become a magnet for attracting those who recognize that climate change will be the defining issue for their generation. To seize this opportunity, we must first tackle the major environmental issues facing our region: improving air and water quality, building a sustainable local food system that captures more carbon than it emits, expanding autonomous vehicles and a smart grid powered by renewable energy. Following

the inspiration of our alum, Rachel Carson '29, Chatham is modeling many of these necessary changes at our Eden Hall Campus through the work of the faculty and students in the Falk School of Sustainability and Environment.

Vincent J. Delie, Jr.—Chairman, President and CEO, F.N.B. Corporation, First National Bank

Local leadership must remain focused on business creation and job growth to spur economic expansion, and this should be our number one priority. Economic opportunity leads to success for our region and provides the resources to address other social issues as well as educational and infrastructure needs. This engine drives population growth and retention leading to a much larger tax base. The demands are great, but our ability to provide for others and invest in infrastructure is linked to our own prosperity. This can be accomplished by lowering taxes and better aligning our great academic institutions with businesses.



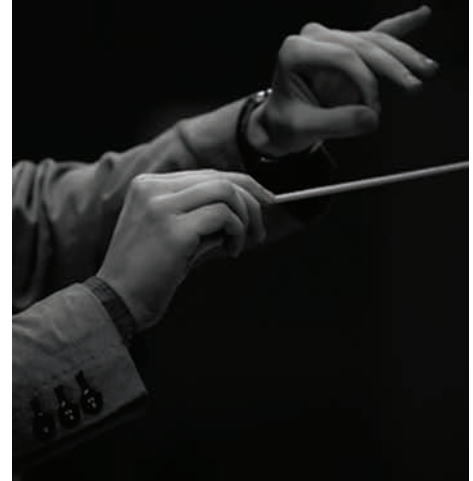
Karen Hanlon—Executive Vice President and COO of Highmark Health

Embracing diversity, rather than just talking about it, must become a priority for our region if we expect to attract and retain the best and

brightest minds who will shape the future of our region. Collectively, we have a responsibility to welcome diverse people and thoughts into our everyday work lives. All voices matter and different perspectives, experiences, and ideas mirror the world today. We cannot just check the box; we must have substantive outcomes and we must also hold ourselves accountable. Business and civic leaders must commit to building corporate cultures and participating in programs such as the Rooney Rule and The Advanced Leadership Initiative that will create access and opportunities to put minorities in leadership positions. Leaders must also have the courage to step aside and enable our younger residents, both men and women, to become the stewards of Pittsburgh's future. Our very existence, literally, hinges on it.

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Richard V. Piacentini—President and CEO, Phipps Botanical Gardens

Pittsburgh has so much to offer the world. Regularly shortlisted in national and international publications for its best-in-class amenities, cultural attractions, universities and overall livability, the sooty city of the late 19th century has evolved into a gem of an American metropolis with inimitable character, culture and potential.

To attract and retain young people, we need to recognize that many of them seek transportation methods that don't rely on cars. In that regard, Pittsburgh can be compared to a desert island. We are within 500 miles of half the population of the United States, but to get there, you have little viable choice beyond a car or plane. We desperately need efficient interconnections of high-speed rail to cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Columbus, Chicago, D.C., Detroit and others that could truly catalyze the growth and vitality of our region. Reliance on cumbersome, emissions-heavy air and car travel has isolated us from our neighbors and capped our potential. With rail travel, the Pittsburgh that so many of our neighbors read about would be within easy reach for more guests than ever before, bringing economic growth while adding incentive for residents to make our city a long-term home.

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**Melia Tourangeau—President
and CEO, Pittsburgh Symphony
Orchestra**

I think the region needs to strategically leverage and position all that we are and stop worrying about what we aren't. Quality of life is a real driver for employees and employers, and Pittsburgh has it all for just about any interest. I often say that Pittsburgh is a "mini-me" of New York City—in all the best ways. We have exceptional cultural assets, walkability, exciting nightlife, fantastic restaurants and world-class entertainment (like the PSO!). But it's affordable, manageable, family-oriented and with friendly hospitality. The topography and natural assets of the rivers, bridges and hills create a uniquely beautiful place to live that appeals to the outdoor enthusiast as well as the urbanite. Some of the drivers that persuaded me to move here almost five years ago were the reputation and legacy of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra as one of the best orchestras in the world, and its location in such a vibrant and active downtown. This is a sports city, and it is so much more, and as arts and cultural organizations, we want to help the region as it continues its strategy to sell itself to the world. We join you as part of the solution.

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**J. Kevin McMahon—President
and CEO, Pittsburgh Cultural
Trust**

Thirty-five years ago, Pittsburgh faced a declining industry and shrinking population due to changes endured by many rust belt cities. H.J. “Jack” Heinz II and his band of dreamers founded the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and thus proved that the arts can serve as a catalyst for economic, commercial and residential development, while enriching the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Since the 1980s, the Cultural Trust has strengthened and grown Pittsburgh’s Cultural District through mission-driven efforts to integrate the arts and culture into Downtown Pittsburgh’s urban landscape.

Looking forward to the next 35 years in Pittsburgh, we need to not only maintain the



transformation of our city but move forward through arts and culture—more performances, more public art and free events, more businesses occupying formerly empty storefronts, more residential units Downtown. This progress cannot happen without continuing big, bold steps in Pittsburgh’s Cultural District. We need to improve and grow public green spaces, enhance our historic theaters and build new

ones, and expand free and low-cost programming to bring new, diverse audiences into the city.

Today, it is the “quality of life” that is the prime determiner of where people choose to live and work. Pittsburgh has a great quality of life, but it must be sustained and supported and marketed so our city can continue to be recognized as one of the most livable cities.

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MICHAEL'S STORY

When he entered the workforce after high school, Michael struggled to find a job where he felt comfortable. He tried out different positions, but the changing schedules and pressure to keep up with other employees filled his life with stress. He frequently told his parents, that he did not want to go. Michael's family knew that he needed something different.

"He's proud of what he does every day. He comes to work, he tells people this is his job, he gets paid. He's just happy, and that's the most important thing."

— MICHAEL'S PARENTS

THE TRANSFORMATION

Life'sWork counselors found the right combination of support structures to help Michael succeed. These included working in Life'sWork's direct employment facility and joining the small group staffing program which gave him the opportunity to work several days a week at regional businesses such as Gamma Sports and Mitsubishi Electric Power Products. His attitude toward work has changed entirely - he is excited to go to his job every day and he enjoys what he does.

OUR MISSION

Life'sWork of Western PA is a non-profit organization that empowers people to live the life they choose. We support people with disabilities, people facing other employment barriers and young adults on their journey towards purpose, self-esteem and independence through meaningful work.

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Bill Hunt—President and CEO, Elmhurst Group; Chair, Carnegie Museums

I am not here to state our taxes are too high. I am, though, here to say that the format of our corporate income tax and local property tax actually discourages new companies and individuals from locating to our region. Our tax structure is a drawbridge that protects the region's existing residents, while discouraging new ones from moving here. This is no way to grow western Pennsylvania.

First, Pennsylvania's corporate income tax is one of the highest "perceived" tax rates in the country. I say "perceived" because many of our existing companies in the state pay at a much lower level due to special exemptions and other tax strategies. Perfectly legal, but it takes an approach that many new prospective companies to our region may not want to pursue, especially when our competitor states already offer lower corporate tax rates. The solution is to simplify the process by lowering our corporate tax rate while offsetting the lower revenue by reducing the existing exemptions.

Second, our local property tax structure has a similar bias against new companies and residents. Those new to our region pay taxes based on a higher assessed property



value due to their recent purchase price. Existing residents have traditionally been able to pay less in taxes on similar properties because those properties have not been reassessed in many years. I recently heard a new resident tell me that, yes, our region's home prices were lower than their previous house in the Washington, D.C., area, but their monthly mortgage payments were nearly the same due to the inclusion of their higher

property taxes here. The solution is for the state to require reappraisals of all properties throughout the commonwealth every three to five years, with the commitment from the local taxing bodies to decrease the millage to be commensurate with the increase in assessed values.

Restructuring both the state corporate income and local property taxes may not be politically popular, but to grow this region, the state must create new tax structures that no longer discriminate against those companies and people who are considering moving to western Pennsylvania. PQ

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Contest-Winning Ideas for Pittsburgh's Future

LIGHT THE BRIDGES! For a gleaming Downtown

written by **JEFFERY FRASER**

DRESSING THE RACHEL CARSON BRIDGE WITH 27,000 color-changing LED lights got the public's attention in 2016. And the popularity of the temporary installation, done as part of the City of Pittsburgh's bicentennial celebration, bought it an extended 18-month run.

If that's the case, says former Allegheny County Chief Executive Jim Roddey, why not artistically illuminate all of the major bridges that cross the three rivers that define the city's geography?

Riverlife, a local nonprofit, commissioned a plan more than 15 years ago for creatively lighting the city's entire riverfront, including its major bridges. And Allegheny County is scheduled to light four of the bridges it owns. Roddey resurrected the concept for the 2019 Pittsburgh Tomorrow Contest, and the judges felt it was a winner.

