The Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections Projects: 100 compelling initiatives that engaged citizens, addressed pressing issues, left a lasting impact on communities, and contributed to the “Pride & Progress” of Southwestern Pennsylvania in 2008. Led by established and emerging civic leaders, they created a critical mass of grassroots activity throughout the anniversary year.

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More than 500 funding requests were received and decisions were made by regional and local panels representative of all 14 counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania. Most Regional Projects received awards of $50,000 to catalyze their efforts, while most Grassroots Projects received $5,000.

With projects, events, and activities happening in every county, residents of Southwestern Pennsylvania made history of their own during this watershed year—re-engaging neighbors, restoring connections, reinvigorating communities, and imagining what they can do here.
It’s been 250 years since Pittsburgh’s founding fathers imagined a new future here in Southwestern Pennsylvania, christening the town and setting in motion the events that would lead to the Pittsburgh region that we know today. Since then, this region has enjoyed a richness of history and a diversity of populations and experiences rarely matched by its neighboring American cities.

With Pittsburgh 250, we have celebrated that past and looked to the region’s future with events and projects both large and small—from the nationally regarded Tour of Pennsylvania race and PNC Legacy Trail Ride, to homecomings and community gatherings of all shapes and sizes. As a major component of that commemoration, Community Connections helped 100 projects across the 14-county region to create their own ways to illuminate their past and imagine their future anew, bringing Pittsburgh 250 the broadest base of participation possible.

Pittsburgh 250’s theme—Imagine What You Can Do Here—is about connecting the people inside and outside of this region to the vast wealth of ideas, amenities, and possibilities that Pittsburgh prizes as its greatest resources. As you’ll see in the following pages, Community Connections helped accomplish that goal in a broad range of meaningful ways, across an impressive geographic area.

I’d like to thank the hundreds of people who took part in Community Connections for helping to make Pittsburgh 250 as great a success as it was, and to encourage them to take those new ideas and connections forward into Pittsburgh’s next 250 years. Making the Connections is the story of a region and its citizens, and how they came together to celebrate their joint history by propelling their communities forward. I hope it helps you to think about the Pittsburgh region in a new light, and to imagine what you too can do here.

JAMES E. ROHR
Chairman, Pittsburgh 250th Anniversary Commission
Chairman and CEO, The PNC Financial Services Group
In late 2005, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development called us together to discuss a budding concept. We were asked to develop the community component of Pittsburgh 250. A mission with few parameters, but three ambitious goals: grassroots inclusivity, regional collaboration, and new models of community engagement.

Over the course of the next three years, with the help of hundreds of people from around the region, our initial ideas solidified into an initiative that had involved thousands more, created a new model for community-based philanthropic work, and built new networks that will continue to help the region grow for years to come. Through this work, we’ve seen communities both small and large draw closer together, and a renewed sense of understanding between the city and the countryside. We’ve seen how the potential for progress only increases as our discussions become more collaborative, our missions more inclusive, and our vision more expansive. Most importantly, we’ve seen a common recognition, among people involved at all levels of this process, that community connections are important, powerful, and precious things.

Many people from around Southwestern Pennsylvania deserve credit for further developing the program, and enabling Community Connections to exceed our initial goals. The more than 40 regional leaders who came together as the Community Connections Committee were integral in streamlining and acting upon the initiative’s plans. Community Connections wouldn’t have made it past the idea stage without the leadership and stewardship of the region’s generous foundation community. Likewise, without the financial support and relationship-building power of the area’s community foundations and corporate funders, Community Connections couldn’t have encompassed the range it did. Moreover, The Sprout Fund’s continued work in all corners of the region is at the heart of everything that Community Connections has accomplished.

But such credit is largely academic compared to that deserved by the hundreds of community leaders, project managers, decision-makers, and participants across the 14-county region. Their creativity, time, and bottomless wells of energy are the source of the 100 projects that will become the lasting legacy of Community Connections. It has been our absolute privilege to be a part of your work, and to watch Pittsburgh 250 connect county to county, neighbor to neighbor, and the past to the present in building our region’s future.

ARADHNA M. DHANDA
President and CEO
Leadership Pittsburgh, Inc.

CATHY LEMIS LONG
Founding Executive Director
The Sprout Fund

GEORGE L. MILLS JR.
President and CEO
WQED Multimedia

A Letter from the Community Connections Committee Co-Chairs:
Observations on Creativity, Collaboration
Private Foundations
Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation
The Grable Foundation
Hillman Foundation
Jewish Healthcare Foundation
Laied Foundation
Richard King Mellon Foundation
Donald & Sylvia Robinson Family Foundation

Community Foundations
Armstrong County Community Foundation
Community Foundation for the Alleghenies
The Community Foundation of Fayette County
The Community Foundation of Greene County
Community Foundation of Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio
The Community Foundation of Westmoreland County
The Pittsburgh Foundation
Elmer G. and Gladys Schade Klaber Fund
The Clarence G. Koepke Memorial Fund
Ray H. Kohl Fund
Phillip M. LaMonte Fund
Fannie A. Lawrence Fund
The Lois Tack Thompson Fund
William Christopher and Mary Laughlin Robinson Fund

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Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections was supported by a diverse array of private foundations, corporations, and community foundations from across southwestern Pennsylvania.

Making the Connections
PITTSBURGH AT 250: A PREFACE

The story of Pittsburgh’s founding has all the elements one could ask of a great American legend. A martyr, in the defeat and death of General Edward Braddock as he marched on the French at the forks of the Ohio River. General John Forbes is its redeemer, his men laboriously cutting a trail through the wilderness from Philadelphia to attack Fort Duquesne—this time, successfully. George Washington completes the pantheon, standing with Forbes in November of 1758, at the place where three rivers meet to claim the surrounding land in the name of British statesman William Pitt.

When it came time, 250 years later, to mark that anniversary, it was obvious to the Pittsburgh 250 Commission and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development—the organization entrusted with coordinating events and activities related to the anniversary—that the date required a celebration that mirrored the iconic history of the Pittsburgh region.
At the Point—the historic site of Fort Duquesne—a $35 million renovation upgraded the State Park at Pittsburgh’s heart. The Tour of Pennsylvania bicycle race attracted elite young cyclists from around the world to ride in a Philadelphia-to-Pittsburgh competition retracing the Forbes Trail, and nearly 100 other cyclists joined in the 355-mile ride celebrating the opening of the Great Allegheny Passage Washington, D.C.-to-Pittsburgh Trail. Many homecomings and reunions brought 50,000 visitors back to Pittsburgh throughout 2008, many of whom were able to see world-class art exhibits and performances thanks to the Pittsburgh International Festival of Firsts and the Carnegie International.

Pittsburgh 250 also recognized some of Pittsburgh’s most notable native sons and daughters, who were feted at the History Makers Gala. Among the honored guests recognized for their impact on the region were historian and biographer David McCullough, actress Shirley Jones, philanthropist Teresa Heinz, and football great Franco Harris.

To the outside world, Pittsburgh may be most well known for the moments when its legends made history, be that Andrew Carnegie’s revolution in steelmaking, the many National Football Championships of the Pittsburgh Steelers, or Jonas Salk stepping out of his University of Pittsburgh lab with the world’s polio vaccine. However, Pittsburgh’s story is not only “the biography of great men,” nor is it a mere timeline of pivotal events confined to the city’s limits. It is a chronicle of incremental shifts and exceptional but unassuming individuals; one that takes place as much in a schoolyard or a neighborhood club as in a boardroom or science lab. It’s the stories that occurred in Bedford and Butler counties where Forbes and Washington camped, and in the pioneer towns of Greene County where early settlers launched a new nation’s Westward expansion.

Pittsburgh’s biography is Gussie Greenlee in his Crawford Grill in the Hill District, grooming a generation of jazz players who would create “America’s classical music.” It’s Wilma Scott Heide growing up in Connellsville, imagining a world where women are treated as equals. And it’s the communities of Cambria County and the Mon Valley, producing the coal and the steel that built the American century.

In the same way, the 250th anniversary had to include momentous events and stories of legendary figures, just like the region had produced momentous history and legendary personalities. But it also had to include recognition of those individuals who keep the region’s wheels constantly in motion, even when no mark appears on the timeline.

When we look back at the founding of Pittsburgh in the fall of 1758, we don’t see a single day on which this place came to be—or is our vision for this region’s next 250 years so firmly cast. Rather, ours is an evolving story of people and events, both grand and small, covering hundreds of miles and including millions of voices.
When Pittsburgh celebrated its 200th anniversary in 1958, the “Pittsburgh Renaissance” of Mayor David L. Lawrence was well underway. Using its bicentennial as a moment to chart a new course, the city looked to a future without the soot and smog that it was famous for—a chance, under the slogan of “Gateway to the Future,” to quite literally clear the air. At the time, the region’s leadership envisioned a future built as much around banking, education, and technology as the past was built around the steel mills along the rivers.

CALL AND RESPONSE

So when it came time to celebrate the 250th anniversary in 2008, the Pittsburgh 250 Commission was faced with a challenge. With Pittsburgh’s “smoky old town” image finally on its way out, and the transition to a more diverse and global economy underway, how could Pittsburgh best capitalize on this moment? In a time when regions now rise and fall together as collections of cooperative and interdependent communities rather than isolated and stratified rivals, the Commission recognized that the best possible future for Southwestern Pennsylvania is one in which everyone—from the smallest boroughs of the most distant counties to the largest corporations in the tallest skyscrapers—has a stake in the place they call home.

Searching for inspiration, the Commission looked to Jamestown, Virginia, where the historic colonial town celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2007 by connecting small community events and projects to the larger-scale anniversary events. With this kind of collaborative spirit in mind, the Commission approached three leaders of dynamic, nonprofit organizations to adapt this model to suit the Pittsburgh region at this moment in time.

“The challenge was how to be truly inclusive,” says Aradhna Dhanda, president and CEO of Leadership Pittsburgh. “We wanted to learn from the people throughout this process, and then help them find ways they could celebrate the region’s anniversary.”

The trio of Dhanda, George Miles, Jr., president and CEO of WQED Multimedia, and Cathy Lewis Long, founding executive director of The Sprout Fund, became the co-chairs of the Community Connections Committee.

“This entire project had to come from the bottom up,” says George Miles, “it had to come from the people. There’s a lot of talk about ‘regionalism’—we really wanted that. We wanted folks in Greene County or in Greensburg to feel as much a part of this as those in the middle of Pittsburgh.”

The co-chairs, together with their committee of more than 40 leaders from Southwestern Pennsylvania, quickly realized that the answer was for Community Connections not to rebrand existing community projects under the banner of a larger initiative, but to cultivate and support new ideas created by and important to the region’s people. The program would draw resources from a wide selection of regional community foundations, private foundations, and corporate donors to create a pool of funds that could then be used to make small grants to organizations and individuals seeking to engage and empower communities during the commemorative celebration.
Bill Flanagan asks: How do you make a city’s anniversary something an entire region can celebrate?

It’s a question that three partners set out to answer in 2004, when they came together at the request of Saint Vincent College’s Dan Onorato and the City of Pittsburgh Major Tom Murphy to headline an Allegheny Conference on Community Connections Conference in Pittsburgh, established to develop a strategic blueprint for VisitPittsburgh.

In addition to the Pittsburgh 250th, Dan Onorato and then Mayor Bill Flanagan asked: How does a region celebrate?

We knew there would be a community trail ride from Philadelphia, a whole new way to connect our region. Both were named Pennsylvania and supported by the initiative had to be grassroots as possible. The Sprout Fund far exceeded expectations by inventing a model that would be ready and anticipating new ideas. The goal was to make “Greater Pittsburgh” even greater in its future.

So, here we are, five years later, summing up a straightforward idea: Give people money to invest in their own communities. But to ensure the money was awarded to the projects most valuable to participating communities, the Community Connections Committee flipped the standard model of philanthropy on its side. It wasn’t just a new model that was required, but a whole new paradigm. While regional planning bodies have long developed high-level plans for the multi-county region, there was no system for organizing the hundreds of community organizations, services, and agencies engaged at work in the region. Community Connections would give communities the power to decide for themselves where and what the region’s philanthropic dollars would be awarded. The Committee realized that an initiative like this large and bold couldn’t be operated by volunteers alone. This kind of work was cut out for an organization experienced in many of the facets the initiative would require—and one already in place to galvanize grassroots participation and decisionmaking. So, here we are, five years later, summing up Sprout’s proven strengths.

“Pittsburgh” was playing favorites or picking winners. Instead, the process wouldn’t have to be done from scratch. As Board Chair Henry Simonds points out, it was more of a matter of summing up Sprout’s proven strengths.

“Were we able to incorporate elements from the Seed Award program, the Public Art program, and experience bringing large groups to the table with initiatives like Engage Pittsburgh and the Idea Round-Up,” says Simonds. “Taking in isolation, those programs are all great, but also disparate. For Community Connections, we put them all together to create something that’s sum greater than the whole of its parts.”

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Making the Connections: forging Civic Innovation

FUNDRAISING CHARGE
Community Connections set an ambitious fundraising goal of one million dollars to support projects in each of the 14 counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania. To plant new seeds, significant investment had to be made not just in Pittsburgh or Allegheny County, but in neighboring counties, towns and villages; communities that are of equal importance to the region’s history and future prosperity.

Fundraising was an integral part of the process of connecting communities—whether that was a small community foundation an hour’s drive south of Pittsburgh, or the corporate giving office of the region’s nationally known banks. As president of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, the first private foundation to give to Community Connections, Pat Getty knows as well as anyone that raising money is about more than filling the pot. It’s the way that the philanthropic community builds its own connections.

“Funding is a part of the problem with a top-down structure,” says Getty. “We have to recognize that we need a more horizontal approach to every aspect of community life—an approach that engages a variety of people and organizations by inclusion. So it was important to get as many funders as possible for Community Connections.”

Sprout’s Cathy Lewis Long points out that this kind of fundraising outreach was part of Community Connections’ model from the very start.

“It was incumbent upon us to have a base of support that reflected the initiative’s inclusiveness,” says Lewis Long. “We knew that we wouldn’t be able to raise significant dollars in the outlying counties. But we also knew that we needed strong partners in each county, and community foundations are the ones working in those counties.”

It wasn’t until its sixth birthday, in 2007, that the Community Foundation of Greene County made its first regular, annual discretionary grants—the first regular assets, in other words, that the community foundation awarded other than pre-determined gifts. Rather than a project based in its county seat of Waynesburg, or one of the small but vibrant cultural organizations in Greensboro, that year the foundation made a $1,000 grant to Community Connections. And according to Executive Director Betty Stammerjohn, it was a decision that was both easy to make, and important for the sparsely populated rural county.

“Until 1990, the population was small enough that we weren’t even counted in the Southwestern Pennsylvania regional census information,” says Stammerjohn. “Greene County was really overlooked for a long time. So we place a priority on helping to build the place of Greene County within the region. We saw the benefit of encouraging Sprout and Community Connections to be here—it benefits the county just to be a part of this regional initiative.”

Along with seven community foundations, Community Connections received funding from six private foundations such as Benedum and the Richard King Mellon Foundation, and eight corporate funders. According to Leslie Olen, manager of communications and community relations for Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, a NiSource Company, the project was ideal for their giving plans, and those of other regional companies.

“We were interested in being involved in Pittsburgh 250, because of the company’s rich history in Southwestern Pennsylvania,” says Olen. “For companies that work in all 14 counties in the region, a program that would impact small organizations in those counties was something we wanted to be a part of.”

Just as Community Connections would give the grassroots a stake in Pittsburgh 250 through small-scale grassroots Projects, the initiative would make several larger funding awards to Regional Projects that affected many communities in multiple counties.
“Something Community Connections did,” says Benedum’s Getty, “was to demonstrate that there’s enthusiasm about working across the region towards change. That’s not something that happens without some kind of a nudge to broker connections throughout the region’s philanthropic community.”

IDEA FARMING
Similar to its approach to fundraising, finding the projects and community leaders that would ultimately be funded by Community Connections called for a more considered approach than issuing a generic call for proposals. Through a series of idea generation, or “ideation,” sessions held in every county in the region, The Sprout Fund helped catalyze and foster ideas that would celebrate the “Pride and Progress” of this region — the theme of Community Connections — whether that was idea generation, or “ideation,” sessions held in every county in the region.

To Valerie Huston, who attended the Armstrong County session, the issue concerning her seemed like a fairly simple one. To so many American schoolchildren — even kids growing up in rural Western Pennsylvania — like the one she lived on. But to so many American schoolchildren, the phrase “Foodland,” they say, “Foodland,” says Huston, “was to demonstrate that there’s enthusiasm about working across the region towards change. That’s not something that happens without some kind of a nudge to broker connections throughout the region’s philanthropic community.”

“Many of the applications we received following the idea generation sessions were from individuals that had never engaged in this type of activity before,” says Stiver. “Our goal was to reach infrequent community leaders and other people with freshly hatched ideas, but all demonstrating a passion for their community.”

At the sessions, held in each of the 14 counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania, a moderator led group discussions that encouraged participants to think of creative solutions to meet the needs of their communities. Afterwards, the most promising concepts were discussed further in breakout groups, to see what kinds of proposals for Community Connections grants might come forth.

During the Lab’s multi-day sessions at regional schools, kids participate in exercises such as “A Day in Your Life...from their cotton clothes to the pizza they had for lunch has its roots in the soil and the people who work it.”... Mobile Ag / Ed Science Lab, students learn that agriculture is more than just farmland they pass on the road.

Making the Connections | PERSONALizing INNOVATION

Tonya Wible, program manager of Pennsylvania’s Mobile Agriculture-Education (Ag/Ed) Science Lab. “Even in rural areas, they’re losing that connection with agriculture.”

One solution to this problem is a fleet of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau-operated mobile agricultural science labs that are able to pull up outside schools and give students hands-on learning experiences. But when Valerie Huston heard about the program in 2007, it was largely limited to the Eastern and Central parts of the state. Huston thought it was about time Western Pennsylvania had a dedicated lab of its own. She met with potential supporters such as the Armstrong County Commissioner’s office and Armstrong Educational Trust, who suggested she attend a workshop led by The Sprout Fund’s Community Connections Program Coordinator Dustin Stiver.

And it was there that she discovered that community projects don’t just come from the big organizations — sometimes they, too, have to start “on the farm.”

“I gave a presentation on my project,” and Dustin said, “I think I’ve heard this idea before.” He put me in touch with Henry Karki, who he had met at the Mercer County ideation session and was working on the same project with the Beaver-Lawrence Farm Bureau, and we wrote the grant together.

After surviving multiple rounds of review, the Mobile Ag/Ed Science Lab project successfully navigated the decision-making process to receive a $50,000 Regional Grant. The new lab debuted in July, 2008, to a fully booked schedule visiting schools around the region.

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Community foundations exist to connect donors to issues and opportunities in the communities they serve. Often, community foundations help identify local concerns; at other times we act in support of efforts that meet common goals. In the largest sense, community foundations provide support, stimulate discussions, and the exchange of ideas, and spur change as needed.

Sounds awfully like the goals of Pittsburgh 250, doesn’t it? That’s why the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies and our colleagues were so enthused about participating in Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections. In all, seven community foundations, with geographic areas of interest covering most of the Southwestern Pennsylvania region, stepped up to help fund the effort. The money we provided helped in a modest way to round out the funding for the events and projects supported by Community Connections.

Speaking for our foundation, I’m certainly glad we did so. But the financial contribution was by no means the extent of our participation. What motivated more was the work to give the community foundations a dose of energy and an opportunity to do what we do best: We connected the goals and energy of Pittsburgh 250 with the people and communities of our region.

And, in return, we connected those same folks to a larger idea—one that needed them to be successful in a regional approach. It’s common to assume everyone knows what everyone else is up to in some more rural counties, but that’s not always the case. After funding was secured, a team of moderators and graphic facilitators hit the road to raise awareness and gather ideas for the upcoming funding opportunity.

Community foundations were essential to this process. It was truly a community foundation hosted effort, and we helped schedule meetings and get the word out in our territory. What might have seemed like an overwhelming task to community foundations was presented with the idea of reaching out to as many people as possible. The effort was one of hope in having their projects funded, of course, but that didn’t seem toovershadow the excitement in the room. Community Connections brought about a chance—perhaps a chance to be heard—for people to talk about what they valued and why they value it. Certainly, encouraging those in our region to be a part of something larger was in what community foundations, and Community Connections, are all about.

One project funded in Cambria County replaced a former junkyard with native planting and a multi-leveled gateway landscape. The leader for the community group told me she was surprised the effort was funded because she didn’t imagine her project was big enough to warrant the attention. She and her group have since taken on another garden, and now she’s thinking of running for city council.

I find these kinds of stories instructive. Whether I look at it as a Community Connections participant, a community foundation representative, or just as a member of my community, I call that success.

Mike Kane asks: How do you build solid foundations?

Mike Kane:
Executive Director, Community Foundations for the Alleghenies

Brainstorming Ideas, Somerset County
Even in smaller areas, the widespread call for ideas brought new faces into the grantmaking process — people who might have never considered applying for a grant, or even beginning a project, in other circumstances.

When Dr. Stephen Catt, executive director of planning and external relations at Butler County Community College, co-hosted his county’s ideation session, he saw something come out of the meeting besides a handful of potential Community Connections project ideas.

“The money was the lure that brought everybody together,” says Catt, but perhaps not the most important part of the ideation sessions. “People gravitate towards their own networks, and once you’re in your own world, it’s hard to break out. The best part of these sessions were the new communications — the new networks that came out of them.”

As attendees talked, several graphic facilitators — artists drafted from the Pittsburgh area — drew their impressions of each project, to create a visual complement to the verbal discussion. Pittsburgh illustrator Chris Schmidt served as graphic facilitator for several sessions. To him, the graphic facilitator’s job wasn’t just to draw peoples’ ideas, but to show the group what they had in common.

“People who develop collective ideas, they’re like the blind men trying to describe the elephant,” says Schmidt. “Each understands a part of it — but what does it all look like? When you finally detail that, visually, you generally find there’s consensus.”

According to Katrina Struloeff, marketing and development coordinator at the Union Project, a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit community center, and an ideation session moderator, the moderator’s job was part traffic cop — making sure everyone had their chance to speak — and part detective — investigating and probing ideas put forth by participants.

“We were empowering people to recognize that their ideas could be something,” says Struloeff, and to draw from the participants the true worth of their projects. “We were there to ask, ‘How would you explain the importance of your idea to someone who has never been to Cambria County before?’”

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granting wishes

Community Connections was created and funded through regional collaboration. But none of those efforts would have been very meaningful without a similarly democratic process for deciding which projects to fund.

“It was essential for the decision-making process to create opportunities for local perspectives,” says The Sprout Fund’s Lewis Long. “For example, Somerset County representatives needed to consider Somerset County applications. And, in the same way, Regional applications needed to be reviewed through a regional lens.”

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It was essential that the decision-making process create opportunities for local perspectives.
When it came time to create that decisionmaking process, however, Sprout was faced with a problem—a albeit a good one: Community Connections had garnered 502 project applications, far more than had been expected. On September 14, 2007, the submission deadline, Sprout received an application every six minutes. They came in from across the spectrum of Western Pennsylvania—both geographically, and in terms of projects, focus, academic representatives to business organizations. The Sprout decisionmaking process was even more rigorous. At the Regional Decisionmaking Forum held in Pittsburgh on December 13, 2007, the 24 strongest Regional Grant candidates presented their ideas live before the decisionmakers, an impact on the specific community and environment; goals such as community organizations to museums, schools, and even farmers. One memorable application delivery—from Family Communications, Inc.—was an especially speedy delivery via Mister Rogers' Neighborhood Development. “There was a cluster of projects that made it to the regional forum. To mediator and Coro alumna Sujata Shyam, the method was not only successful as a decision-making system, but also in revealing the extent of the region’s commitment to community progress.

I thought all the projects we chose were really strong,” says McBride. “The rural communities around Pittsburgh are in constant contact, and we’re used to making compromises with Pittsburgh. Sometimes it feels like Pittsburgh muscles its way through, but not here. In this process, every county got something—it was a big regional effort, and I felt honored to be there.”

At the Regional decisionmaking forum, Fellows from the Coro Center for Civic Leadership in Pittsburgh mediated round-table discussions. To mediator and Coro alumna Sujata Shyam, “the presentations by finalists, the process was amazing to see,” says Shyam, “the final round-table discussions, and the final large group discussion. It was an impressive operation to bring this group to consensus. I’d recently moved to Pittsburgh from San Francisco, and I was inspired by the projects that made it to the regional forum. It offered a fantastic perspective on civic engagement in this region.”

By recruiting dozens of people like Wright, Community Connections helped ensure that Grassroots funding decisions were based on the specific needs and priorities of each county. With decisionmakers ranging from philanthropists to business owners, educators, and community organizers, the unique make-up of Southwestern Pennsylvania’s 14 counties was reflected in the constitution of the Grassroots decisionmaking panels. All told, 86 Grassroots Projects received support totaling $418,750. Although, with more than 230 applications vying for Regional Grants requesting up to $50,000 each, that decision-making process was even more rigorous. To ensure that only the strongest candidates would be considered by decisionmakers, experts from a variety of fields reviewed Regional applications. In total, 72 expert reviewers, The Sprout Fund provided the top tier of proposals that met broader goals,” says Wilson. “I evaluated projects against the criteria Sprout provided, which really led me to consider projects that would have an impact on the specific community and also meet broader goals,” says Wilson.

Once proposals were examined and ranked by the expert reviewers, The Sprout Fund provided the top tier of proposals to the Regional Decisionmaking Panel. For the applicants who made it through this round of examination, there was one more step they had to take on their approach to receiving support. At the Regional Decisionmaking Forum held in Pittsburgh on December 13, 2007, the 24 strongest Regional Grant candidates presented their ideas live before the decisionmakers from all counties. After each project was given a chance to make their case to the assembled body of decisionmakers, deliberations ensued and, after an exhaustive dialogue, 12 Regional projects were chosen to receive grants of up to $50,000.

JoAnn McBride, executive director of the Lawrence County Tourist Promotion Agency, served as one of the decisionmakers on the Regional panel. Through this experience, she felt she was able to make a positive impact not just for Lawrence County, but to keep in sight Community Connections’ goal of being truly regional.

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As senior producer at WQED-TV, Minnette Seate is no stranger to the world of nonprofit community programming. But Seate possesses another trait that made her perfect to act as a member of the Regional decisionmaking panel: She’s no sucker for jargon.

“I suppose I should call it ‘perspective,’ but I brought a lot of my own ‘baggage’ to the decisionmaking table,” says Seate. “I tried to be as even-handed as possible—but with a heaping teaspoon of reality.”

Yet by the end of the process, Seate had discovered another important aspect of the decisionmaking system. She saw dozens of individuals from around the region display ingenuity and passion for bettering their communities. And it brought her a new perspective on the region—a perspective that left her “baggage” behind, and connected her more closely to the presenters, her fellow decisionmakers, and the places from which they all came.

“It opened my eyes to how Pittsburgh-centric I can be,” says Seate. “You forget sometimes that while others may vote or dress a bit differently than you, they want the same basic things for their communities that I do—just with a different dressing on it.”

AWARDS AND ALLIES

On the morning of December 19, 2007, more than 300 people gathered at the top of the Regional Enterprise Tower in Downtown Pittsburgh. At first glance, the attendees may not have seemed to have much in common. This disparate group included Pittsburgh business leaders in two-button suits and historical reenactors in 18th-century military uniforms; philanthropy professionals from the region’s south in Greene County and farmers from its north in Armstrong; community organizers from Homewood and Girl Scout leaders from Mercer County.

But as many of them learned that day, they certainly did have a lot in common. They had a firm belief in the potential of Southwestern Pennsylvania, and a bright idea of how to build a better future while celebrating the past as a part of Pittsburgh 250. What’s more, each had something in common—whether they were cleaning up a small community in Cambria County or building huge sculptures throughout the region: A Community Connections check had their name on it.

Once those checks were handed out, and the Regional Enterprise Tower cleared of guests, those projects shared something else: A year-long relationship with The Sprout Fund, which proceeded to act as sounding board, advocate, PR firm and general assistant to all 100 projects funded through Community Connections. If one of the important facets of Community Connections was its ability to empower new and inexperienced grassroots community activists by funding their projects, it would’ve been a grave mistake not to back up that funding with other kinds of support throughout the year.