Under his proposal, the scope of lighted bridges would span from the West End Bridge across the Ohio River to include the

bridges that cross the Allegheny River up to the 31st Street Bridge, and the 10th Street, Smithfield and Birmingham bridges that cross the Monongahela River.

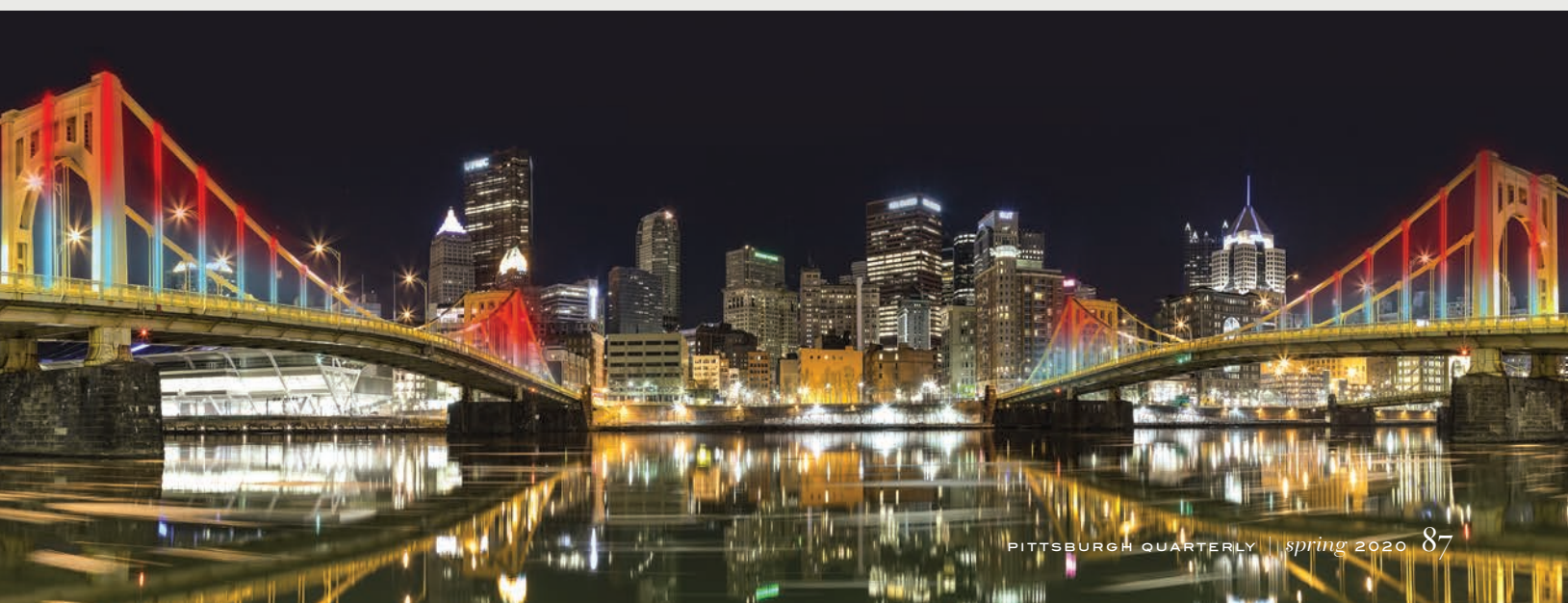
Roddey, whose career included running an advertising business, suggests lighting the bridges on a grand scale could be attention-grabbing enough to promote the city and region without the cost of a national marketing campaign. "Pittsburgh needs to tell its story. We light up the bridges and the news media and social media will take care of it. They'll tell everybody."

Creatively lit bridges attracting wide acclaim are found in dozens of cities across the globe, from Lyon and London to New York, Tampa and, closer to home, Johnstown.

Riverlife's 2004 vision of illuminating the Pittsburgh riverfront included permanent lighting on 16 bridges to creatively highlight the structures. Installing and maintaining such lighting was estimated to cost between \$1 million to \$3 million per bridge, said Stephan Bontrager, the nonprofit's vice president of communications and outreach.

In 2015, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto asked the group to explore lighting all 16 bridges for the city's bicentennial. But the timetable proved too tight to pull off, Bontrager said. "We went back and said, why don't we work on one of the bridges, do it well on a temporary basis and see if it inspires bridge owners to implement

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permanent artistic lighting when their bridges undergo rehabbing?”

The result was “Energy Flow,” a colorful installation on the Rachel Carson Bridge that drew its power from small wind turbines and won admiration from residents and public officials alike, helping convince the county to permanently illuminate other bridges it owns.

By 2023, LED lighting is expected to create a glowing tribute to the architecture of the Roberto Clemente, Andy Warhol and Rachel Carson bridges across the Allegheny River. Known as the “Three Sisters,” they were designed by the county Department of Public Works and built by the American Bridge Company from 1924–1928. They’re the only trio of nearly identical bridges in the

United States and stand as rare examples of the self-anchored suspension bridge. The 10th Street Bridge is also on the list to be lit. “These are great, historic structures,” said Stephen Shanley, director of the Department of Public Works. “Showing them off is something we’ve wanted to do for some time.”

Final cost is pending completion of the final design, which is expected this year. Generally, the piers, towers and pilons will be illuminated and necklace lighting will be used to trace the bridge suspenders in the night sky, said Darla Cravotta, county director of community relations and special projects. “We believe they’ll be timeless in the way they look.” ■



steampipe: John Butler II; steamclock: Adobe Stock

VENTING OFF STEAM

And turning it into a musical Downtown clock

written by **JEFFERY FRASER**

LYNN DUNBAR IS WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE vertical steam pipe that juts from the pavement at Penn Avenue and Seventh Street in Downtown Pittsburgh for patrons of the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts and the rest of the Cultural District to see. Her husband is in the Pittsburgh Symphony, she once worked for the symphony and she sings in the Mendelssohn Choir.

“I spend a lot of time in the Cultural District. And I’ve always thought that steam pipe was an eyesore,” she said.

She happened upon a way to transform it into something

wonderful during a vacation to Vancouver, in British Columbia, Canada. In its Gastown neighborhood, a steam clock was built to mask one of the grates that vent the city’s steam heating system. Although designed to fit with the Victorian Italianate-influenced architecture of the neighborhood, it isn’t an antique. It was built with private donations in 1977.

It transformed a steam grate from a place where homeless residents once sought to nest to a major attraction for tourists who gather to hear it whistle the arrival of every quarter hour.

Dunbar, convinced that such a clock could enhance Pittsburgh’s Cultural District, pitched the idea to the city’s mayor, Bill Peduto, and Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and

a group of foundation leaders in October as a 2019 Pittsburgh Tomorrow Contest finalist.

The pipe she wants to hide with the clock vents an underground steam delivery system that heats several dozen buildings and draws its water from Pittsburgh's "fourth river," a large aquifer flowing beneath Downtown streets.

It would become one of only a handful of working steam clocks in the world. The first was built by Englishman John Inshaw in 1859 to draw customers to his Birmingham, UK, tavern.

The two-ton, 16-foot-high Gastown Steam Clock in Vancouver was built as part of a campaign to revitalize the city's historic shipping hub and warehouse district. It was intended as a curiosity to attract visitors and to Gastown's new offerings, which include a fashion district, galleries and restaurant scene. "I'll tell you what, it's thriving now," Dunbar said. "And there is always a little bit of a crowd around the clock waiting for the hour or quarter hour."

Today, the whistles that mark time are stream-driven, but little else about the clock is. Small electric motors help it keep time more accurately. When built and designed by Canadian clockmaker Ray Saunders, it carried a price tag of nearly \$44,500. More than 30 years later, building something similar could cost three times as much.

The clock was a gift to the city from a local business association, shop owners and other private donors who raised the money to have it made. The city and business group share the cost of maintaining it, which is close to \$11,000 a year, according to a Vancouver spokesman.

A clock that would conceal the steam pipe on the high-traffic sidewalk outside of the Benedum remains an idea at the moment. Dunbar doesn't have a specific design in mind, but sees it as an opportunity for local engineers and artists to create a signature work that would turn a crude pipe into something more befitting the city its steam helps to heat. "It could be Pittsburgh-specific," she said. "You can have cultural representation in it, Steelers, robotics. It would be cool." ■

DANCING ON PITTSBURGH'S STREETS

Bringing Gene Kelly alive again

written by **JULIA FRASER**

A SHIRTLESS TUPAC SHAKUR STALKED THE STAGE at California's Coachella music festival in 2012. He raised his arms to the roar of the stunned crowd and launched into his posthumous hit single, "Hail Mary." The performance took place more than 15 years after Shakur was murdered in a drive-by shooting. But on that night at Coachella, he lived on, trading rhymes onstage with Snoop Dogg until his image disintegrated into the night sky.