As Sprout’s Community Connections Program Coordinator, Dustin Silver found himself hitting the highways and byways of Southwestern Pennsylvania throughout 2008 in aid of the initiative’s projects.

“We knew from the outset that distributing checks was only the beginning of our work,” says Stiver. “Sprout has experience helping new projects move from ‘requests to results.’ It was important to work alongside project managers to equip them for success.”

Sometimes it was enough just to support a project by showing up, say, at the unveiling of a new beautification effort in Ambridge. Other times, that support role became more complex—advocating for the South Side Sculpture Project at public forums, or creating and issuing press releases and media requests for event-driven projects. Still others required something else entirely, such as when the Parker Postage Stamp Park called with a beguiling question: “What actually happens at a groundbreaking ceremony?”

Perhaps most importantly, Sprout was there—at the other end of the phone, out in the field, and through a monthly online newsletter—to keep reminding projects that they’re not alone. Through Community Connections, Sprout helped build a new regional network of committed partners, including community groups, or funding organizations, media outlets, and just regular folks selling to turn out and put in a few hours. Throughout 2008, the region would see this new network of Community Connections come alive to empower the people of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

With grant money in pocket, the 100 projects funded through Community Connections got down to business balancing their limited funds with their lofty goals. But just as Sprout and the Community Connections Committee had hoped, when community members were given the opportunity to direct funding as they saw fit, supported projects rose to the occasion.

Though different in scope, diverse in goals, in community engagement, and distant in geography, these projects together comprise the story of Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections.
There’s such a fantastic Timeless Quality here, it inspired me to leave something permanent for the future—these could still be here hundreds of years from now.
The creation and implementation of a work of public art can signal many things. It can be a step in a larger community effort, symbolizing pride in the neighborhood, or a commemoration of cultural and historical events that transpired therein. Sometimes the act of making the artwork itself is enough reason to proudly display its final product, created out of the raw talents and materials of the community.
Amongst the public art projects funded by Community Connections, certain artistic themes reappeared again and again: a permanence of concept and materials; pride of history in an act of forward progress; and, the contemplation of location and integration into community. But, perhaps most excitingly, none of these projects resulted in art unable or unwilling to stand the test of time. These icons will remain by the roads and trails of the region for years to come.

CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY

Even in the bright sunshine of summer, entering the former LTV Steel coke-works along the Monongahela River near Pittsburgh’s Hazelwood neighborhood can be somewhat intimidating. Past a cobwebbed guard’s kiosk, one slowly drives down disused roads and into the mile-long building that once housed the works’ rolling mill, where an iron giant, 20 feet tall, looms shadowy and watchful. This is zombie territory: the scorched earth and Frankenstein’s monsters of the post-industrial age.

To acclaimed Pittsburgh artist Tim Kaulen, it’s all raw material—from the scraps stacked in one corner of the mill, to the histories and myths that surround the city’s industrial lore. With the other members of the Industrial Arts Co-Op, Kaulen has spent 10 years helping to forge the rusted detritus and proud iconography of Pittsburgh’s industrial history into a monumental work — the South Side Sculpture Project. The sculpture is a multi-story-tall diorama of two steel workers built from pieces of the original nearby Hot Metal Bridge, framing an industrial crucible, its rim overrun with metal frozen in mid-pour.

The surroundings may seem intimidating initially, but it’s obvious that Kaulen is as comfortable in the LTV site’s massive studio space as in his living room. Arms crossed, ignoring the nearby welder’s torches and nerve-rattling balanced girders, Kaulen shakes his head as his dog, Eli, runs around with a wooden spool, trying to lure a playmate. It ought to be comfortable after a decade’s work.

“The Industrial Arts Co-op was commissioned for this by the City in 1998,” as a central artwork for a new riverfront shopping area, says Kaulen. "It was meant for the Southside Works, which was in the planning stage.”

At that time, the Southside Works was only an idea — a shopping and living development on the brownfield space that once housed the Jones & Laughlin steel mill. With the site’s history in mind, the Co-op—a group of artists interested in large-scale public artwork—chose its subject matter and materials from that industrial heritage.

The group solicited a number of donations from the industry itself. Scrap metal from the LTV and Jones & Laughlin sites, salvaged from the recycling process, went to build the workers and their “armor,” as Kaulen describes it: “A layer of metal, like protective gear. It’s meant to get away from the architectural geometry of the figures — make them appear more organic.” A Youngstown company donated a used hot-metal ladle—the ten-foot-tall, bucket-like iron piece that serves as the sculpture’s centerpiece.

But the same things that make the sculpture compelling—it’s larger-than-life scale, and time-weathered, permanent materials—created difficulties for the Co-op artists. Early into the process, it became clear that, while the city was interested in housing the piece at the Works, there was not a dedicated piece of land for it to reside on.

“There was never a specified site,” says Kaulen, “but we decided to build it without the site, because we just wanted to make the art.”

The LTV site in which the Co-op works, now owned by a consortium of foundations called the Almono Limited Partnership, is a godsend, according to Kaulen. It may be “freezing in winter, and too hot in summer,” but its height and width makes the Co-op members uniquely able to work cheaply on the kinds of scale their work encompasses.

The problem, however, has been in moving the piece, and reassembling it on its final South Side location. That’s where the Regional Grant from Community Connections came in, providing money to finish work on the sculpture, and help transplant the multi-ton structure to its permanent home—and in doing so, create a new icon for future generations of Pittsburghers.
The question was always, “All these cars are passing by—how do I get people to stop at my place?” So what started out as a roadside fruit stand, or a place to get water, kept getting bigger, and eventually wound up as these quirky roadside buildings.

The Coffee Pot, Bedford County, a roadside giant from an earlier era of the Lincoln Highway.
Driving Ambitions

Scale, permanence, histories of industry and a transitioning economy: When Olga Herbert talks about the public art project she’s working on for the Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor (LHHC), her language echoes that of the Industrial Arts Co-op. Not surprising, considering the geographic regions and historical eras that Herbert, as executive director of LHHC, deals with.

In its heyday, from 1913 until the opening of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in 1940, the Lincoln Highway was the primary East-West corridor through the state—part of a transcontinental road, Herbert is quick to point out, “ten years older than Route 66, and twice as long!” And unlike so much of Route 66, you can still get your kicks driving the entirety of the Lincoln Highway today from Times Square to San Francisco.

Pennsylvania’s portion of the Highway is dotted by small towns that once brimmed with the roadside bustle that befit the country’s prime thoroughfare, but which have fallen into economic and historical quietude since the coming of the Turnpike seven decades back. The LHHC exists, according to Herbert, to help promote economic development through tourism along the least populated portion of Pennsylvania’s Lincoln Highway, from the Allegheny-Westmoreland County line to York County, over 200 miles away.

As part of that mission, the LHHC established the Roadside Giants of the Lincoln Highway project. With support from a Regional Grant, the LHHC partnered with four technical schools around the Western Pennsylvania region to create a series of Roadside Giants—huge, architectural structures in the form of commercial objects. It’s a practice with a long history along the Lincoln Highway, the best-known example of which is Bedford County’s Giant Coffee Pot.

“These people living along the Highway were real entrepreneurs,” says Herbert. “The question was always, ‘all these cars are passing by — how do I get people to stop at my place?’ So what started out as a roadside fruit stand, or a place to get water, kept getting bigger and bigger, and eventually wound up being these quirky roadside buildings, often put up over the course of a weekend.”

Students at the partnering schools designed and constructed a sculpture for their area’s portion of the Highway. In doing so, the students gained valuable inter-disciplinary experience—the graphic design students handing concepts off to welders; the process moving on to the building-trade students, “who might say, ‘there’s not enough steel in the world to do this!’” It’s a collaborative working environment that served to impart practical real-world knowledge to the participating students and enrich their learning experiences.

The finished pieces will each become iconographic for their locality: a Packard—the iconic car of the Lincoln Highway age—in Greensburg, Westmoreland County, created by Central Westmoreland Career and Technology Center in New Stanton, or a tandem bicycle in the town of Somerset—alluding to their many cycle trails—crafted by Somerset County Technology Center. But there’s also a unifying aspect to the Roadside Giants. “It’s hard to miss these structures, and no doubt—ing that you’re riding on the age-old Lincoln Highway.”

“Some people tend to disregard this kind of architecture,” says Herbert, “but it’s programmatic architecture: yeah, they stick out, that’s what they’re supposed to do.”

It’s a safe bet that, when these students matriculated into the Eastern Westmoreland Career and Technology Center, none of them envisioned the massive, multi-story gas pump sculpture that was in their educational future. But through Roadside Giants of the Lincoln Highway, not only have these Latrobe, Westmoreland County students built such a thing, they’ve made it into a local icon: Along with colleagues from three other regional tech schools, Eastern student welders, designers, and even chefs (who baked celebratory cakes in the shape of each Giant), contributed to a new lasting legacy along this historic route.

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Galiyas’ painting—images of the seasons, rendered on a 30-foot tall silo, each containing one of three substances used to make glass. When Chris Galiyas was asked to prime the silos of the Youghiogheny Opalescent Glass Company in Connellsville, Fayette County, artists Chris Galiyas and Meeghan Triggs pay tribute to the year-round dedication of that community, even after the celebration of Pittsburgh 250 has long passed.

Tourists braving the journey from Washington, D.C. to Pittsburgh — the Trail Town Public Art Project created artwork along the Pennsylvania portion of this 318 mile trail system. In Rockwood, Somerset County, sculptor Scott Hostettler fashioned a locomotive from reused materials and in Connellsville, Fayette County, sculptor Steven Fiscus erected an archway at the very spot where General Braddock’s army crossed the river in 1755, and where those who would march to Pittsburgh today will find their ford, too.

“Their such a fantastic timeless quality about Ohiopyle,” she says, “it inspired that sense of wanting to leave something permanent for the future—these could still be here hundreds of years from now.” It’s a good example of the Trail Town goal—and, perhaps, that of all of these projects—to create public art that becomes intrinsically part of its location and remains an emblem of the community, even after the celebration of Pittsburgh 250 has long passed.
The intersection of Haynes and Napoleon Streets in the Kernville neighborhood of Johnstown is the second-busiest intersection in Cambria County. It’s near the entrance to the city from Route 56—a route traveled by thousands every day, which makes husband-and-wife artists John and Cindy Stallings cringe, because the Haynes Street underpass is not pretty.

Neglect and population decline have made this location a renowned eyesore—which is one reason the Stallings targeted the intersection for the latest of John’s public sculptures, a massive circular form planted in a tiny new parklet, sponsored in part by a grassroots grant from Community Connections.

“Kernville isn’t just a blighted neighborhood,” says Cindy Stallings, “it’s the first impression of Johnstown—it’s right off of the Route 56 exit. It’s not only visitors’ first sight, but thousands of Johnstowners themselves see it every day.”

The Stallings weren’t the only ones thinking about revitalizing Kernville with the arts. When John and Cindy began talks with the city about their public sculpture proposal, they discovered that Kernville had been designated for renovation through the Johnstown Artist Relocation Program.

Using public art to spur urban redevelopment isn’t a new idea—it’s, as an Americans for the Arts economic study determined in 2007, “an economically sound investment” for small towns as well as big cities, because “the arts mean business.” The City of Johnstown has taken this idea to heart, targeting artists with financial subsidies, pre-arranged mortgages and other incentives to lure them into Kernville. With the Relocation Program in mind, the Stallings have ramped up their plan to include further sculptures in other strategic Kernville locations, commissioned from regional and national artists. “It’s got to be something we’d consider ‘museum-quality’ artwork,” says John Stallings. “And hopefully this will become known as a place to really show your work.”

It’s a plan that has attracted a lot of supporters. Since being awarded a grassroots grant, the Stallings’ plan has seen other support come in from private companies as well as the Pennsylvania Rural Arts Alliance and the state’s Department of Community and Economic Development. Meanwhile, John Stallings was named the sole recipient of 2008’s George Sugarman Foundation grant, with the Foundation citing regional support for the Haynes Street project as an important part of their decision.

“This project’s been a lesson in seeing things grow,” says Cindy Stallings, “so if a seed can grow into something much bigger than we’d imagined. And in this case, the Community Connections grant was that seed.”
Our historic fabric is one thing our region really has to offer. Believe me: people will be interested in these sites if they’re brought back.
Southwestern Pennsylvania’s daily life is informed by 250 years of history—whether it’s Route 30 from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, first cut by General Forbes in 1758, or the backdrop of industrial heritage found near Pittsburgh today. When it came time to acknowledge the region’s 250th anniversary, naturally, many Community Connections projects incorporated history into their activities.
To some, the priority was on restoring and preserving physical artifacts like rescuing a 19th-century barn or preserving a restored theater from the Vaudeville Age. To others, it was the interpretation of history that mattered. For all of Community Connections’ historical projects, the overarching theme was one of continuity between the past and the future — ensuring that the first 250 years remain a foundation on which the next 250 years can be built.

Old Bedford Village
Motorcycling along the highways of Pennsylvania, Roger Kirwin sees the ghosts of Redcoats cutting paths across the state’s landscape in 1758, laying the groundwork for a road still traveled today.

“The French and Indian War was all about movement,” says Kirwin, executive director of Old Bedford Village, the living-history center on the site of the 18th-century fortress in Bedford County. “It was about, ‘How do you move 7,000 soldiers back and forth across the state’s woodlands?’ And when you move around Pennsylvania today, you trace those movements. Look just off the turnpike, and you see woodlands that aren’t much different than they were 250 years ago. There are very few places left where you can look at history like that.”

What’s not always so apparent is which history is on display at the Village. Despite the center’s direct link to the French and Indian War, visitors are just as likely to have responded in kind. Not only did groups of reenactors aid in the construction of the redan, the structure has attracted attention from hundreds who gleefully used this newly-added authenticity and attended 2008’s celebrations of Bedford’s 250th anniversary. And drawing those people to Bedford, says Kirwin, makes the Village a more dynamic educational and cultural amenity.

“When you can bring the places and characters of history to life, the public gets more interested,” says Kirwin. “It takes things out of the realm of academia and into a tactile, tangible understanding of history. We give living historians a marvelous canvas for reenactments, and, in return, they come here and give the public something to see.”

Barn Storming
Whenever Jack Maguire saw a historic building in Saltsburg, Indiana County, threatened with demolition, he had a simple solution: Buy it. A commercial building from 1913, the old Academy built in 1851, the town’s high school — each time one of these buildings was targeted by the wrecking ball, Maguire bought it, refurbished it, and found contemporary uses that maintain the historical integrity of the building.

When talk began about pulling down the circa-1850 W.R. McIlwain Store and Warehouse, Maguire knew there’d be little public outcry. Because of its positioning along the once-busy canal, the dilapidated building has long been known by encounter people dressed in Confederate gray or Napoleonic-era uniforms. “The thing about Old Bedford Village is its versatility,” says Kirwin, known to don a red coat himself as a French and Indian War reenactor. And it’s towards that end that the Village was awarded a Grassroots Grant to build its new pan-coupe redan—a type of defensive structure used in the U.S. and Europe from the 1750s through the early-20th century. With the redan’s addition, Old Bedford Village solidified itself as a premier location for living historians, no matter what era they cast themselves in. Those historians and hobbyists have responded in kind. Not only did groups of reenactors aid in the construction of the redan, the structure has attracted attention from hundreds who gleefully used this newly-added authenticity and attended 2008’s celebrations of Bedford’s 250th anniversary. And drawing those people to Bedford, says Kirwin, makes the Village a more dynamic educational and cultural amenity.

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A run-down local eyesore with “mule” in its name? Maguire knew that it’d take stubborn determination to win this one. “It just doesn’t look good,” says Maguire, a semi-retired civil engineer and longtime Saltsburg resident. “There’d been a fire at the back of the main structure, and the roof was collapsing. But, in my mind’s eye, I can see how it’d look if it was restored. And in Saltsburg, what you’ve got to do is just step forward and do the work—don’t just talk about it.”

Which is just what Maguire did. He volunteered to tear down the rear section of the Barn to “help some of those eye-sore complaints go away.” With a Grassroots Grant acquired by Saltsburg Borough, Maguire and other volunteers stabilized the Barn, which had been listing to one side. To Maguire and fellow preservationists, The Mule Barn represents an important part of Saltsburg’s history, dating from the mid-19th century when the Harrisburg-to-Pittsburgh canal went through town and beasts of burden pulled the barges. As Saltsburg Borough President Elizabeth Rocco says, were the Barn to go, “that’d be just one more piece of our history that we’ll never get back.”
It’s all part of what Jack Maguire calls “our historic fabric” — the future of which is in our hands. “History is one thing we really have to offer,” says Maguire. “And, believe me: people will be interested in these sites if they’re brought back.”

**RE-COVERED WAGON**

At the 50-acre Succop Conservancy, located on Route 8 just a few miles south of Butler, Director Nancy Lawry points out a former incubator from this property’s past as a chicken farm — now it’s a blacksmith’s shop for the Conservancy’s Heritage School. Here, no space or material is wasted: The previous owner’s swimming pool, filled in for safety reasons, became an herb garden; its bathhouse, the kitchen for outdoor events, refurbished with timber from cleared acreage.

This philosophy goes hand-in-hand with the Conservancy’s establishing directive, as laid out by Tom and JoAnn Succop when they donated their family farmland in 2001, to keep the land for education and environmental stewardship purposes in perpetuity.

So when the Conservancy pulled a pre-Civil War hay wagon from the farm’s early-19th century barn, it was only natural that its restoration should become part of the Conservancy’s mission. That didn’t mean the task would be easy. “It was in a dark corner of the barn, with a family of raccoons living in it,” says Lawry. “It’s hard to even think back to what it looked like.”

With help from a Grassroots Grant, the Conservancy assembled a Venturing Crew — a team of teenagers, working through Boy Scouts of America. With the Conservancy’s woodworking expert and blacksmith, that crew restored the wagon — forging new wheel spokes to replace broken ones, and touching up and painting the wooden frame. In the process, the crew learned hands-on lessons about how agricultural Butler was built 100 years ago.

It’s just the sort of skills that visitors will learn at the Heritage School, a new initiative that makes Succop Conservancy a destination for historical folk-trade education. Classes range from blacksmithing and woodworking to aromatherapy and Native American storytelling.

The wagon now plays an integral role in the life of the Conservancy, acting as its icon and a working transport for students, the Venturing Crew, or anyone participating in community activities like Butler County’s Master Gardeners events. But perhaps the most important aspect of the project is the ongoing restoration work itself, illustrating the experiences of our ancestors.

“We’ve got the ability to use the wagon for community events, and for rides,” says Lawry. “But more than that, it’s just an important reminder of the farming heritage that made this area — and our country — what it is today.”
When Denise Mihalick walks the aisles of the Arcadia Theater, built in 1921, she follows in famed footsteps: movie star Loretta Young, for example, and Depression-era film star Joan Blondell, both paced the Arcadia’s stage in its vaudeville days according to tickets stubs found in the building.

But as executive director of the Arcadia, located in Windber, Somerset County, Mihalick tempers those dreams of its heyday with nightmares of its dilapidated recent past. Photos of the Arcadia prior to its 1998 restoration show an interior brutally wracked by age and neglect, its ceilings caved in, its walls crumbling under their own weight.

Fortunately, today’s Arcadia is full of past glory. Restored to its gilded-age appearance, based on artifacts as small as a piece of long-gone carpeting or a photograph highlighting an exterior feature, the Theater is once again the crown jewel of the Windber area. And, with the recent memory of the Arcadia’s dilapidation in tow, Mihalick says the community is committed to keeping it that way. “The people of Windber are so proud of this theater,” says Mihalick. “To give you an example, I am the only paid employee — the entire theater is run by volunteers, from the box office to the ushers.”

Today, the Arcadia Theater has the success it needs to keep operating: According to Mihalick, monthly performances regularly sell out the 690-seat theater. But while ticket sales and sponsorships cover production expenses, the Arcadia’s needs for future renovation and preservation are, so far, unfunded.

“The building is 96 years old — we need a new roof, and everything from the constant need to upgrade technical equipment, to slowly replacing all the toilets. If we can raise enough money to start a sizable endowment, we’ll live off the interest whenever we need some capital improvements.”

With the help of a Grassroots Grant, the Arcadia kicked off its endowment campaign on October 25, 2008—nearly ten years to the day after its first post-restoration performance. “We’ve become regional,” says Mihalick. “From Johnstown to Somerset to Altoona, our reputation isn’t just the quality and diversity of entertainment, but the warmth — the magical appearance of the theater. It’s referred to as the ‘gem of the area,’ but it’s not just the theater — when we have shows nights, every restaurant is full, everything’s busy. And that can’t help but give visibility to the town.”

The anniversary fundraising gala was just a first step toward ensuring the lasting legacy of the Arcadia Theatre. And, if Mihalick has anything to do with it, there will be many more steps to come.
A burly, buck-skinned businessman stops through this territory frequently, setting up the tented trading post that displays his wares: muskets, ammunition, pipes and blankets, whatever the natives want in trade for the beaver and deer furs they've got in plenty. He might be based out of Fort Pitt, like so many traveling traders, but he doesn't spend much time there—more often it's North to the Iroquois or West to the Shawnee, to see what he can rustle up.

This, of course, is spinning a bit of a yarn—after all, it's 2008, not 1758. But it's easy to get caught up and forget that this is Boyce Park in Allegheny County—and that there's a swing set just around the bend. The trading post is, in fact, just a stop along the trail of Washington's Encampment, a grassroots Project that brought 1758 to life for thousands of visitors from around the region and beyond.

During the Pittsburgh Celebrates 250 weekend, October 4–5, the Allegheny Foothills Historical Society took over Boyce Park in Plum Borough, turning it into an encampment based on that of General John Forbes and Colonel George Washington in the fall of 1758, when the two prepared to march into what is now Pittsburgh. Hundreds of French and Indian War reenactors—from Redcoats and George Washington to Native Americans and fur traders—converged on Washington's Encampment, to illustrate the people and events that cut the Pittsburgh region as we know it out of the wilderness.

As Washington's Encampment was underway, the Fort McIntosh Garrison was gearing up for an 18th-century event of its own. The Beaver County living-history unit, which specializes in the latter part of that century—and Western Pennsylvania's Revolutionary War era—was badly in need of a refitting. (The 2008 economic crisis took its toll on gunpowder and uniform prices, too!) With a grassroots Grant, the unit reorganized and revitalized its tools of the trade, debuting its new, historically accurate materials at an event in October.

The experience of living-history events such as Washington's Encampment and Fort McIntosh is not so much immersion as it is education—a fact that rang out clearly. The kids started getting their basics straight—"Why were their guns so long?" "I thought the Redcoats were the bad guys?" Even some of the know-it-alls got schooled, too, in everything from the simple inner workings of a musket, to the complex intersection of historical changes— involving wealthy British industrialists and lowly North American fur traders alike—that illustrate how Pittsburgh came to be.
The French and Indian War was all about movement, and when you move around Pennsylvania today, you trace those movements. You see woodlands that aren’t much different than they were 250 years ago. There are very few places left where you can look at history like that.

On the surface, we're cleaning up the community, but what we're really doing is building social capital. When people come and participate, they see our neighborhood in a different light.
Unlike some community projects, revitalization efforts often come with the satisfying immediacy of a visible result. There are statistically calculable and physically tangible outcomes—16 tons of garbage picked up by one Homewood clean-up; a new green space to accompany the nascent library in Millvale; a blueprint to work from in a new Johnstown recreational area.
But when Khalif Aligrins his satisfied smile, it’s about something more than the garbage bags — stuffed full and piled high — collected by the volunteers at his Homewood Redd Up. And not just any patch of grass can make Brian Wolovich beam with pride, only one with as much history behind it as Millvale’s. Ali, Wolovich, and community organizers around the region spend their weekends changing the appearance of their neighborhoods not just to make them look different, but to change the way they’re viewed. And, by reshaping that vision, Community Connections became a way to change the expectations of residents and visitors alike.

IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

Standing on a small park embankment in Pittsburgh’s Homewood neighborhood, Khalif Ali — a coordinator with a local community organization, Operation Better Block — clutches a microphone like a natural. Organizing his small army of volunteers, Ali isn’t so much general as master of ceremonies, elevating his orders — the distribution of work gloves, rakes, industrial-strength garbage bags — into a kind of Saturday morning stage patter. “Yeah, I know,” he says, smiling to the assemblage, “I love the mic.”

The crowd Ali addresses is eccentric: blurry-eyed college students stand beside senior citizens and community activists. The ringleader of one Homewood church group nudges City Councilman Bill Peduto about a few of the community’s needs, while members of a University of Pittsburgh fraternity collect the tools they’ll need to join in the day’s Homewood Redd Up — the biannual community clean-up (named for the Pittsburgh—Scotland colloquialism meaning “to tidy up”), sponsored in 2008 by a Grassroots Grant. Unlike some Pittsburgh neighborhoods, cleaning up Homewood isn’t just a battle against litter, as Ali’s instructions illustrate.

“Make sure your group has one of these syringe bottles,” Ali announces. “You’ll need them when you find needles — and you will find needles.”

Homewood is a tough neighborhood, beset by poverty, drugs, and gangs, and cleaning it up requires a passionate dedication. Operation Better Block joined forces with organizations in more affluent East End neighborhoods to form the Homewood-Squirrel Hill-Point Breeze Redd Up Coalition. The coalition brought people together from neighborhoods that might be only a few blocks apart geographically, but sometimes seem worlds apart culturally. As Executive Director Alia Durham explains, the Redd Up is about so much more than just clean streets and parks.

“On the surface, we’re cleaning up the community, but what we’re really doing is building social capital,” says Durham. “Afterwards, while volunteers share lunch together, they’re talking to one another — it raises the visibility of our

Khalif Ali, Homewood Community Organizer
The house was purchased by the Society in 1990—after 50 years as a private home, and 50 years as a convent. But while the interior was restored to its 19th-century state in 2000, the house's exterior remained staunchly 20th-century—an annoyance to an organization intent on replication of a historical era.

"None of the period photos show the whole yard, but from other artifacts you get a good picture of it," says Historical Society Secretary Dave Huber. "We have an etching of the house from 1890, with a lot of detail. You can see the courtyard centerpiece, and the whole property had a six-foot-tall wrought-iron fence."

The fence, hedges, and courtyard have all been recreated from the pieced-together surviving images. The courtyard, crowned by an arbor under which visitors now enter, and containing iron benches and lawn urns, has become the focal point of the museum's exterior, and provides an outdoor setting in which visitors can gather. It has another purpose, as well: to aesthetically connect the Buck House to Ebensburg's downtown, just six blocks away.

"We really strived to tie this in to the recent downtown revitalization, which had a Victorian theme," says Huber. "Similar trees, similar iron work—we're hoping that will help lead people into the museum from downtown."

CAmbri An gAr Den

There is a folktale that persists from the glory days of Ebensburg—the late-19th-century period when the small Cambria County town, 30 miles north of Johnstown, served as summer home and getaway for the robber barons of Pittsburgh. Looking over the workers preparing her garden for a wedding, an aristocratic matriarch announced from her porch, "Cut the hedges low so that the natives may watch."

Walking through the doors of the Cambria County Historical Society's museum, visitors encounter this folktale inscribed on a card and posted near the museum's entrance. Which is appropriate, if tongue-in-cheek: It's with a similar mission, though from a more populist perspective, that the Society invites "the natives" into the magnificent A.W. Buck House for a new exhibit of Ebensburg's history.

Welcoming visitors to the building are the carefully trimmed hedges of the site's new Victorian-era garden—recreated in detail from period photographs by Kendall-O'Brien, a Pittsburgh-based firm of landscape architects with ties to Ebensburg, with help from a Grassroots Grant.
So when the newly dubbed Committee to Clean and Beautify Ambridge hit the streets to clean up each Sunday, other Ambridge locals began joining in. The group’s ranks swelled from five initial volunteers to its current membership of over 100 people are directly or indirectly involved in working with the organization — with Sciulli-Carlson as its chair — began looking for other opportunities.