Tupac's virtual performance was courtesy of a computer-gener-

ated projection, similar to a hologram. An artist can now perform his own tribute.

Christine O'Toole envisions Gene Kelly skating down Penn Avenue in Downtown Pittsburgh maneuvering through theatergoers in a virtual performance from "It's Always Fair Weather." Judges liked her idea enough to make her a finalist in the 2019 Pittsburgh Tomorrow Contest, and it was met with approval from Mayor Bill Peduto, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and five foundation leaders.

O'Toole's idea evolved from recurring discussions in the city about building a statue to honor Gene Kelly. She countered with a virtual dance, feeling that "a monument to a man whose genius was movement should move."

Large-scale three-dimensional visual projections have been used to have Michael Jackson perform at the 2014 Billboard Music Awards, project Edward Snowden's head on a statue at Brooklyn's Fort Green Park and unleash a giant, flaming lion to bound across the roof of a football stadium in Argentina. The technology to project Kelly onto Pittsburgh's sidewalks is here.

"It's easy enough to have one person who moves in a fairly confined space on a stage," O'Toole said. "It's much more difficult to make it a larger space. I had hoped this could be something that happens outside in Downtown Pittsburgh."

While it's tough to pin down a cost for a project of that scale, estimates of the cost of the Tupac performance ranged from \$100,000 to \$400,000, according to an MTV News article. The Michael Jackson tribute cost "multiple millions," according to the company that produced the show.

Steve Audia of Carnegie Mellon University's Entertainment Technology Center said that one of the reasons for the cost is that each still frame of the movie would have to be individually reconstructed, a time-consuming task.

The cost estimates of an outdoor hologram have led O'Toole to also consider a more affordable option using augmented reality technology that makes images materialize on a user's device, such as a smartphone. New digital platforms, such as Aery, host fine art exhibitions in augmented reality. Artist Richard Humann's "Ascensions," a cluster of imaginary constellations in the sky, hang above the High Line in New York City when viewed through the Aery platform on an iPad.

Using similar technology, a user could walk through a real-life environment, such as Penn Avenue in Downtown Pittsburgh, and a digital artwork like a dancing Gene Kelly would skate across the screen of a phone or tablet. As with any projection, there are legal issues to sort out before Kelly can dance again. Licensing rights for the image would need to be secured, for example. The Gene Kelly Image Trust owns the images.

And as it turns out, it's something Kelly's widow, Patricia Ward Kelly, has been considering. In an e-mail to O'Toole, she wrote, "We are actually ahead of you on all of this. We have been exploring digital platforms for several years, including Holograms and VR/AR [virtual reality/augmented reality] imaging and are considering several possible installations around the globe." ■

Julia Fraser is a Pittsburgh Today staff writer and research specialist.

TURNING WASTE INTO ENERGY

Biodigestors, absent in Pittsburgh, gain popularity elsewhere

written by **BILL O'TOOLE**

JOHNN STOLZ BELIEVES PITTSBURGH IS FLUSHING A critical source of renewable energy down the toilet. Literally.

He proposes the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County join the growing ranks of urban areas upgrading their wastewater treatment plants to renewable power plants that use the process of biodigestion to create energy.

Stolz, who is the director of the Center for Environmental Research and Education at Duquesne University, submitted the idea to the 2019 Pittsburgh Tomorrow Contest, sponsored by Pittsburgh Quarterly and Pittsburgh Today. As a top finalist, he was invited to pitch his proposal to Mayor Bill Peduto and Allegheny County Chief Executive Rich Fitzgerald.

"We're not utilizing an incredible source of energy, and it's right under our feet," Stolz said.

In biodigestion facilities, machines grind organic compounds, such as food waste or sewage, into a thin slurry, which is then pumped into a heated, airtight tank where microbes break it down. The process creates and captures methane gas that can be used to power vehicles or generate electricity. The leftover sludge can be used as a potent fertilizer.

Unlike natural gas pumped from the earth, biodigestion produces gas from materials that will inevitably decompose and release methane into the air. As a result, biodigestion eliminates the release of the gas from those materials into the atmosphere.

"It's renewable, sustainable and carbon neutral," Stolz said.

Dozens of such facilities already exist around the country. Both Cleveland, Ohio, and Hermitage, Pa. have opened biodigestion plants in the past decade.

In Portland, Ore., the newly installed biodigestion system at the Columbia Boulevard Wastewater Treatment Plant will begin producing renewable natural gas this year for the city's commercial vehicle fleet. The city projects that the facilities will replace 1.34 million gallons of diesel fuel per year, generate over \$3 million in annual revenue and cut yearly greenhouse gas emissions by 21,000 tons.

While championed by environmental groups, the facilities have met their share of local resistance. In Cleveland, there have been persistent complaints about the smell coming from the plant. Stolz acknowledges that foul odors may occasionally escape, but he considers the process preferable to the continued expansion of the petrochemical industry.

For Pittsburgh's purposes, the Allegheny County Sanitary

Authority's (ALCOSAN) treatment plant, which produces 44,000 tons of dry waste every year, is a natural home for a biodigester, according to a feasibility study by students in Duquesne's sustainability MBA program. And Stolz said now might be an opportune time to consider one.

ALCOSAN is preparing to spend \$2 billion upgrading its infrastructure to prevent sewage overflows to comply with a consent decree with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. According to ALCOSAN, the project will include the expansion and a number of capital improvements to the sewage treatment plant.

Stolz is hesitant to put a price on the construction of a local biodigester. But he estimated that project could be completed for less than 1 percent of what ALCOSAN plans to spend. The Portland facility, similar to the scale of scope of what he envisions locally, cost \$12 million to build.

Beyond the sewage already in abundance at ALCOSAN, Stolz said several companies and institutions around the city have more waste to contribute to a biodigester. Pittsburgh's sports stadiums, for example, could contribute 143,340 pounds of food waste per year. Hospitals in Allegheny County produce a collective 49,530,500 pounds of human waste and 10,401,405 pounds of food waste annually.

ALCOSAN did not respond to requests for comment. Stolz said that since presenting his idea to the mayor and county executive, he's had discussions with Pittsburgh's Department of City Planning and is planning a gathering of local stakeholders this year. ■

ADDING AMENITIES TO BIKE TRAILS

What riders experience matters

written by **BILL O'TOOLE**

THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH IS POISED TO GAIN dozens of miles of new bike lanes in the next decade. While avid cyclist Tom Vesch welcomes the expansion, he suggests thinking beyond the trails themselves to consider the broader experience of riders.

"Our burgeoning trail system in the city could be enhanced to include amenities along them such as spray water parks, sand volleyball courts, playgrounds, food truck parking and areas featuring art and history," Vesch, a senior paralegal with Reed Smith, wrote when submitting the idea to the 2019 Pittsburgh Tomorrow Contest.

Adding such services was inspired by Vesch's trip to the bike trails of Stanley Park near downtown Vancouver, British Columbia,

just one of several cities across North America that combine their bike paths with local cultural and recreational resources.

In Austin, Texas, the 10-mile Butler Hike and Bike trails encompassing the city's Lady Bird Lake features foot showers, water fountains for both humans and canines and connections to nearby natural pools for swimmers and kayakers.

Portland, Ore.'s Eastbank Esplanade, a 1.5-mile loop through downtown on the banks of the Willamette River, features a series of historic markers detailing the history of the riverfront as well as several large-scale sculptures commissioned by the city.

Work to enhance the experience of riders with more amenities in southwestern Pennsylvania would likely involve local governments, trail and biking groups and others who contributed to the bike lanes and trails already in the region today.

But the results could bring benefits to the greater community, as well as those who ride on the trails. Popular bike paths tend to give local economies a boost, experts say. "Bicycle tourism is something like a billion-dollar industry in the United States. We should be trying to capture as much as possible," said Scott Bricker, executive director of the nonprofit Bike PGH.

"We could be investing in and outfitting Pittsburgh and its surrounding municipalities to be more bike-friendly. That way, when bicycle tourists get to Pittsburgh they can easily stay on their bikes and visit the neighborhoods, visit business districts, go to their hotel and go to restaurants."

Accommodating bicycling and walking has gotten more attention and investment in recent years. Yet, the City of Pittsburgh still has a relatively small number of bike lanes compared to other cities its size.

According to a 2018 national report from the League of American Bicyclists, Pittsburgh has 6.5 miles of protected lanes and 29.2 miles of other mixed-use bike lanes. It adds up to 1 mile of bike infrastructure per square-mile, the fifth-lowest of all small and midsize American cities.

Those numbers are likely to climb in the next several years. The city's 2020 capital budget includes \$3.4 million to upgrade and expand a number of bike lanes and trails around the city, while the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure is set to release its 10-year bike plan for public comment early this year.

Embracing cycling as a key component of local transportation policy would go a long way toward laying the foundation for a robust network of recreation and cultural amenities along our bike trails, Bricker said. He and Bike PGH envision a future system where bike tourists heading to the museums share lanes with locals running their errands. "We're for upgrading our entire trail system to make them useful 24/7," he said. "The people who live here benefit just as much, if not more, than the people we're trying to attract." P G

Bill O'Toole is a Pittsburgh Today staff writer.