“Kilman’s famous furniture store, the Lincoln Grill — where Pamela’s restaurants started; Riverfront Park; The Attic record store and Mr. Small’s Theater, Pittsburgh’s best French bakery; Kitman’s famous furniture store; the Domino effect encourages others to do the same kind of thing.”

“The domino effect” Millvale resident Brian Wolovich can rattle off a list of local cultural landmarks bffiting a town twice its size. “We’ve got Pittsburgh’s best French bakery; Kilman’s famous furniture store, the Lincoln Grill — where Pamela’s restaurants started; Riverfront Park; The Attic record store and Mr. Small’s Theater, which are both world famous.”

But Wolovich, a teacher at Quaker Valley Middle School, will also be the first to tell you that the Allegheny River town just outside Pittsburgh is lacking — and it’s a list at least as long. Besides the dwindling population, loss of businesses, and unemployment common to many similar former mill towns, just outside Pittsburgh is lacking — and it’s a list at least as long. Besides the dwindling population, loss of businesses, and unemployment common to many similar former mill towns, much of Millvale sits in a flood plain.

“When Hurricane Ivan hit in 2004, we had everyone from local government to George W. Bush come here and make promises,” says Wolovich — but much like Katrina in the Gulf Coast, the real shock was the lack of help afterwards.

“Everyone came back again after the floods in August of 2007. At least that woke up the media, asking why those 2004 promises weren’t kept.”

So when Wolovich joined with a few friends and family members to form New Sun Rising, a nonprofit organization with lofty goals to revitalize Millvale — most notably, creating the Millvale Library, which began operating in the summer of 2008.

But while the impact of Millvale having its own local library is obvious, another aspect of the project takes a more subtle tact. With the Grant Avenue Pocket Park, funded by a Grassroots Grant, which began operating in the summer of 2008. But while the impact of Millvale having its own local library is obvious, another aspect of the project takes a more subtle tact. With the Grant Avenue Pocket Park, funded by a Grassroots Grant, which began operating in the summer of 2008.

“Millvale’s not the most relaxing place in the world,” says Wolovich. “The best amenity we have is Riverfront Park, but it’s severed from the community by Route 28, a busy four-lane highway. The green space will have so many benefits, but most of all, it’s just a place for people to relax.”

Like the Homewood Redd Up, the library and green space have provided opportunities to show residents and visitors a new face of Millvale. New Sun Rising has hosted volunteers from as far away as Florida to work on its projects, besides bringing together local activists and community organizers to see the potential that Millvale holds. Beyond simply providing a breather for people already in the community, Wolovich sees the green space as the next stage in building a new Millvale — a place that can take advantage of its low cost
of living and opportunities for home ownership, and begin to bring new families into the community to buy houses and invest in the neighborhood.

“If you buy it, you care for it more,” says Wolovich. “Millvale has a much higher-than-average percentage of renters, so you see houses falling into disrepair. I think combinations like the library and the green space, they impact people’s interest in buying into the community. Young families can afford to buy a house here, so I see it having a domino effect.”

**A Job begun**

Bill Horner passes his hand along a worn gravestone, reading the words as he touches them: “Jacob Horner,” he says. “Founder and Proprietor of Sandyvale Cemetery.”

The shared surname is no coincidence, nor is the name of the location—Sandyvale sits in a neighborhood of Johnstown, Cambria County, called Hornerstown, named for Bill’s ancestors, including Jacob. Although burials here date back to the Revolutionary War era, the other gravestones at Sandyvale are few in number and random in location— the result of Johnstown’s famous floods in 1889, 1936, and 1977. A few trees and some weathered statuary dot the landscape, where dog-walkers and joggers frequent circular paved trails at lunchtime.

Standing in the middle of Sandyvale Cemetery Memorial Garden there’s little to signal the ambitious changes that Horner, Diana Kabo, and the rest of the Sandyvale Cemetery Association board members have in mind for this plot of hallowed ground. But Sandyvale is about to see its landscape overhauled again—this time, not by the chaos of floodwaters, but by careful planning executed by dedicated stewards.

The plans for Sandyvale are remarkable. There’s a hiking- and-biking trail that runs along the Cemetery’s perimeter to link up with established trails such as the Path of the Flood Trail and the James Mayer Riverwalk. A disused barn at the land’s edge, donated to the Association, is ready to be transformed into a visitor’s center. And long-range plans include multiple botanical gardens and an arboretum. To Horner, it’s all part of a renaissance in Johnstown.

“This is a city in transition,” says Horner. “Steel’s gone, coal is somewhat gone, now it’s defense and information technology that run this area. But people are really taken with the quality of life here, and that’s what this project impacts.”

Horner and Kabo stress that the master plan they’ve produced will take years to complete. But thanks in part to a Grassroots Grant to get 2008’s planning phase and initial work underway, Bill Horner can already imagine his predecessors’ glee.

“What we needed was to start,” says Horner. “It’s a sentiment echoed throughout community efforts working to revitalize through beautification—from Allegheny to Beaver to Cambria and beyond.”

“It’s like my father always used to say,” says Horner, “A job begun is a job half done.”

*Photo of the Sandyvale Cemetery Memorial Garden*
There was no ribbon at the "ribbon-cutting" for the new Postage Stamp Park in Parker, Armstrong County. Instead, members of the Parker City Revitalization Corporation sliced through black-and-gold caution tape to signify the opening of the tiny park in October 2008. Postage Stamp Park is a dozen people wide, sandwiched between the Allegheny River and North River Avenue. But a few tables, a bench, and a spectacular view are all you need to step off one of the multiple hiking or biking trails that cross near Parker, or pull ashore to take a breather in "America's Smallest City."
Something that really stands out about Pittsburgh is that all of the neighborhoods have a unique identity, and Pittsburghers have so much pride in that individual identity and experience.
The communities of Southwestern Pennsylvania carry with them the same rubrics of facts and figures as any other locale—demographics that too often become the story when we look at a place. But the character sketch of a community can’t be drawn in charts or graphs; the lyric beauty of a neighborhood can’t be written with statistics.
Some Community Connections projects celebrated the poetic moments that make a community unique, whether in a single neighborhood, or the region as a whole. But to do so required imaginations that worked with equal poetry. Through film, drama, and community gatherings great and small, these projects prove that the Pittsburgh region is a place where symbols have strength: Where an image from a neighborhood, the words of a bygone era, or just a pair of sneakers and a sweater can conjure a new pride in the places we live.

Won’t You Be My Neighbor?

Ednan Alwan shakes his head — “No,” he doesn’t know who King Friday is, “But I know Mister Rogers.” Five-year-old Ednan points to a TV showing episodes of the PBS favorite, “and I know Neighbor Land!” He may have the name wrong, but when it comes to the neighborhood — be it the Neighborhood of Make-Believe or Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood — Ednan Alwan knows what he’s talking about. In a way, he lives there.

On March 20, 2008, on what would have been his 80th birthday, all of Southwestern Pennsylvania came together to celebrate the legacy of Fred Rogers for the culmination of Won’t You Be My Neighbor? Days — a week-long series of events organized by Family Communications, Inc., and supported by a Regional Grant. It’s hard to imagine Rogers’ legacy being fulfilled more emphatically than in the converted apartment in Pittsburgh’s Prospect Park neighborhood, where Ednan and a dozen other children from this immigrant-heavy part of town had gathered.

The apartment acts as an integrated neighborhood base for the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council’s Family Literacy Program. It was here that Ednan’s mother, Hakima, learned English when she emigrated from Morocco eight years ago. Now she works for the Literacy Council, watching the kids and other parents — many of them political refugees from Burma, Burundi, and other far-flung locales — take English lessons. On Rogers’ birthday, the apartment was packed with kids and their parents; food, games, and — of course — a TV showing episode after episode of Mister Rogers to an audience of rapt viewers.

Won’t You Be My Neighbor? Days had many components: the groundbreaking for a new Fred Rogers statue on Pittsburgh’s North Shore, big birthday bashess at the city’s North Side museums and smaller ones in Rogers’ hometown of Latrobe. There, local librarians quietly donned Fred’s signature sweaters and sneakers as part of a worldwide Sweater Day — an effort to recognize Fred Rogers’ achievements through the symbols he made his own — with sweater drives for the needy, open houses, and more.

Since Fred Rogers’ passing in February, 2003, the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh has paid tribute to the city’s favorite neighbor by opening its doors for free on his birthday. To celebrate Pittsburgh 250, Family Communications saw
the opportunity to widen that effort to a region-wide event commemorating Mister Rogers’ legacy of inclusivity. Viewed from the cold perspective of statistics, Neighbor Days was obviously successful in its attempt to get families out to the region’s wonderful amenities in order to bring Pittsburghers together. The Children’s Museum recorded that 2,450 children visited that day—one of the best-attended days of their 25-year existence—and the story was the same at more than 70 other participating organizations and venues across the region. Project partner Tickets for Kids provided 450 free tickets to children for further events, and 5,000 books were distributed to kids from regional libraries.

But even though Fred Rogers knew his program reached thousands of kids, he always imagined neighborhoods built by approaching one kid at a time, and making sure they understood, “You are special.” According to Margy Whitmer, a longtime producer of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* at Family Communications, the kind of small-scale event at Prospect Park might’ve been closest to Rogers’ legacy.

“A lot of people who grew up watching the show, have kids who watch it now, and they finally get why they liked it so much,” says Whitmer. “Kids need someone that makes them believe, ‘he’s talking to me.’ They need a one-to-one feeling; that empathy.”

Through components both large and small, Neighbor Days brought the people of Pittsburgh together, and made that kind of empathy just a little more possible. What seems most important is a child like Ednan Alwan seeing himself a little bit closer—to his mother, his neighborhood, his city and his region.

“That’s what we hoped for,” says Whitmer, “that, through this project, people would begin to feel more connected to their neighbors in positive ways. That’s what Fred was always about—relationships.”

In the long-dormant dramatic adaptation of *Out of this Furnace*, Thomas Bell’s classic novel of immigration and labor in turn-of-the-last-century Braddock, Allegheny County, prejudice against Eastern European mill workers is part of everyday life. That’s a history most Pittsburghers know well. But the immigrant experience in Pittsburgh continues to be a vital part of the region’s ongoing history—just look at Ednan and Hakima Alawen, and their neighbors in Prospect Park.

In addition to producing a revival of *Out of this Furnace* for Pittsburgh 250, with the help of a Grassroots Grant, Unseam’d Shakespeare Company examined immigrant labor and discrimination as continuing issues—not just pieces of history. To do so the Company commissioned two new plays: Wali Jamal’s *Braddock 76*, about the African-American experience in 1970s Braddock, and Anya Martin’s *Teatro Latino de Pittsburgh*, about the contemporary Latino immigrant experience in the region. The tale of *Braddock 76* is a Shakespearean juxtaposition of a young, black, motherless boy falling in love with a young, Slavic, fatherless girl. The twist? Each one’s parent is running for mayor of Braddock: he to be the first black mayor, she to be the first woman—a rather familiar electoral scenario in 2008. This allowed playwright Jamal to explore issues central to ‘70s Braddock: race relations, gender inequality, and the role of labor unions. *Braddock 76* also draws from the collective memory of Braddock’s residents as told in oral histories gathered by Jamal and Unseam’d Shakespeare. Similarly, to create *Teatro Latino de Pittsburgh*, Martin explored beyond their dream. Five students from area high schools. Using contemporary theater techniques aimed at “teaching how to write theater, not just on the page, but in time and space,” as Martin puts it, as oral histories and interviews with Latino immigrants, Martin discovered that today’s immigration stories closely resemble the days of *Out of this Furnace*.

*The two stories don’t just intersect, they’re almost the same,* says Martin. “People are still coming for the same reasons: for a better life for their families, and because most feel like they don’t have a choice. People see this city as earnest, honest, and hard-working, and that’s a big part of this community’s traditions: blue-collar and family-oriented.”

With the revival of *Out of this Furnace*, Director Marc Wooldruff sought to keep the play relevant for today’s theater crowd, and also to bring to the stage a performance that could lure newcomers to drama with a snapshot of their ancestors’ world. And the Unseam’d Shakespeare Company succeeded at this goal beyond their dreams. Every performance, including the two weeknight staged readings, sold out. The result was a different look at the city’s identity through Pittsburgh’s immigrant history, in what Wooldruff saw as a profound opportunity for social change.
“I believe in the power of theater to change people,” says Woodruff. “If you can make people think for an hour that they’re poor if they’re not, or black if they’re white — you can begin to change minds.”

RELIABLE NARRATOR
Pittsburgh’s Strip District neighborhood is a kind of neutral ground — the market territory where, on a busy Saturday morning, the city’s wealthy and famous walk side-by-side with tourists, ordinary Joe’s, and the far-less-fortunate. It’s where Steelers players, for example, mingle with fans, so it’s no real surprise to see legendary wide receiver Louis Lips dropping a dollar into the cup of a panhandler dressed head-to-toe in fur-trimmed black-and-gold: Steelers Santa. Nor is it a surprise when The Strip’s long-standing “Flute Man” takes a break from busking to call out: “Louis Lipps with another touchdown!”

The difference is that Steelers Santa isn’t actually a panhandler, but actor Tommy Lafitte, portraying Steelers Santa for producer (and long-time Strip District business owner) Ray Werner’s short film “Tommy and Me,” the tale of a homeless man’s difficult, but ultimately precious role in this high-visibility neighborhood. The flautist’s shouts just go to prove that Werner and director Gregory Lehane have got every quirky detail of this neighborhood down pat.

And that’s the key to Greetings from Pittsburgh: Neighborhood Narratives, the omnibus feature-film project, supported by a Grassroots Grant, of which “Tommy and Me” is but one part: nine films that each exemplify a specific Pittsburgh neighborhood.

In many ways, those neighborhoods reflect the same kind of uniqueness that the region’s small towns do. And just as Community Connections sought to highlight the region by networking those disparate places, Neighborhood Narratives shows that — once brought together — these unique stories combine to say something about Pittsburgh.

“Each individual film expresses what it really means to be in that particular neighborhood,” says Neighborhood Narratives project co-coordinator Kristen Lauth Shaeffer. “Pittsburghers have so much pride in their individual neighborhood identity and experience, and that’s something we wanted to really capture.”