The advertisement features a background image of a college campus with students walking. Overlaid on this are three red banners with white text and dashed borders. The first banner on the left says "#1 LEAST EXPENSIVE PRIVATE COLLEGE IN PENNSYLVANIA U.S. News". The middle banner says "AMERICA'S BEST VALUE COLLEGES + TOP COLLEGES Forbes". The third banner on the right says "#11 BEST SCHOOLS FOR INTERNSHIPS Princeton Review". Below these banners, the text "SEE HOW WE RANK" is written in large, white, serif capital letters. At the bottom of the ad, there are three small inset photos: the first shows two students wearing safety goggles and working with a lab instrument; the second shows a group of students sitting around a table, looking at a laptop; the third shows two students walking outdoors, one holding a backpack. To the right of these photos, on a red background, is the text "Grove City College is a nationally ranked liberal arts and sciences college where students are equipped to pursue their unique callings through an academically excellent and Christ-centered learning and living experience. Our students learn about their place in the world, and how to use their talents to succeed not only in life, but to advance the common good. An exceptional faculty, a beautiful campus, and a core curriculum that uses the wisdom of the ages inspires each generation to discover and create a better future. Tuition and costs run about half the national average before scholarships and financial aid. Our graduates see a 96 percent placement rate and enjoy greater career satisfaction and higher than average starting salaries." Below this text is the website "gcc.edu/howwerank" and the Grove City College logo, which consists of a red shield with three white horizontal stripes and the text "GROVE CITY COLLEGE" to its right.

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gcc.edu/howwerank

 **GROVE CITY
COLLEGE**

Crime is Dropping, BUT SO ARE RELATIONS WITH POLICE

written by **BILL O'TOOLE**

SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONTINUES TO BE one of the safest metropolitan regions in the nation, and the latest data suggest it's only getting safer.

The overall crime rate in the seven-county Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area stood at 1,687.7 per 100,000 residents in 2018, a year-over-year decrease of 9 percent, according to FBI Uniform Crime Report data. Only Boston had a lower overall crime rate among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions.

"Compared to other regions, we look pretty good," said Alfred Blumstein, a professor of urban systems at Carnegie Mellon University. "I think this story is largely a positive one for public safety in the city and in the Pittsburgh region."

But local experts say the region still faces significant public safety challenges. "An important pressing concern is the issue of police community relations," Blumstein said. "The notion of trust and faith between the community and the police is still nowhere near as good as we would like it to be."

CRIME AT LOW TIDE

Southwestern Pennsylvania long has ranked among the lowest-crime regions in metro America. Seattle, for example, had the highest overall crime rate among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions. At 3,690.3 crimes per 100,000 residents, its overall crime rate is nearly twice as high as what is reported in the Pittsburgh MSA.

Compared to southwestern Pennsylvania, Indianapolis has 1,597 more crimes per 100,000 residents, Baltimore reports 1,503 more crimes per 100,000 residents and Philadelphia reports 674. Even benchmark regions that enjoy rising popularity and populations can't match Pittsburgh when it comes to low crime rates. Charlotte has 1,479 more crimes per 100,000 residents and Austin has 963.

The Pittsburgh MSA did see increases in several categories of violent crime. The murder rate increased a hair from 5.4 to 5.5 per 100,000 residents, and the rate of forcible rape increased from 20.6 to 25.8. Motor vehicle theft and rates of aggravated assault also rose slightly. But even with the increases, the rates of rape, aggravated assault and car theft in southwestern Pennsylvania are lower than in any other benchmark region. And the Pittsburgh MSA saw significantly lower rates of other crimes, such as burglary, which fell by 23 percent.

The numbers follow many years of consistent declines in

violent crime, both in Pittsburgh and across the nation. "We're now at extremely low crime rates in comparison historically," said Edward Mulvey, director of the Law and Psychiatry Program at the University of Pittsburgh.

As with all metros across the country, crime in the Pittsburgh MSA tends to be concentrated in and around urban areas.

Such neighborhoods often contend with longstanding regional problems, such as decades of shrinking populations and economies. More recent problems, such as the opioid epidemic, are not exclusive to cities, affecting suburban and rural communities alike.

Despite these entrenched issues, Pittsburgh's crime rates are the envy of many other similarly sized MSAs. However, at the neighborhood level, new data suggest a persistent and widening gap in the degree of trust communities have in the police who serve them.

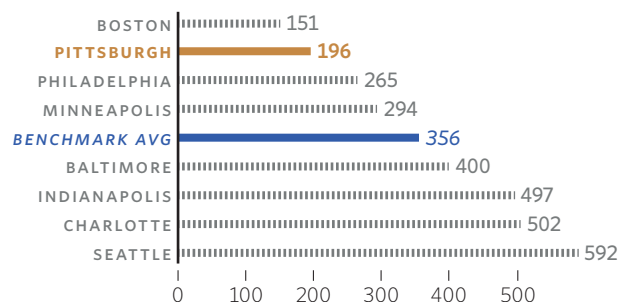
CHALLENGING RELATIONSHIPS

In Pittsburgh's high-crime areas, relations between residents and local police have eroded over the last several years, community surveys carried out by the Washington, D.C.-based Urban Institute suggest.

Grading on a scale of 1 through 5, residents rated their "relatability to the police" an average of 2.9 in 2015. That rating fell to 2.6 in 2017. Their "willingness to partner with the police" rating dropped from 3.8 to 3.3, and their views of "police legitimacy" slipped from 2.9 to 2.7.

Using a combination of data from host police departments and public information, institute researchers and their community part-

Public Safety: Burglary
Rate per 100,000 residents



Burglary rate within MSA; highest/lowest among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions. SOURCE: 2018 FBI Uniform Crime Report

ners identified residential streets with the highest concentrations of poverty and violent crime, and then conducted public surveys measuring community perceptions of the police across a variety of topics. The surveys took place in two waves, one in late 2015, and another in 2017, with different respondents surveyed in each wave.

The surveys were done as part of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, a multi-city collaboration between the U.S. Department of Justice and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice's National Network for Safe Communities, the Center for Policing Equity and Yale Law School.

Trainings and interventions were developed to strengthen relationships between police and community members. Best practices, including implicit bias training for police and frameworks for community engagement, were rolled out in participating cities starting in 2015, including Pittsburgh. Other cities included Stockton, Calif.; Minneapolis, Minn.; Gary, Ind.; Fort Worth, Texas and Birmingham, Ala.

Pittsburgh is the only city in the initiative where every single metric for perceptions of the police and police-community relations got worse over the two-year period.

Some local experts say the data, although small, highlight longstanding tensions between

local law enforcement and the wider community, especially in high-crime areas of the city.

"We deservedly can say we really went all in on that Justice Department training, but it wasn't enough," said David Harris, a professor of Law at the University of Pittsburgh. "I think equity and fair treatment continue to be an issue here, whether we want to recognize it or not."

However, Mulvey said the numbers don't do justice to the overall positive impact that a more community-oriented approach

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taken by police over the last several years has had. "It's a short-term read on a long-term problem, and I don't think it's that informative, frankly."

City police Commander Eric Holmes, the local liaison for the project, said the bureau considers their work with the initiative to be a success. In addition to bolstering longstanding community engagement programs, Pittsburgh has added procedural justice concepts, such as implicit bias trainings and evaluations of all officers. They developed intervention strategies for specific underserved communities, such as East African immigrants, and worked with the Department of Public Safety to develop a multicultural unit.

Holmes said he takes the community survey data seriously, but doesn't find them surprising.

"Most of them, maybe all of them, were done in high crime areas, in neighborhoods where historically we've had a strained relationship, and the data shows that. We're a work in progress as a police agency, and it just shows us that there's more work to be done."

FRAGMENTED ENFORCEMENT

Improving police-community relations in the region's low income and high-crime areas is made all the more difficult by a longstanding characteristic of Allegheny County: the fragmentation of local governments and public services.

There are 109 separate police departments spread across the county. Within the City of Pittsburgh alone, the city police have

overlapping jurisdiction with police departments from the six major universities as well as both UPMC and Allegheny Health Network hospitals.

In many former steel towns nearby, local tax bases are stretched thin, leaving little money for community engagement, enhanced accountability and other measures to help the officers policing them.

"We have all these departments with very little oversight, with the inability to do anything but some of the more basic tasks, taking on some of these big regional problems," Harris said. "It's simply not sustainable in a way that I think serves everybody and gives everybody good service."

While Cheswick Borough and Springdale Township elected to combine their police departments earlier this year, similar efforts at police consolidations historically have been met with fierce resistance from local departments. "Having a metro police agency would be awesome," Holmes said. "But I will be long retired before that would ever happen."

He and other experts emphasize that public safety is a complex issue and that further improvements depend on addressing the many conditions in the region that influence crime.