In 2007, Shaeffer and Andrew Halasz were both students finishing MFA degrees in film at Chatham College. It was when discussing the recent omnibus feature Paris J’Taime — for which a group of famed directors created short pieces about Paris neighborhoods — that they realized that Pittsburgh could be seen through a similar lens.

“Something that really stands out about Pittsburgh is that all of the neighborhoods have a unique identity,” says Shaeffer. “So we thought Pittsburgh would be an ideal location for a project like Paris J’Taime. And because it was Pittsburgh 250 — the timing just worked perfectly.”
The pair assembled an advisory committee of local film-world icons—Lightning Over Braddock filmmaker Tony Buba, The Bread, My Sweet director Melissa Martin, and Women in Film and Media Executive Director Faith Dickinson—and began soliciting treatments. In seeking films about specific neighborhoods, the obvious route might have been documentaries, but the project leaders made an early decision to stick entirely to fictional narrative films. Like in Gabrielle Reznek and Sam Turich’s “Mombies,” an uproarious satire of the gentrification of Lawrenceville by grown-up hipsters, which looks at the phenomenon of Pittsburgh’s new family-oriented artsy crowd through the region’s most famous film tradition: zombie flicks. Or, as in “Milk Crate,” John Rice’s film about a lifelong South Side resident whose neighbor—a young Japanese man and recent South Side transplant—makes the cultural faux pas of moving the crate used to mark the South Sider’s parking space. “How do you capture that in a documentary film?” says Shaeffer. “But John is a South Sider, and he’s written about that unspoken understanding, and being the person coming in who doesn’t know the rules.”

Other films in Neighborhood Narratives include Tim Hall’s film about the Hill District—comprised entirely of still photographs—and Jenn Gallego and Matthew Fridj’s story of a long-sought love discovered in Homestead’s Library. In the sequence’s last film, called simply “Regent Square,” Nelson Chipman and Jeremy Braeuxman place a transplanted New Yorker in the eponymous neighborhood and expose him to neighborhood traditions like welcome baskets and front-porch happy hours—much to his chagrin.

Neighborhood Narratives’ debut screening at Pittsburgh Filmmakers’ Regent Square Theater sold out in advance, and the project never looked back: Each of eight subsequent screenings, in the other eight represented neighborhoods, also sold out, calling for an encore run of five further screenings during the holidays. Those neighborhood screenings—and the collaborations with community spaces and organizations that made them happen—marked one of the most important aspects of Neighborhood Narratives: That each film shows the indelible mark of its neighborhood, but also speak to the city’s identity as a whole. “These films aren’t connected in terms of character, or story,” says Shaeffer. “But together, the project forms a tapestry of the city—a feature film that tells what it means to live in Pittsburgh.”
Filmmaker Chris Ivey didn’t expect things to be easy when he set out to make *East of Liberty: A Story of Good Intentions*, a multi-part documentary film about issues of race, class and gentrification resulting from the ongoing redevelopment of Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood. But after finishing and screening its first part, Ivey ran into an unusual problem: His target audience—the people most affected by, or frustrated with, the situation—wasn’t getting involved, or even attending the screenings.

“Of the 2,700 who came to the regular screenings, probably less than 500 were black—and that’s the target audience! So, if they’re not going to come out, I’m going to go to them.”

In the summer of 2008, Ivey organized a series of free, outdoor screenings, supported by a Grassroots Grant, in traditionally African-American neighborhoods of Pittsburgh such as Homewood and the Hill District. Expanding the film’s audience wasn’t Ivey’s only motive. While making the film, “it was really a struggle, getting people to open up,” says Ivey. “Any kind of media, in their opinion, always makes you look bad.”

The screenings provided Ivey with an opportunity to show those communities that he was telling the whole story, which he’ll continue to do as a filmmaker as long as he’s in Pittsburgh.

“There are some happy stories, some good things that happened, but of course some people make it, and some people don’t,” says Ivey. “A lot of people fall through the cracks, and we see some really sad stories, too.

“This is frank stuff, and I know it’s frustrating for some local media to cover these communities. But, for one thing, just because I’m black, it’s easier for me to get access to those communities—because I am them, so I have a real opportunity. It’s all about telling the truth, about getting past that Pittsburgh politeness, and getting people to open up.”
WE’RE NOT ONLY MAKING CLEANER WATER HERE, WE’RE CREATING A NEW ENVIRONMENT, A WETLANDS THAT’S TEEMING WITH LIFE.
One of the long-standing ironies of Pittsburgh’s reputation is that, despite being known for so long as the smoky Steel City, one can travel a few miles in almost any direction out of the city’s center and escape into an idyllic countryside unlike that surrounding almost any other metropolitan area. This irony, however, is one that Western Pennsylvanians cherish: Those trails, waterways, ponds and fields are as much a part of the region’s identity as its industrial heritage or deep-rooted history.
As a part of Community Connections, many projects cut paths to increase the understanding of, and access to, the region’s outdoor amenities, be that miles outside of town or just around the corner. Because the depth of this region’s environmental beauty is something that Pittsburgh—perhaps because of its decades with smoke-darkened skies—never takes for granted.

FISHERMEN OF MEN

Sitting on the shore, Rodney Bryant points east, away from the boathouse and towards the deepest part of the lake in North Park, Allegheny County. That’s where he used to catch catfish and trout on his weekly trips to the park, he explains, “until I had my first heart attack, three years ago. I haven’t been here since. Not ’til today.”

Bryant’s most recent trip to North Park, on a made-to-order sunny summer’s afternoon, wasn’t necessarily about catching fish. With Fisherman’s Tale, a Grassroots Project lead by the century-old senior-care organization Lemington Community Services (LCS), Bryant and over a dozen other African-American seniors—largely from the Lincoln-Lemington neighborhood of Pittsburgh—visited North Park to catch some rays, catch up with friends, and tell some stories. And if those stories happened to reflect on the state of their mental and physical health, LCS Executive Director Joy Starzl says, all the better.

“We’ve always had a guy’s night at the center, where the seniors come in and play cards and talk,” says Starzl. “We bring someone in to talk about an issue, but not to stand up and talk about it—they just sit around and play cards with the guys, and bring up things like grieving and depression. But the men stopped coming, so we thought, we need to expose them to this information. We did a survey, and they said, ‘we don’t wanna play cards—we want to go fishing!’”

Fisherman’s Tale brought the guy’s night outside. Along with the seniors, LCS took a few extra folks along on their trips: Doctors, psychologists, neighbors and friends who could casually chat with the fishermen and find out what’s really going on with them. Lincoln-Lemington, along with several other predominantly African-American neighborhoods in Pittsburgh from which LCS draws the majority of its clientele, is a rough place to be a senior citizen. A lack of amenities geared towards seniors, coupled with a high crime rate, tends to keep people isolated—which allows them to slip through the cracks too often. With the success of Fisherman’s Tale, LCS project coordinator Arnold Perry hoped that the project would help to stem that decline.

“We try to bring together people who too-often stay in their homes,” says Perry. “People need events like Fisherman’s Tale so that they don’t feel neglected and unwanted. Jesus told Peter to be a ‘fisherman of men,’ and that’s what we try to be.”
While the initial plan for the project was limited to senior citizens, the immediate appeal of Fisherman’s Tale allowed the seniors to tell their tales to a new generation of African-American youths. “The kids that have come — I’m at a loss for words,” says Starzl. “They come and they listen to the guys, and afterwards, they tell their friends about it and their friends want to go, too. They want to go again and again. And that’s so important, because if we don’t get these guys to tell their stories, they will regret it, and one day the kids will regret it, too.”

“Traditionally, boat launches are big concrete slab things that you back a truck onto,” says Moone. “We’re not interested in anything like that. Ours are made of native sandstone blocks, with steps or matched trails, to carry a kayak down on. The idea is to encourage the use of the outdoors, but discourage improper use.”

Over the summer and fall of 2008, Wild Waterways built four launches on the Connoquenessing Creek, and a further launch on Slippery Rock Creek. The result is a fully accessible yet environmentally sound water trail, which not only serves the people of Southwestern Pennsylvania, but makes a new destination for kayaking and canoeing enthusiasts from all over the country.

“The launches on the Connoquenessing cover the bulk of the Connie water trail,” says Moone. “So now, if you’re a beginner and want flat water, we’ve got a space for you — you won’t have to paddle lilies to get out of the water. But there’s another stretch — from Ellwood City Gorge to Rock Point — that’s serious Class 3 and Class 4 rapids, and it’s hard to get in and out of the water there. This makes that available, and we expect a big influx of people, people who know what they’re doing, and who like a challenge.”
Outside of Michael Edwards' stately house on Pittsburgh Street in Connellsville, Fayette County, a freestanding sign is posted, explaining the history of the block's grand homes. It's easy to see why Edwards and his partner moved here from Washington, D.C., seven years ago — the house is the kind of property that would command multiple millions of dollars in a bustling city's market. "We drove up one day from D.C. to take a look at it," says Edwards. "We didn't even stay the night," before deciding to move.

Edwards has since devoted most of his time to helping Connellsville emerge from a post-industrial slumber that's lasted decades, with initiatives like the Connellsville Cultural Trust and its Main Street Program. Through his most recent effort, the Connellsville Heritage Trail, a two-mile walking tour of the town including 11 informational signs at historic locations, Edwards hopes to attract other D.C.-to-Pittsburgh travelers — this time, though, they won't be coming in cars.

"Connellsville is the only sizeable place where the Great Allegheny Passage bike trail passes right through the town," says Edwards. "We want to get people off the trail, and walking into town."

The town of Waynesburg, in Greene County, considers itself to have once been the starting point for a historic trail of another sort. Pittsburgh and St. Louis may be more famous, but Waynesburg native Mary Beth Pastorius claims her hometown was the first launching pad for westward expansion.

"Greene County was really the road to the West," says Pastorius, a Waynesburg property owner and committed preservationist. "A lot of people in here are proud of their pioneer heritage, and there's a great historical understanding of the people. We want to do is spread that to the buildings."

With Rediscovering Eden: The Historic Waynesburg Walking Tour, local residents and visitors began to appreciate and understand the importance of this architecture. By walking, Pastorius believes Waynesburg residents can get reacquainted with their own neighborhood, and find a new sense of pride in their community's history.

"It's a notion that's shared by Valentine Brkich when he talks about his Beaver County home. "It used to be that, if you lived in Bridgewater, you walked to the store," says Brkich. "You talked to your neighbors on the porch, you passed by people on the street. You knew things about your community because you walked on your streets, in your town."

The memory of the way things used to be is ever-present in Brkich's life, whose family history is closely tied to his hometown. His grandfather served as mayor for nearly four decades and built the house that Brkich now lives in, the same house where his own father was born.

"I have a big interest in getting people to take pride in this community," says Brkich, "to recognize the treasures they have. So I wanted to take these river towns here in Beaver County, bring attention to them, and connect them.

Towards that goal, Brkich devised the River Town Community Walking Maps project, mapping pedestrian paths in each of ten communities along the Ohio and Beaver rivers. The walks combine the towns' downtown amenities and heritage sites, plus provide a brief historical overview. While Brkich himself assembled the histories, choosing the walking routes and points of interest was a collaborative effort with the downtown-partnership organizations in each community — one of many links between river towns like Beaver, Rochester, Monaca, and Bridgewater.

"People don't walk anymore, and it's one of the things that has taken away the community aspect of our towns."
It made me think — what about people who aren’t like me, and don’t have the options I have?
It’s the oldest kind of community engagement: A loaf of bread, a bottle of medicine, protection from harm, a helping hand extended to a neighbor in their time of need. In the town halls, churches, nonprofit offices, and living rooms of Southwestern Pennsylvania, helping to serve the basic needs of one’s neighbor isn’t an extraordinary event tied to an anniversary or region-wide initiative, but a part of everyday life.
So when Community Connections gathered people from around the region to imagine the ways they could enhance their communities, it was no surprise that a host of engaging and creative ideas evolved that would help the underserved. But in economically troubled areas of Mercer County, the Mon Valley, the City of Pittsburgh and more, Community Connections projects not only helped to serve those in need, they brought our region just a little bit closer together — and brought a few more helping hands within reach.

**TRANSIT AUTHORITY**

Their hands covered in grease, their backs bent, hunched over a car’s engine — Pastor Phil Beck and Josh Salley of Central Community Church (C3 for short) in Transfer, Mercer County, have a funny word for what they do in a cramped garage each Friday night: ministry. It’s an expression of faith encapsulated by the slogan on the back of their T-shirts — “Just Do Good” — and one that Beck subscribes to whole-heartedly.

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**TRAVERSE AUTHORITY**

Across Route 18 from the Central Community Church in Transfer sits a former strip mall, donated for the church’s use. In one corner of the building, fellow Michigan-to-Mercer transplants Beck and Salley, two car enthusiasts arrived separately, and met serendipitously — operate the C3 Performance Car Care Ministry. Every Friday night, locals with lots of car trouble but little money can get free-to-cheap oil changes, assessments, and minor repair work as part of Central Community Church’s mission of ceaseless community service.

Also from Grassroots, the Church was able to renovate a garage-like space within the old mall and begin to process the stack of applications they received for help with auto repair. The Church acquired donated parts and help from several local garages, and a lot of loving labor from Beck’s parishioners — all of the hours put into renovating the space were volunteered. And while a church-operated car mechanic might seem strange to some, in Mercer County, it just makes sense.

The sparsely populated territories of Mercer County, 65 miles north of Pittsburgh, are caught in something of a no-man’s-land. Mercer’s a little too far south for Erie’s orbit, and that pesky border keeps it from latching onto Youngstown, Ohio — even though its proximity to that city ironically designates Mercer as an “urban” area in the eyes of many federal agencies. With a widespread population, and little-to-no public transit available between most of its towns, just getting from place to place becomes the number one issue.

Most descriptions of Southwestern Pennsylvania, omit Mercer County, too. So when the opportunity arose to participate in Community Connections, with its expanded view of the Pittsburgh region, projects in Mercer County turned out in numbers. And, unsurprisingly, many directly addressed that transportation issue.

“Transportation is the big problem here,” says Michael Wright, president and CEO of the Shenango Valley Urban League, and a Grassroots decisionmaker for Mercer County. “If you don’t have your own vehicle, you can’t get a job, you can’t even go to the doctor — you can’t do anything.”

For some Mercer County residents, getting from Hermitage to Sharon isn’t an option, never mind a trip to Pittsburgh, even if one’s physical or mental health depends on it. That’s why the Community Counseling Center of Mercer County came up with the idea for its Telepsychiatry Project — a program to help provide access to psychiatric medical help for Mercer County kids without their families having to make the trip to Pittsburgh.

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In telepsychiatry, patients can have their initial visits with a certified psychiatrist over a computer-based long-distance video and audio system. Patients — in this case primarily children — can receive diagnosis, and in some cases even prescriptions, over the system, without having to physically visit the doctor.

“I always wish there was no reason for us to have a job,” says Torok. “But there is a real need, and with a program like this, we’re able to provide better access to services, sooner, and get kids started earlier with the attention they need.”

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For the Westmoreland County Food Bank, Greensburg is something of a riddle: The county’s seat and largest city, only eight miles south of the Food Bank’s Delmont headquarters, and yet frequently out of reach.

“Greensburg is hugely important for us,” says Deana Pastor, program director for Westmoreland County Food Bank. “And before our Community Connections grant, our Operation Fresh Express program hadn’t been there for two years because we didn’t have a sponsor.”

Operation Fresh Express takes fresh and perishable foods into the county’s various communities, using two refrigerated trucks, to supplement the non-perishable items that the Food Bank’s “food box” recipients receive monthly. On average, community visits service 150–200 people per trip, all with donated food—the program began in 1999 as a way to distribute the perishable items received at regular donation points before they had to be thrown out. During the summer months, Operation Fresh Express also receives donations from local farmers’ “hunger garden” crops designated for Food Bank donation.

Operation Fresh Express requires volunteers and donated goods to work, both of which it had. But it still costs money, even just to run the trucks—about $350 per trip, which must be donated by a community sponsor. With a Grassroots Grant, the Food Bank was able to jumpstart and standardize the Operation Fresh Express schedule, thereby building its capacity to reach more people more frequently.

By using their grant money to revisit areas like Greensburg and Monessen that Operation Fresh Express had been missing, the program raised its visibility and was able to woo enough new sponsors to fill its calendar for 2009 in advance. In the Mount Pleasant area, which hadn’t received regular visits in years, the Food Bank was able to solicit 2009 sponsorship by inviting a potential sponsor to volunteer at a grant-funded 2008 Operation Fresh Express visit.

“This program always operates at a deficit,” says Pastor. “That’s OK—we don’t want to throw away good food just because it expires. But we have to have a sponsor to make it work. There are a few regular sponsors—churches, rotary clubs—but other than those communities, service is hit-and-miss. That’s why the grant was so important—I got us back into these communities.”
Gritty concentration and joyful determination: The faces of the runners who turned out in force for Fayette County’s Main Street Classic 5K Run/Walk for the Homeless reveal a desire to succeed, and a knowledge that they’re running for a reason. Hosted by Uniontown’s homeless-aid organization, City Mission-Living Stones, the Main Street Classic gave participants a chance to come together on a beautiful summer’s day to raise awareness for less fortunate members of the community. The Main Street Classic wasn’t about running away from the region’s problems, but about neighbors uniting to confront those problems, head on and at full speed.
When Jude Vachon injured her shoulder in 2005, she could hardly have imagined that it would be the catalyst that led her life in an entirely new direction. Vachon had good reason to believe that, although uninsured at the time, she would be able to find whatever assistance was available to help cover medical expenses. After all, Vachon had experience as an educator and community activist, and was well on her way to her current career as a librarian in Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Public Library system. If there was information out there, she’d be able to find it.

“But it was all extremely difficult,” says Vachon. “It was hard for me to find any help, and I’m a big information geek! I can be really creative and resourceful about getting things done, and it made me think — what about those people who aren’t like me, and don’t have the options I have? No internet access, no personal connections — it just hit me how in the dark people are without information.”

In the aftermath of her own problems, Vachon began writing things down — the addresses and phone numbers, names and notes that can help to navigate the maze of organizations and programs that exist in the Pittsburgh area to help the medically uninsured. Under the simple name Be Well!, Vachon began publishing a booklet of all that information, distributing it to one of the least-insured demographics — 18- to 40-year-olds.

Be Well! was immediately successful, running through 6,000 copies and about 10 separate revisions as it garnered more attention and built relationships with healthcare providers and organizations around Pittsburgh. But Vachon realized that the audience she was reaching wasn’t necessarily the one that needed this help the most: The uninsured are represented with wildly disproportionate numbers in African-American communities, particularly amongst seniors. So, Vachon received a Grassroots Grant to build upon Be Well!’s relationship with St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church, within reach of multiple target neighborhoods like East Liberty and the Hill District, and expand the project’s impact with a new print run of the Be Well! booklet.

Through information sessions and community health fairs at St. Andrew’s, Be Well! provided everything from traditional medical services — free blood-pressure checks and HIV screenings — to introductions to non-mainstream health options, such as doula and midwife birthing programs. But Vachon says that the real breakthrough came not necessarily from meetings and sessions, but from old-fashioned legwork.

“Sometimes people see that there’s a healthcare fair and have this sense that, ‘there’s nothing there for me,’” says Vachon. “You have to go to where people really are, to make booklets to corner stores and braiding salons, putting fliers up on telephone poles — everything. Access to information has to come first, and that means you’ve got to try to be as ubiquitous as possible.”
This region is perfect for discussing the process through which we construct the idea of a place. We want people to take a closer look at the environment that surrounds them.
The complexities of meaning in contemporary art make strange bedfellows indeed: A billboard seen from the highway and a piece of music arranged for brass band; paintings hung in bus shelters and in nooks and crannies of a do-it-yourself gallery space. Taken out of context, these disparate works might seem as unrelated as could be. But contemporary art is about context—about the curator as artist—and, in the right hands, such works can be arranged into a new whole, describing a new way of looking at the world.
As a part of Community Connections, a handful of artistic endeavors used a wide array of media to build new ways to perceive our communities. Whether that was a vision of the built environment Southwestern Pennsylvanians inhabit, a theme to act as soundtrack for the city, or a bold imagining of the region’s artistic abundance, those projects worked toward a common goal: to offer a new perception of the Pittsburgh region’s artistic past and future, by offering a different glimpse of its creative present.

**Signs of the Times**

The tilt of a Tiki-like neon “T.” The star that dots an “i,” somewhere between a cartoon and a Christmas-tree ornament. The pastel aquas and pinks that color in those letters, like a ghost of Miami on Steubenville Pike.

The simplicity and fragility of a sign, like the Twin Hi-Way Drive-In Theatre’s classic sign in Robinson Township, can be both its greatest beauty and its kiss of death: Why keep something built for a function after that function has passed?

But to the founders and participants of the Pittsburgh Signs Project, that simplicity holds a beauty worth savoring; that fragility, something worth holding onto.

Since 2004, Jennifer Baron, Greg Langel, Elizabeth Perry, and Mark Stroup have captured images of the signage that dots Southwestern Pennsylvania’s landscapes, and shared them with the world on their celebrated website, [www.pittsburghsigns.org](http://www.pittsburghsigns.org). And with the book *Pittsburgh Signs Project: 250 Signs of Western Pennsylvania*, funded by a Regional Grant, the project took a significant step forward.

Since its inception, Pittsburgh Signs Project has been, according to Stroup, a way of examining and celebrating the objects that comprise our places—just as we examine and celebrate the cultural affections that we, as people, are comprised of. For *250 Signs of Western Pennsylvania*, the project brought those two elements together, with a region-wide call for photographers both amateur and professional; dozens of photographers, from all 14 Southwestern Pennsylvania counties, contributed photos of signs to the book. And in doing so, created a compendium of regional lore.

Some of the included signs are obvious choices. Others, far less so: A farm’s sign, made of tires, or handwritten roadside notes on rural roads.

“We hope that this project can push the conversation about Pittsburgh as a place,” says Stroup. “This region is perfect for discussing the process through which we construct the idea of a place—the mythology that informs our view of the place we live. We want people to take a closer look at the environment that surrounds them.”

Pittsburgh Signs Project has done that in a number of ways besides its online presence, from walks around various sign-heavy locations, to shows of photographs at galleries and group events. With *250 Signs*, an entire new audience has
opened up for the project. With heavy local and national publicity, including an Associated Press story, that conversation about Pittsburgh has gone from web phenomenon to that recognition reserved for more durable objects. For Jennifer Baron, removing the project from its web-based environment only heightens its power. Through the team’s relationship with Carnegie Mellon University’s STUDIO for Creative Inquiry, the Carnegie Mellon University Press agreed to act as publisher—with the added benefit of a nationwide distribution through Cornell University Press.

"The book is about capturing and documenting this culture is always about millions of things, all going at once. But where you just pick apart one little thing over and over. Our perceptive is really to be something beautiful in there?" And for the month of June 2008, when there’s something poetic about just looking at one little thing."

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time. Viewed in this new context, thanks to Mosser’s impressionistic portrait of the famed August Wilson peered through the window of a bus shelter. At dusk on a hot summer’s evening in Pittsburgh, the idea came in a flash. Artist Tim Meehan saw a vulgar radio-station ad posted inside a shelter like the ones he and fellow Academy co-founder Dan Vogel waited in every day. "It was so tacky," says Meehan, "I just thought, ‘why can’t there be something beautiful in there?’" And for the month of June 2008, when the River City Brass Band decided to highlight the music of the many world-famous musicians that hail from the Pittsburgh region, the nationally-regarded concert band found a lot to choose from. There are famed singers and players like Dakota Staton and Staton and George Benson. And then there are composers like the legendary Henry Mancini and Billy Strayhorn—and a few new composers like Carson Cooman and Marilyn Tait—That the trio, one day, just might become legend by "The Eyes of August," on its landscape. But the project’s legacy may prove to be a constant swirl of such work. Now that the precedent is set, Vogel and Meehan say the possibilities seem endless. "When we started, we knew this was going to be a bit of an optimistic summer’s morning, and the thick fug of history that hangs just out of reach in the city’s air. Across the street from that location into the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, where Vogel and Meehan first struck on the idea for The Academy of the South Side. "We thought, ‘what if there was something for contemporary realist painting like the Art Institute is for graphic design?’" Vogel recalled.

Less than a year later, The Academy of the South Side opened, offering classes and five-model sessions to anyone interested in drawing and painting technique and theory, taught by local artists at the Brew House art space in the South Side. When The Academy purchased a bus shelter ad on the South Side’s Carson Street to announce their classes a few years back, it opened their eyes to the possibilities of this citywide canvas: At less than $300 for a month-long rental, including the creation of a shelter-wall-sized poster of their artwork, Vogel and Meehan realized how easily one could parlay a small grant into a citywide salon.

With enough funding secured, the Academy began accepting submissions and chose 19 high-visibility bus stops, and an equal number of artists from over 80 submissions. The result was a nationwide intercession of Chopin’s "Gold Light: Pittsburgh," was like an introduction or a handshake. Its haze lifted in a flash. Within an hour, the Academy had received 116 submissions and chose 19 high-visibility bus stops, and an equal number of artists from over 80 submissions. The result was a nationwide intercession of Chopin’s "Gold Light: Pittsburgh," was like an introduction or a handshake. Its haze lifted in a flash. Within an hour, the Academy had received 116 submissions and chose 19 high-visibility bus stops, and an equal number of artists from over 80 submissions. The result was a nationwide intercession of Chopin’s "Gold Light: Pittsburgh," was like an introduction or a handshake. Its haze lifted in a flash. 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from composers with regional connections, based on their visions of Pittsburgh. As the Band’s music director and conductor, Denis Colwell knew as well as anyone that debuting a new piece of music is a risky proposition—but that the rewards can be just as great.

“There’s never a guarantee that the audience is going to like a new piece, of course,” says Colwell. “But we try to keep a balance on our programs—of the old and the new. With enough new arrangements of old favorites to sink their teeth into, I like to believe an audience will grant you the opportunity to try something brand new. After all, every piece of music was a debut at some point!”

For their Celebrate Pittsburgh project, the River City Brass Band commissioned and debuted new pieces such as “Portrait in Brass and Steel” by Mike Tomaro, a Band member and head of Jazz Studies at Duquesne University; recent musical composition graduate Carson Cooman’s “Pittsburgh Rhapsody”; and “Snapshots of a Great City” by former dean of Carnegie Mellon’s music school, Marilyn Taft-Thomas.

While debuting new music was the most ambitious part of River City Brass Band’s project, it would never have been enough for this hard-working ensemble to expose the music only to a Downtown Pittsburgh audience. As part of its mission to maintain an expanded focus and bring music to the region, rather than forcing the region to come to them, the Band’s 2008 calendar saw the band perform each of its programs in at least seven locations—from Westmoreland to Cambria to Beaver counties, and all over Allegheny County.

To Colwell, the next step for these commissioned compositions is to see to their addition to, and survival in, the popular repertoire, which means reaching out beyond the brass band world.

“There are only two professional brass bands in the U.S.,” says Colwell. “So the number of performances is very limited. All too often, a piece gets written and premiered, and that’s it. But once you transcribe these pieces for concert band, there are hundreds of options—every school in the country has one.”

With a host of talented arrangers within the Band’s ranks, including composers such as Tomaro, making those transcriptions a reality won’t be difficult—allowing the music from Celebrate Pittsburgh to remain in circulation for years to come.

Jill Larson knew exactly what she wanted In The Making: 250 Years/250 Artists to accomplish, and the five-month long exhibition at Fe gallery in Pittsburgh’s Lawrenceville neighborhood certainly hit its mark. While many small, independent gallery shows might go for stylistic cohesion, minimalist organization, or conceptual interdependence, Larson wanted In The Making to inspire a radically different emotion.

“I wanted people to be overwhelmed,” says Larson. Fe gallery’s volunteer artistic director. “I wanted them to have the
same impression I had when I moved here — to take a step back, right when they walk in, and have that experience I had.”

That experience was an age-old Pittsburgh story: Drawn to the city for reasons beyond her control, an artist discovers that, rather than a smoggy culture-free zone, Pittsburgh boasts a thriving arts scene comparable to much larger cities. Upon arriving from Atlanta, Larson was initially overwhelmed, and immediately wanted to tell the world about the wealth of talent in her new home.