"We have to think of a much more holistic approach. It can't just be more cops, more arrests. That's never the answer. I think we know that now," Harris said. "Woe unto us if we don't think more broadly and try to bring not just the necessary law enforcement, but the social services, the investment, the jobs. The underpinning of the community is what has to be repaired." ■

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HOW ALLEGHENY COUNTY VIEWS PUBLIC EDUCATION

written by JEFFERY FRASER

ALLEGHENY COUNTY RESIDENTS ARE TOUGH graders when assessing the performance of the public schools that educate 115,000 county children in grades kindergarten through 12, a far-ranging survey of their views on education suggests.

Fewer than half give schools a better-than-fair rating for their class size, funding, student preparedness, parental involvement and diversity of the student body. But on one of the most critical aspects of education, well more than six in 10 county residents describe the quality of instruction in local public school classrooms as ranging from good to excellent.

The survey, conducted by Pittsburgh Today and the University Center for Social and Urban Research at the University of Pittsburgh (UCSUR), explores their perspectives on education issues and policy as well as their views on the performance of schools in southwestern Pennsylvania's most populous county.

They have doubts, for example, about the usefulness of state-administered standardized tests and the quality of education that home schooling offers. More career technical education tops



their wish list for their local public schools. They overwhelmingly value early childhood education and advocate for it to be part of every school district. And they widely endorse giving families greater choice in the schools their children attend.

Nearly 2,300 Allegheny County residents took the online survey in October. They were identified from the UCSUR Research Registry and data were adjusted to make the sample representative of the demographic characteristics of the county.

Their responses offer the broad perspective of the county as a whole, as well as insight into how race, household income and whether people live in the City of Pittsburgh or the suburbs tend to color their views and experiences.

SPENDING DECISIONS

Most Allegheny County residents agree that the amount of money spent on schools influences the quality of the education they offer to students. Only 5 percent of residents don't believe that funding affects quality.

An overall majority of residents feel that funding for public schools is adequate, while four in 10 believe they are underfunded. Athletic programs and facilities is the only line item on which a majority of residents favor cutting if education spending has to be reduced. Meanwhile, at least three in four residents oppose spending cuts for buildings, transportation, school personnel, after-school programs, and art, music and library programs.

Residents are more willing to make changes that improve their public schools. More than eight in 10 favor more art and music instruction, as well as more technology-based education, such as adaptive learning software and maker spaces, and more career technical education opportunities, such as auto repair and culinary arts training.

And more than eight in 10 residents agree that education funding in Pennsylvania should be equitable for all students, even if that means taking money from some wealthier school districts and investing it in ones with leaner resources.

TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

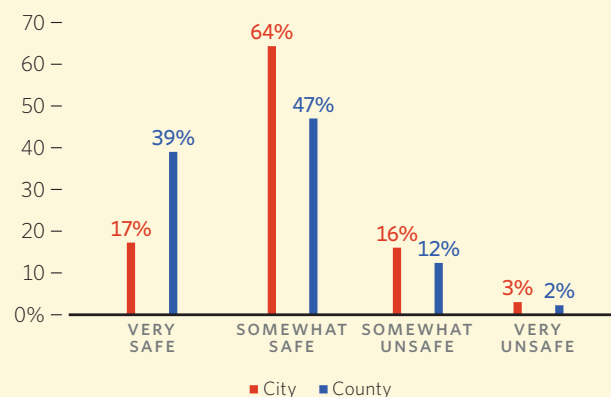
County residents, for the most part, hold favorable views of their public school teachers, the quality of their work and even the unions that represent them, the survey suggests.

Teachers greatly influence the quality of education students receive in their classrooms. And 64 percent of residents rate the quality of instruction in public schools as either excellent or good. Only 5 percent describe it as poor.

When school budgets must be cut, 78 percent of residents say teachers and administrators should be spared. Paying teachers more is something 75 percent of residents favor as a way to improve public schools. More than six in 10 residents oppose tying teachers' pay to the academic performance of their students. And 57 percent believe schools benefit from having unions represent teachers in contract negotiations. Only 23 percent of residents disagree.

School administrators tend to get less favorable reviews.

Education: How would you rate the safety of the public schools in your community?



Percentage of City of Pittsburgh residents; percentage of Allegheny County residents outside the city. SOURCE: Pittsburgh Today Education Survey, 2019

Fewer than half of residents rate their school administrators as excellent or good and 15 percent feel they do a poor job. And they're less inclined to give their local school boards favorable ratings.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Allegheny County is of one mind about early childhood education.

More than 85 percent of residents think it is very important, while less than 2 percent don't think it is important at all. And a whopping 88 percent think all public school districts should offer childcare and early childhood education.

About 6 percent of residents surveyed have preschool-aged children. Responses suggest that more than 60 percent of those families regularly use childcare. Families in the City of Pittsburgh are twice as likely as those in the suburbs to do so. And the type of care they rely on is equally split between family members and professional caregivers.

STANDARDIZED TESTS

County residents are wary of using statewide-standardized tests in education. More than half, for example, feel the emphasis placed on the tests is inappropriate.

They tend to support using them for a few purposes, sometimes strongly. Some 93 percent believe the tests should be used to identify areas where students need help and eight in 10 residents support using them to ensure students meet national academic standards. Another 78 percent support using the tests to help identify areas where teachers can improve their skills.

But 82 percent feel the tests should not be used to determine the funding that schools receive. Nearly 62 percent say they shouldn't be used to rank schools and more than half believe they shouldn't determine whether students are promoted or graduate. Only 56 percent believe the state's standardized tests are accurate measures of a student's progress and abilities.

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SCHOOL CHOICE

County residents widely embrace school choice, with more than 70 percent favoring greater school choice as a way to improve public schools. But their support isn't unconditional. They generally have a dim view of home schooling. More than half of residents overall believe the quality of education for home-schooled children is worse than what they'd receive if they attended school. Only 22 percent think it's better.

And while they tend to support giving families greater choice in schools, they're much less inclined to provide vouchers to help families pay for the alternatives. Only 45 percent favor school vouchers. Views on issues of school choice, however, are greatly influenced by the race of respondents.

AFRICAN AMERICANS FAVOR CHOICE

African Americans in Allegheny County more widely favor giving parents vouchers to help pay for educating their children somewhere other than their local public schools. Some 60 percent favor the concept of vouchers; only 43 percent of other races favor it.

African Americans emerge as the strongest supporters of school choice. Asked what changes they favor to improve their local schools, 91 percent said giving them a greater choice in the schools children attend, an idea that 67.5 percent of other races favor.

African Americans are much less satisfied with their local public schools than people of other races. They're at least three times less likely to describe the class size and diversity of the student body in public schools as good or excellent. They're about twice less likely to give schools high marks for safety, educational standards, funding, parental involvement, student behavior, student preparedness and administration. And they are three times more likely to rate the educational standards and technology and innovation in their local schools as poor.

Perceptions of equity also vary widely among races. Some 68 percent of African Americans feel the education black students receive is worse than what students of other races receive. But 59 percent of residents of other races feel the quality of education is the same for all students. And while 60 percent of other races rate schools favorably for their equitable treatment of all students, only 25 percent of African Americans feel that way about their schools.

WHERE INCOME MATTERS

The overall responses of Allegheny County residents sometimes mask pronounced differences in how people of varied income levels view certain aspects of local public education.

School safety is one example. Overall, more than eight in 10 county residents feel their local public schools are safe. But 24 percent of residents earning less than \$25,000 a year say their schools are unsafe, making them three times more likely to have such concerns than those with incomes of \$100,000 or higher.

Residents with incomes under \$25,000 rate nearly all aspects of their local schools less favorably than those who earn more, especially when compared with the highest earners. Only 27 percent, for example, rate school funding as excellent or good compared to 61 of residents in the highest income bracket.

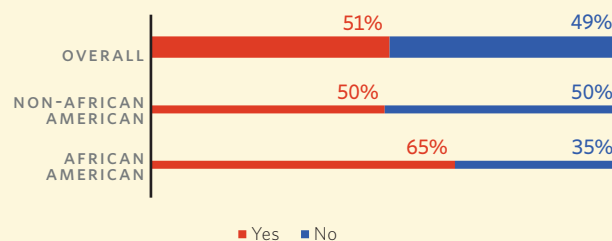
At least six in 10 residents earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year fail to give schools better-than-fair marks for class size, student diversity, parental involvement, funding, administration and the quality of their school board.

CITY AND SUBURBS

City of Pittsburgh residents have markedly different views of certain issues than suburban residents. More than 60 percent of city residents, for example, feel the funding for the Pittsburgh Public Schools is inadequate, while only 26.5 percent of suburbanites believe their public schools are underfunded.

Where people live also tends to influence their view of the quality of education offered students of different races. Some 60 percent of city residents feel African American students receive a lesser quality of education than students of other races. But

Education: Would you support merging your school district with a neighboring school district?



Percentage of non-African American and African American Allegheny County residents. SOURCE: Pittsburgh Today Education Survey, 2019

only 29 percent of residents outside the city feel the same way. And 41.5 percent of city residents believe students in racially integrated schools get a better education compared to 26 percent of people in suburban school districts.

Those who live outside of the city tend to give their local schools better grades. They're more likely, for example, to describe educational standards as excellent or good by a 69-to-37-percent margin. They're twice as likely to give student preparedness high ratings and nearly twice as likely as city residents to describe student behavior as excellent or good.

One thing residents of the city and suburbs have in common is a lack of engagement in the governance of public schools. For all of their concerns, only 8 percent of city residents and 12 percent of those outside the city have, in the last two years, attended a school board meeting, where decisions that influence the quality and future of their public schools are made. ■

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SINKHOLES, CONGESTION

written by **BILL O'TOOLE**

Region mulls new approaches for managing transportation

ON THE MORNING OF MONDAY, OCT. 28, A massive sinkhole, roughly 20 feet in diameter, suddenly opened on 10th Street in Downtown Pittsburgh, swallowing the back half of a Port Authority bus.

There were no serious injuries, and the cartoonish photos shared from the scene were generally met with delight on social media across the country. But for local traffic experts, the meme was a grim reminder of the region's chronic and compounding transportation issues, and the pressing need for new policy.

As southwestern Pennsylvania struggles with deteriorating infrastructure coupled with rising demands on roads, researchers in Pittsburgh are charting new approaches for the ways metro areas can manage and finance their roadways.

"We want to improve quality of life. We want to improve air quality and reduce the wear and tear on our infrastructure," said Karen Lightman, executive director of Metro21: Smart Cities Institute at Carnegie Mellon University. "We've got to find ways to make vehicles that use the infrastructure and use the road pay for them in a more equitable way."

DETERIORATING ROADS

If roads are the arteries of an economy, then Pittsburgh's economy has heart disease.

Deteriorating infrastructure has been a regional issue for decades, and new studies suggest the consequences are becoming increasingly dire.

"Pennsylvania's transportation system has fallen into an alarming state of disrepair," states a Pennsylvania House of Representatives Infrastructure Task Force report released in November. "Our review of the state of our system revealed crumbling roads, failing bridges, [and] aging railcars and buses."

Federal Highway Administration data suggest 30 per-

cent of Pennsylvania roads are in poor condition and 18 percent of bridges are structurally deficient, according to a September study based on 2017 data that was published by Lending Tree, an online loan marketplace. Those metrics and an annual repair cost of \$610 per motorist give Pennsylvania the fifth worst road infrastructure in the nation. Only Mississippi, West Virginia, Oklahoma and Rhode Island are worse.

Both reports find that the problem stems from a perennial lack of investment.

"Money for transportation and infrastructure is insufficient. What's coming down from Washington is insufficient. What's coming from the state is insufficient," said Karina Ricks, director of the City of Pittsburgh Department of Mobility and Infrastructure. "The source of funding from both of those is generally the gas tax. As vehicles get more efficient, as we electrify the fleet, that's a diminishing resource."

According to the Congressional Budget Office, The Highway Trust Fund, the main federal source of highway and public transit funding, will be insolvent by 2021 and rack up \$164 billion in debt by 2029 due to projected declines in revenue from fuel taxes.

The Pennsylvania Transportation Advisory Committee warned last year that the state Motor License Fund, which receives 75 percent of its revenue from the state's liquid fuels tax and provides the majority of state transport funding, could be reduced by \$4.9 billion by 2029.

"We're going to need to look to other ways to replace that, because I think we all agree that we need to continue to invest in a state of good repair for our infrastructure," Ricks said.

The troubling projections of funding shortfalls come as southwestern Pennsylvania faces new and daunting strains on local roadways.

>>

AND AMAZON



<< NEW CHALLENGES

Recent data suggest that the roads of southwestern Pennsylvania have grown more crowded and more vulnerable to damage from extreme weather in the last several years. Annual traffic delays in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area increased by 18 percent to 46 hours in 2017, according to the most recent national Urban Mobility Report from Texas A&M University.

Vehicle miles traveled and congestion have been increasing across the nation since 2014. The Pittsburgh MSA is no exception. Daily vehicle miles traveled in the region rose from 33,977,000 in 2017 to 35,691,000 in 2018, an increase of 6 percent, Federal Highway Administration data suggest.

While longer-term trends, such as a growing economy and rising rates of urbanization, are contributing to increasing traffic levels, experts said the more recent rise of ride-hailing services, such as Uber and Lyft, and e-commerce delivery services are also playing a significant role.

Direct-to home delivery, for example, has increased by roughly 12 percent annually for the last 25 years and is accelerating with the growth of Amazon's shipping networks. "The amount of real-time freight delivery is having a big impact on the region's traffic, and we expect that to grow," said Stan Caldwell, executive director of the Traffic21 research institute at CMU.

Meanwhile, environmental trends are also exacting a heavy toll.

The wettest years on record in the region were recorded in 2018 and 2019. Record-setting rainfalls have caused landslides and flooding that have shut down vital transit corridors and left massive holes in the budgets of both the state and local governments.

In 2018, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation exceeded its landslide budget by nearly \$100 million. The City of Pittsburgh estimates it will cost more than \$12 million to repair damage from last year's landslides, \$4 million more than the city can afford to spend this year.

A SENSE OF URGENCY

Such trends underscore the urgency of policy approaches. In Pittsburgh, the city government is working with Carnegie Mellon

University to study managing roads with pricing policies based around local traffic levels.

"Congestion charging is something I think Pittsburgh will have to think seriously about," Ricks said. "That is perhaps not the most politically desirable concept, but we have very tight streets, and they are in a triangle. There's only so much operating efficiency that we can eke out of that network."

In congestion pricing schemes, vehicles must pay a premium to access certain areas of a city or region. The tolls are assessed at driving speeds by electronic toll-collection technology, similar to what is found at certain toll-collection points along the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Such systems have been found to thin congestion by discouraging discretionary travel or shifting it to other modes of transportation during peak hours. And they generate revenue to help pay transportation costs.

Singapore has charged fees to enter its central business district since the 1970s. London and Stockholm each adopted their own congestion pricing programs more than a decade ago.

In Central London, the pricing scheme reduced congestion by 30 percent within one year. Over the first decade of the program, gross revenue reached \$3.9 billion, all of which, by law, was reinvested in local infrastructure. In Stockholm, traffic to and from the inner city was reduced by 20 percent, and the pricing system generates USD \$155 million per year in revenue. In Singapore, traffic levels have been reduced by 24 percent since 1998, and the \$100 million annual net revenue has funded extensive improvements in public transportation, resulting in greater bus and train ridership.

New York is expected to become the first American city to roll out a congestion pricing plan in 2021. Washington, D.C., and Seattle are studying the feasibility of congestion pricing as well.

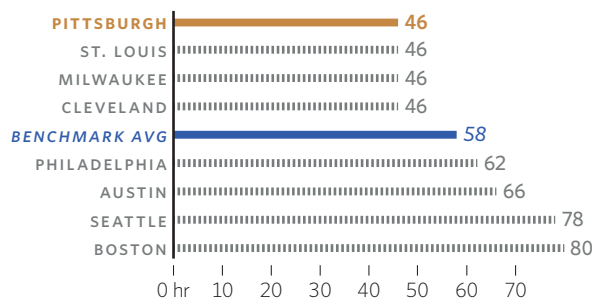
Traditional congestion pricing schemes are based on flat fees depending on the area or time of day. Today's technology, however, makes it possible to track vehicle and infrastructure usage at a much more granular level and more equitably spread the cost.

In Singapore, tolls on certain roadways have been fluctuating based on real time congestion data since 1998, and experts say such smart urban infrastructure will be key to managing the region's roads.

"In the future we'll have connected vehicles. Not necessarily

Transportation: Traffic Congestion

Annual hours delay



Annual hours of delay per peak-hour auto commuter, 2017. Highest/lowest among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions. SOURCE: Texas Transportation Institute, 2019 Urban Mobility report

autonomous, but connected vehicles with connected infrastructure,” Lightman said. “It could be mandated that if you are a delivery vehicle, you have to have the sensor that measures how much time you’re idling, how much time you’re sitting at a curb, how many miles you’re traveling and charge accordingly.”

Metro21 and the city’s Department of Mobility and Infrastructure recently joined forces to study a smart pricing system for the Pittsburgh’s curb space. “Right now, the way that we price the curb is really on an hourly basis, or it’s a day or an annual,” Ricks said. “But that’s not how curbs really exist, especially as you’re getting into commercial deliveries or pickup and drop-off kinds of activities. People are only using the curb for minutes or even less.”

Under the proposed smart curb system, real time fluctuations in price based on road conditions could incentivize Uber drivers or Amazon delivery trucks to avoid certain streets and intersections depending on the time of day, reducing congestion and easing traffic flow. CMU researchers are currently working with the city to identify candidate spaces across the city.

While the motion sensors, Wi-Fi and other smart traffic management technologies are relatively simple, the politics around them are complex.

Former CMU Provost Mark Kamlet, now a professor of economics and public policy, pointed out that a such a system would require standardized technology across all classes of vehicles as well as some kind of regulating authority to set rates. And regulators would have to contend with private companies, such as Amazon, that will be loath to share proprietary data on their operations. “The stumbling blocks are going to be these policy, logistics and legal aspects more than they’re going to be technology.”

But, Ricks said, greater data sharing among the government and major transport-based companies and new funding sources are inevitable as our roads become more strained.

“If your business model is dependent on efficient delivery, you are also dependent on us being able to efficiently manage the roadway space so that you can get to where you’re going.” ■



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written by **JULIA FRASER**

IN PITTSBURGH'S EARLY 20TH CENTURY INDUSTRIAL economy, danger lurked in rail yards, on the exposed I-beams of tall buildings under construction and in steel mills where gases and fire coexisted. "Ten minutes before, we stood there laughing, and not one of us had an idea there was anything wrong with that furnace," lawyer and journalist Crystal Eastman quotes a steelworker saying in a 1910 exposé of workplace peril. "That's the way it is with blast furnace explosions."

Eastman reported that in a 12-month period spanning 1906 and 1907, workplace accidents in Allegheny County alone claimed 526 workers, most of them under the age of 40—strong evidence that the region was a place where the risk of dying young was high.

More than a century later, it still is. Allegheny County has one of the highest rates of premature deaths in metropolitan America. And it has little, if anything, to do with workplace dangers.

The three rivers are no longer crowded with steel mills. The city's research universities fuel a burgeoning technology industry. Two major health care systems are expanding across the region. Yet, Allegheny County has the fourth highest age-adjusted premature mortality rate among the 43 U.S. counties with populations greater than 1 million people, according to the latest data from the U.S. Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention National Vital Statistics System.

Allegheny County's age-adjusted mortality rate, which is the rate of death per 100,000 adjusted to reflect the age characteristics of the county, was 390.6 per 100,000 people. New York County, N.Y., which is Manhattan, had the lowest age-adjusted premature death rate of 210.9 deaths per 100,000 people. Wayne County, Mich., home of Detroit, had the highest rate at 489.5 deaths per 100,000 people.

It's a public health crisis that demands attention, argues Dr. Donald Burke, dean emeritus at the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. "We pride ourselves on our great 'eds and meds.' You'd think our age-adjusted mortality ranking would improve, but it hasn't. For some reason, economic progress hasn't translated into survival."

TROUBLING TREND

Life expectancy among young and middle-aged adults is in decline across all racial groups in America, according to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* last fall.

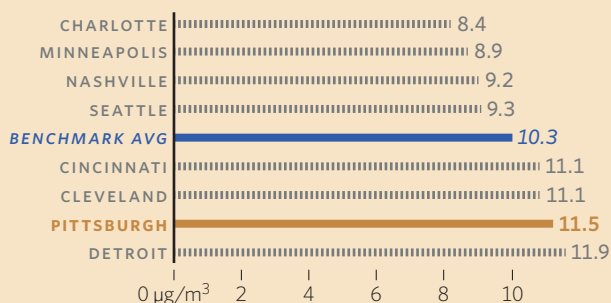
For decades, life expectancy in the United States had increased. Similar trends were seen across the world. And with ongoing medical advances, many experts assumed the trend would continue.

GONE BEFORE THEIR TIME

High rate of premature death troubles region



Environment: Particulate Air Pollution (PM 2.5)



PM 2.5 annual average in micrograms per cubic centimeter by MSA; highest/lowest among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions.
SOURCE: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2018 Monitor Values

But life expectancy began to decline in 2014, the long-term analysis of mortality data suggest—a curious anomaly among high-income nations, particularly the United States, which spends more per capita on health care than any country in the world.

Beginning in 1999, three main causes of death drove cause-specific mortality rates for adults aged 25 to 64: Drug overdoses, suicide and alcohol-related diseases.

But the surge in these so-called “deaths of despair” don’t fully explain the increase in mortality. The long rise in life expectancy had begun to slow in the 1980s, decades before the opioid epidemic spread across the country.

The decline is seen across geography, gender and racial and ethnic groups. But there are disparities. Women, for example, have longer life expectancy than men overall. But since 1999, they’ve had a greater increase in midlife deaths related to conditions such as drug overdoses, liver disease and suicide. Non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native populations experience the highest midlife mortality rates of all racial and ethnic groups. The wealthiest 1 percent of the U.S. population lives longer than the poorest 1 percent. Wealthy men live about 14 years longer and wealthy women live 10 years longer compared to their poorest counterparts.

While receding life expectancy is a nationwide trend, it is more concentrated in certain regions, such as New England and the Ohio River Valley. Pennsylvania had one of the highest increases in midlife mortality from 2014 to 2017.

And it’s an abrupt reversal of fortune. From 2012 to 2014, Allegheny County had experienced historically low age-adjusted premature mortality rates. In 2014, Allegheny County had an age-adjusted premature death rate of 346.6 per 100,000 people.

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But in 2017, the rate jumped to 390.6 per 100,000 people, exceeding the national rate, according to CDC data.

Driving the overall age-adjusted rate of deaths in the county is an increase in deaths among younger populations, particularly adults between the ages of 20 and 44.

Drug overdoses, specifically related to opioids, are a key factor, according to Lynda Jones, epidemiology research associate supervisor at the Allegheny County Health Department. "When we're looking at all mortality and we see those increases by age, we know that to some extent, that's a similar population that's affected by overdoses as well."

'DEATHS OF DESPAIR'

Allegheny County has been one of the places in America hardest hit by the opioid epidemic.

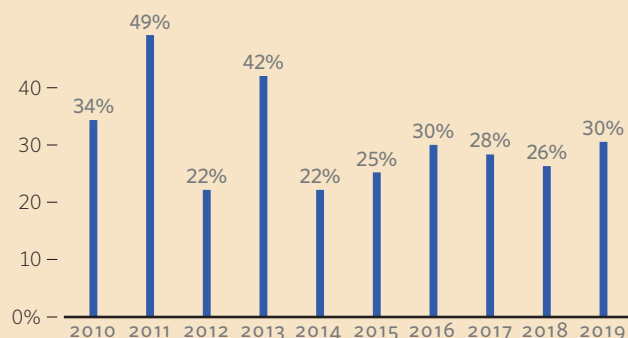
During 2017, considered the county's peak year, 737 opioid overdose deaths were reported, according to Allegheny County Health Department data. The rate of opioid overdose deaths among white and black males is similar.

"Opioids have had such a profound impact on mortality in our population that when we look at 2014 to 2017, it was so impactful that it drove all of our mortality rates," Jones said.

Suicides in Allegheny County rose almost 50 percent in the past

Environment: Recreational Days Lost

High river bacteria warnings



Percentage of recreational season when sewage runoff resulted in warnings of high bacteria levels in Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers. May 1 through Oct. 31, 2010-2019. SOURCE: ALCOSAN

decade, according to a report published by the county Department of Human Services. The county rate of 15.7 suicides per 100,000 people was 17 percent higher than the national rate in 2016, the most recent year that comparable data is available. A host of other suspects also could be contributing to Allegheny County's high

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age-adjusted mortality rate. The rate of residents who regularly smoke, for example, is higher than in most other regions. And the county routinely reports greater concentrations of some air pollutants, particularly fine particulates, which studies link to illnesses such as respiratory ailments, stroke and heart disease, and premature death.

And some health risks are greater among certain segments of the population. For example, heart disease, the leading cause of death in the county, disproportionately claims the lives of African American men and women. And the rate of infant deaths remains much higher among the county African American population compared to other races, despite marked improvement in recent years, according to data from the Pennsylvania Death Certificate dataset from Pennsylvania Department of Health.

SHIFTING THE TIDE

The solutions for reversing the course of rising premature deaths in Allegheny County and the nation are as elusive as pinning down all of the causes.

A JAMA editorial published late last year described the revelation of declining life expectancy as a “call to action.” It recognizes that the solution is beyond the reach of medicine alone. It notes that the Institute of Medicine and National Academy of Medicine rec-

ommend setting a national life expectancy goal; that others propose financing ways to better integrate social programs into traditional health care; and that more research is needed to understand how social and economic factors, such as income inequality and unstable unemployment influence health. And it calls for broad collaboration across medicine, government and society to improve the well-being of Americans. “Otherwise, the nation risks life expectancy continuing downward in future years to become a troubling norm.”

The Allegheny County Health Department is working on increasing access to the life-saving medication naloxone, while also working on increasing accurate and timely data related to local overdoses to monitor trends and direct overdose prevention projects. The county also provides mental health support services for people in crisis, including a 24-hour hotline, mobile support team and a walk-in center.

There is cause for some optimism. County health officials believe opioid deaths peaked in 2017, reporting 432 deaths in 2018, down from 737 the year before.

But without a broad strategy, it's difficult to tackle a problem as complex as premature mortality whose causes are poorly understood and could range from drug overdoses to distracted drivers, childhood obesity and unhealthy air quality. “We have a terrific health system,” Burke said. “If we train the full attention of the health system, universities, government and corporations on this problem, surely we can solve it.” **P Q**

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THE OBESITY PUZZLE

Why the disease defies efforts to control it

written by JULIA FRASER



TEMPTATION LURKS IN gooey fudge icing layered in a slice of moist chocolate cake and the hot salty crunch of a french fry. The sight and smell can incite the body to ramp up blood pressure, heart rate, skin conductance and salivary response—characteristics of arousal and excitement. It's a response that Lisa Germeroth hopes to tame as a new approach to curbing obesity, which has defied conventional treatments to remain at epidemic levels in America.

Germeroth, an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh, is working on a clinical intervention targeting the memories that form between experiencing the high-calorie food cue and the physical craving response. The idea is to reduce cravings for the high calorie food over time, which could lead people to eat less of it. A similar approach has been effective in addressing substance abuse because of neurological similarities.

Her research underscores why, despite such advances as improved gastric bypass surgery and government initiatives to encourage greater physical activity, nearly 40 percent of adults in the United States and 19 percent of children have body mass indexes greater than 30, which is the threshold for obesity, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.

Science and government are only now coming to grips with the complexity of the disease

that has long been the subject of common misconceptions that simplify its causes and solutions. Beyond how many vegetables a person eats or time spent on a treadmill, genetic makeup, household income, the characteristics of neighborhoods, the products and practices of the food industry and a host of other circumstances are seen as influential pieces of the puzzle that determines whether people struggle with obesity.

"Sure, your body's energy input has to be equal to energy output, but it's not as simple as that," said Iva Miljkovic, associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh. "It's a disease with many risk factors that not many people know about. It's not just about a person not exercising."

MEASURING THE PROBLEM

The rate of obesity in the world has nearly doubled since 1980. And it remains a problem close to home. Fewer than one-third of people in the seven-county Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area report being a healthy weight, according to CDC data. The rest have weights deemed unhealthy and nearly 36 percent of them are above the obesity threshold.

Such high rates of obesity are more alarming given the consequences of the disease, which include heart disease, diabetes, infertility and cancers, such as breast and colon cancer. It also carries a stigma, which heightens the risk of depression.

But the way obesity is commonly measured gives an incomplete picture of those risks. BMI, a

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calculation first used in the 1830s, takes into account an individual's height and weight. It doesn't, however, distinguish fat from muscle or where in the body someone stores fat.

And that's an important shortcoming because the type of fat and where it's found in excess are critical to determining the health risks it poses. Intra-abdominal fat, or fat stored around the organs, is the most dangerous type of body fat and the biggest predictor of heart disease and certain types of cancers. Subcutaneous fat stored around the thighs, however, has been linked to a lower risk of diabetes and other benefits.

"It's location, location, location," Miljkovic said. "That's the crucial measure. People can have a normal BMI, but they have a lot of fat where it's not supposed to be and we don't do anything about it in a clinical practice. When you go to the doctor, you get your height and weight but no one measures your waist. That would be the most simple way to tell if someone was at high risk."

A waist-to-hip ratio is a person's waist circumference divided by hip circumference. A ratio greater than 1 percent indicates a higher-than-normal risk for heart disease, according to the World Health Organization. A healthy ratio for women falls under .85 and under .90 for men.

COMPLEX ROOTS

"One of the most upsetting misconceptions is that anyone who is struggling with their weight and is having failed attempts at weight loss aren't motivated or are lazy," Germeroth said. "People think that if you have the motivation, you can do it. But we've seen that motivation doesn't translate to behavior change. There are so many factors that go into someone's weight status that don't boil down to a person's personality or their motivation."

Indicators of obesity have been found in a person's genetic makeup. Studies, for example, link a variation of the FTO gene to obesity. And the struggle with obesity can start in the womb. A mother's weight gain during pregnancy, smoking habits and blood-sugar levels have been found to affect her child's chances of having to deal with obesity later in life.

After children are born, whether they're breastfed, how quickly they gain weight and how much they sleep all affect obesity risk. But it's still not clear when during childhood steps to prevent obesity should begin, said Michele Levine, associate professor of psychiatry, psychology, and obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. "We can't seem to find the sweet spot for when to target the information and interventions for kids."

What is clear are the grim consequences of letting the disease progress. "One of the scary things about childhood obesity is that we're starting to see diseases of adults in children. Seeing a 10-year-old with Type 2 diabetes or high blood pressure puts everyone's mind to spin," Levine said.

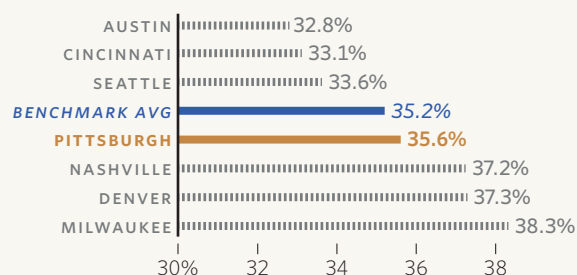
NOT ALL BIOLOGICAL

America's weight problem is further complicated by the influence of social, economic and other factors that lie beyond the reach of health care professionals.

Public health researchers have come to understand that

Health: Obesity

Percentage of population



Percentage of MSA population; Pittsburgh and highest/lowest among Pittsburgh Today benchmark regions. SOURCE: Centers For Disease Control And Prevention, 2017 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

educational attainment, income, social support networks, access to reliable transportation, health care coverage and other social and economic circumstances are critical to understanding health outcomes.

In Allegheny County, for example, residents who earn less than \$25,000 a year are four times more likely than people earning more to report they are in poor health. And people with only a high school diploma are five times more likely to be in poor health compared to residents with a master's or higher degree, the findings of a 2018 Pittsburgh Today survey suggest.

The recognition that obesity isn't immune from such pressures is changing public health approaches. "The shift that I've seen is that we're doing more work with what might be considered non-traditional public health partners who are working to address social determinants of health," said Hannah Hardy, program manager of the Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention Program at Allegheny County Health Department. "In particular, we're working with and promoting organizations that increase access to healthy food."

Strategies for addressing food deserts have evolved. A food desert is a neighborhood without access to healthy, affordable food. Early approaches focused on bringing a grocery store to the neighborhood to provide an option to the corner market that mostly sells processed food and snacks. "Then we started to find more evidence that it was not just about plopping down a store," said Tiffany Gary-Webb, associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh. "It's about how the overall neighborhood is developing, green space and housing development and other aspects."

She is involved with Green Grocer, a Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank program that sends a farmers market on a food truck to low-income neighborhoods and sells fresh foods at affordable prices. It also offers nutrition education, cooking demonstrations and recipes. After six months of being visited by Green Grocer, Clairton residents were eating 20 percent more vegetables each day and people in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood added 13 percent more vegetables to their diets, according to a 2018 study published in Health Equity.

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Access to fresh food was already a concern in Clairton, and the community had begun to mobilize around the issue by the time the Green Grocer arrived. “So when we provided access, people used it,” Gary-Webb said. “Lo and behold, a couple of years later they have a nonprofit grocery store that people advocated for.”

Public health efforts both locally and nationally have expanded to recruit government and businesses in the fight to curb obesity. In Allegheny County, the Live Well Allegheny campaign tries to encourage schools, businesses, restaurants and municipalities to modify policies, food offerings and neighborhood design to promote healthier outcomes for residents.

Whether neighborhoods are designed to promote regular exercise can play a role in the health outcomes of residents. Regular exercise is important to maintaining a healthy weight. Parks, trails, playgrounds and easily walkable communities promote it. The lack of green spaces, sidewalks and safe streets don’t.

One Live Well Allegheny initiative, for example, encourages municipalities to adopt “complete street” policies that better accommodate walking and bicycling. It’s a concept municipalities are slowly catching on to. In 2016, the City of Pittsburgh adopted a “complete streets” policy. Wilkins Township in the east suburbs adopted one a few years later.

But temptation abounds. Television is crowded with advertisements for sugary drinks, sizzling half-pound cheeseburgers with bacon, other high-calorie treats and the establishments that sell them. The widespread availability and promotion of such foods tend to make them part of America’s diet, even as more people are aware of the health risks involved.

In some cases, federal and local government have stepped up to regulate unhealthy foods. In 2015, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued regulations to discourage artificial trans fats in processed food. And a few cities, including Philadelphia, tax sugary sodas. “We need to recognize that we need to do more with the food industry,” Gary-Webb said. “The food industry can create change. We don’t see trans fat that much anymore after it was regulated.”

Meanwhile, researchers are exploring new treatments and rethinking approaches that have done little to slow the spread of obesity.

But the complexity of the disease makes it unlikely they will discover a silver bullet and any combination of therapies will include the daunting challenge of altering a person’s eating and other lifestyle habits. “No matter what part of the obesity puzzle you’re trying to solve, all of them come down to some kind of behavior change and that’s still the Wild West,” Levine said. PQ

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