“I was shocked to find how many good artists were living in this region,” says Larson. “I was shocked by the quantity and the quality of the work being done here, and I really wanted to show other people!”

Larson quickly organized an exhibit connecting Atlanta and Pittsburgh artists, which showed in both cities, including what was meant to be a one-time use of space that Fe gallery (named for the periodic-table symbol for iron) now inhabits. After more than five years, Fe — now a nonprofit organization and volunteer-staffed gallery — is still thriving.

When the opportunity to celebrate Pittsburgh’s 250th arose, Larson conceived of a new way to broadcast the region’s depth of artistic talent: 250 artists, drawn from all 14 counties of the region, crowded together on Fe’s walls, creating a visual critical mass. With works hung salon-style to cover every inch of the gallery — the once-cobwebbed corners to the hinges of the back door — the result was, indeed, overwhelming: A visual flurry of chaos matched only by its instant adoration by the region’s public. It was, in fact, almost too successful, with around 900 people waiting in line up to 30 minutes to attend its September 2008 opening night.

But the more subtle aspect of the show comes from its catalog of the artists and their work, funded by a Regional Grant. By necessity it, too, is huge. But rather than mere keepsakes, the book serves as something of an actual catalog of Pittsburgh art — a reference guide to 250 of the region’s artists and their work, complete with biographical and contact information, sent to 1,000 galleries and art spaces across the country. These mailings were targeted so that, for example, when the catalog was sent to a space similar to Pittsburgh’s Mattress Factory — which specializes in installation art — regional artists like Tim Kaulen from the South Side Sculpture Project, were highlighted.

Larson knows the catalog won’t overwhelm its audience the same way that the show did, but that the result will be the same: A greater acknowledgement of the Pittsburgh region’s art scene, both outside the region and within it.

“We want it to be useful as a tool,” says Larson. “So that a photography gallery can be introduced to Pittsburgh photographers, and then contact those artists directly. And it’s a way to network — to demystify some of the concepts people might have about the arts in this region.”
When he walks into one of Pittsburgh’s jazz jam sessions, it’s as though Dr. Nelson Harrison is going home. Watching the city’s best and brightest musicians gather to play and talk, many of them Harrison’s own former students, he imagines these young players commune with the ghosts of jazz history that still inhabit Pittsburgh. They’re spirits he remembers: trombonist Harrison played his first gigs in 1954, and has continued playing and teaching for the ensuing half century, working with the likes of Nathan Davis and the Count Basie Big Band. But Harrison’s enthusiasm has been subdued at times by a lack of recognition and respect for Pittsburgh’s hallowed jazz ground—a shortcoming that has begun to be rectified with a series of projects aimed at reviving the spirit of Pittsburgh’s jazz era by dignifying the past, educating the present, and connecting to the future of musicians in this city. With his Musicians of Wylie Avenue project, named for the famous Hill District street on which so much of Pittsburgh’s jazz history was made, Harrison hopes to teach young musicians how to make their own golden age.

"I originally thought I was going one direction with Musicians of Wylie Avenue, with oral histories and archives. But with ‘Web 2.0’ platforms, I can manage all of those histories online. I could put that into a book or on a DVD, but on the web I can do all of that and I can take a picture or a movie in a split second and send it right to the site. I have the fortune of being both historically aware, and an active participant. So I have thousands of photos and tapes—I’ve begun going through just photos of the old Hill District venues, the Crawford Grill, and just that is luxury and hours of work. But on the Pittsburgh Jazz Network, people can post things from their archives, and they will all be annotated—the web can handle all of that."

At some point, jazz music changed to a model that’s not part of its tradition—it’s closed now; promoters have kept the musicians and audiences separate, and that’s anathema to the music. This isn’t the symphony! In fact, one of the reasons jazz musicians get paid so little now is that nobody knows what we do. You never see a panel of musicians talking about jazz the way you see people dissect the Immaculate Reception or the Steelers’ last game. Sure, we talk about music every time we get together, but we haven’t been sharing that knowledge with the public. Now, with the Network, it all opens up. People can post things from their archives, and they will all be annotated—the web can handle all of that."

"No—: 28 1/100 Musicians of Wylie Avenue Awarded: $5,000"
When Jimmy Bashline died on May 15, 2008, at the age of 90, he left behind a legacy of visionary art that conjures the entirety of a specific cultural time and place—the highlight-era of the American circus, as seen in his hometown of Butler. Over the course of seven decades, Bashline’s commercial work, as a cartoonist and sign painter, and non-commercial artwork stood as icons of Americana within his community. Only a month before his passing, Bashline’s masterpiece—the Jay Bee Model Circus—opened at its permanent home at the Butler County Historical Society Heritage Center. Its purchase and display by the Society funded by a Grassroots Grant.

The Jay Bee Model Circus is a diorama of over 1,000 hand-carved figurines, vehicles, animals, buildings, model trains and other mechanical implements, created entirely by self-taught artist Bashline. After spending World War II as an army airbrush artist, upon his return to Butler in 1946, he began what would become a lifelong process of hand-crafting the figures for his Jay Bee Circus—everything from an elephant that splashes water to the individually carved spokes on the wagon wheels.

But the Jay Bee Model Circus isn’t just about the fantasy world of the circus. It’s about the real world of Butler at a time when the trains would periodically stop by filled with elephants and lions, and when the firm ground around P.J. Oesterling’s feed shop would periodically give way to the firmament of the trapeze. That’s why Bashline’s fantastic circus environment isn’t disrupted by the representation of real people—like Jimmy and his daughter Aryl, identifiable by the tiny glasses on her one-inch-tall figurine. Rather, it’s strengthened, a chaos controlled by the town that’s at its core.

“At our home, the circus was only seen by less than 200 visitors over the years,” says Aryl Bashline. “The day of the grand opening, it was seen by over 700 people. So I think this is a wonderful venue for my father’s extraordinary hobby. I hope it will continue to be enjoyed by citizens and other visitors to Butler County for years to come.”

Bashline’s artwork combined a long-term commitment with a detailed eye for the traits that comprised his concept of America. “Art,” as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “is the path of the creator to his work,” a concept illustrated voluminously by Bashline, whose artwork thrived cathartically on detailed thematic repetition. His was an American oeuvre, a labor of love born from a Yankee love of labor and a passion for the subtle details hidden within the brash pomp and pride of Americans.

Jimmy Bashline worked on the Jay Bee Model Circus for 60 years, and lived long enough to see it find its permanent home. He knew what he loved to do, and he did it well for over half a century—and to that, we say “Bravo.”
THE LIVES THESE PEOPLE LED AND THE STORIES THEY HAVE TO TELL ARE SO REMARKABLE.
There is a folk song that tells us that, “along with the shoes and the shirts and the ties / there’s a library that’s lost when an old man dies.” But as a part of Pittsburgh 250, several major Community Connections projects made it their mission to alleviate some small pieces of that loss—to preserve for future generations those “libraries” in our neighbors’ minds that, together, form the place we call home.
Making the Connections | Vol. 09

The region’s African-American history and artistic heritage; the largely unknown tale of Pittsburgh’s role in the women’s rights movement; the stories of the relationship between Southwestern Pennsylvanians and their environment:

These are libraries of stories held as precious by our region’s people. Through recorded interviews, Community Connections oral history projects shared those accounts, and used them to build an entrance-level exhibit. It’s built a relationship with the community that will pay dividends for years.

To Shay Wafer, those stories and histories of the African-American community in Pittsburgh were attracting large numbers of participants. By the end of the series, its closing fairs in the Hill District and East Liberty were attracting large numbers of participants.

But at the project’s start, things weren’t so easy — the Center had to go door-to-door in the neighborhoods, hand others their photographs scanned on the spot — and left with both their originals, and their own digital version on CD.

Throughout 2008, the August Wilson Center held a series of oral history “collecting fairs” in communities including McKees Rocks, Brookline, and Pittsburgh’s North Side, inviting people to bring their stories, photos, and documents. While some participants sat in a private room, giving taped interviews, others had their photographs scanned on the spot — and left with both their originals, and their own digital version on CD.

By the end of the series, its closing fairs in the Hill District and East Liberty were attracting large numbers of participants.

A SOlID founDAtion

The first-floor of the August Wilson Center for African American Culture in Pittsburgh was built on a foundation of stories: The tales of men and women, ordinary and extraordinary, from the region. But by collecting the words and images of Pittsburgh’s African-American artists and ordinary citizens alike through the Civil Rites oral history project, the Center hasn’t just built an entrance-level exhibit. It’s built a relationship with the community that will pay dividends for years.

Shay Wafer, those stories and histories of the African-American

making the connections 09: lore

We tried to teach people what it means to collect — that their stories are important. And by doing that, we created a ground-swell of interest in contributing stories.

Collecting oral histories of Pittsburgh’s African-American community is by no means a new idea. At Carnegie Mellon University, the Center for African-American Urban Studies and the project. By switching the recordings regularly, and contact-

imagine an organization, in a new building, that was critical for us, and that we're able to achieve that to tell people, "your stories, your pictures, they're in the exhibit — you are the exhibit.""}

WAR HISTORY

Picture a map of America with lines drawn connecting the country’s three largest cities: New York City to Chicago to Los Angeles. So many of the nation’s historic movements can find their roots and branches in these three hubs, and the women’s movement in the 1960s and ’70s is no different.

Dr. Patricia Ulbrich wants people to see that map slightly differently — with a detour through Western Pennsylvania, without which the women’s movement would’ve been a very different historical event.

“Everyone knows New York was a hub,” says Ulbrich. “‘Everyone knows Chicago, and L.A. Say that ‘Pittsburgh was the fourth hub,’ though, and people don’t realize that. But there were extraordinary things that happened here, and extra-ordinary ordinary.”
Eleanor Smeal, Activist

No: 05

In Sisterhood: The Women’s Movement in Pittsburgh
Awarded: $45,000
In Sisterhood's histories go on to discuss the founding of Pittsburgh Action Against Rape, only the second rape-victim’s advocacy organization in the country, and the University of Pittsburgh’s Women’s Studies program — another second in the nation — both founded in 1972.

“In 1977, feminist press KNOW, Inc., documented that there were 48 feminist organizations in Southwestern Pennsylvania,” says Ulbrich. “With In Sisterhood, we looked at the ones that were really cutting-edge — and what prompted those people to start them.”

Like it was for the staff at the August Wilson Center, the necessity of moving swiftly in collecting oral histories became starkly apparent during In Sisterhood’s work. The project was well into the process of conducting interviews when Ulbrich learned of the death of Jean Witter, the author of a historic 1979 legal opinion regarding the proposed Equal Rights Amendment whose complaint against the Pittsburgh Press for its discrimination went all the way to the Supreme Court and set the national legal precedent.

Those change agents include people such as Eleanor Smeal, one of three women from Pittsburgh to serve as the national president of the National Organization for Women. It includes Gerald Gardner and JoAnn Evansgardner, whose complaint against the Pittsburgh Press for its discrimination went all the way to the Supreme Court and set the national legal precedent. And it was important to do it for Pittsburgh 250, so that the anniversary included the legacy of women who acted as change agents.

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“Some women in the workforce were really cutting-edge — and what prompted those people to start them?”

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environmental professionals to ordinary citizens’ recollections of their relationship to the outdoors. People like Glenn Helbling, a Squirrel Hill resident who constantly finds new things to enjoy in Pittsburgh’s Schenley Park, or 10-year-old Brendan Glover of Rural Valley, Armstrong County, who loves to go fishing and “listen to the sounds, see nature, see how fish and birds act when they’re just being left alone.”

Sometimes, however, those memories are of surmounting the odds stacked by a legacy of industrialization. Diane Lindley of Lone Pine, Washington County, recounts the struggle her mother and father went through when their home was nearly destroyed by the collapse of an old longwall coal mine. “I believe that politicians won’t act until the people take a stand,” Lindley told Allegheny Front. “We have streams on our property that lead into a bigger stream, and then into a bigger river, and eventually, the water you see at the Point in Pittsburgh comes from all these little streams. Well, when the undermining destroys that, it’s a problem for everyone.”

Many of these interviews were edited and broadcast on Allegheny Front’s weekly radio program, produced at community-supported radio station WYEP-FM in Pittsburgh, and the vast majority of the interviews were made available for online listening on the program’s website.

The project took to heart Community Connections’ mission of building new relationships between disparate elements of the region by using other funded projects to uncover interview possibilities. Amongst their many outings, Allegheny Front used events held by Fisherman’s Tale, Wild Waterways Conservancy, Venture Outdoors, and the Mobile Agricultural Education Lab—all projects supported by Community Connections—to find unique perspectives on interactions between people and their environment.

The message of these environmental oral histories is a simple one: Our everyday lives aren’t just scenery of history; they’re vital to history. And they’re stories that must be told, heard, and kept.

“Over the course of the Environmental Oral History Project, it became evident that these are ordinary people, and their normal lives involve the environment and nature every day,” says Krauer. “I think the message is that what we have here in Southwestern Pennsylvania is pretty wonderful and it belongs to everyone.”
When Westmoreland Heritage Executive Director Tom Headley speaks of the 18th century, you’d be forgiven for thinking it’s only just happened. Fort Ligonier, the Battle of Bushy Run, French soldiers, Indian warriors and shamans—Headley refers to them all in the present tense. And that’s not just historian’s prerogative: Tom Headley doesn’t just know about French and Indian War soldiers, he knows them.

For the Westmoreland County History Speakers Program, begun with funding from a grassroots grant, Headley is in constant contact with a variety of living historians—portraying Native Americans, 18th-century soldiers, and an array of other characters from the region’s past whom he connects with schools and classes, history clubs and small cultural organizations.

Westmoreland County is an area steeped in history—and of particular historical importance to the founding of Pittsburgh, being a vital stop on the Forbes Trail. But the issues it faces, even within projects directly addressing that history, are as modern as anywhere else. Because, as Headley points out, while Westmoreland County is chock-full of historical sites and amenities, the days when a school group’s field trip was a given are long gone.

“Schools don’t have a big budget for supplemental things these days,” says Headley. “Because of money or because it’s not a curriculum priority, some schools no longer do field trips to these sites. We empower the sites to approach these schools, and tell them, ‘we can send a living historian into the school.’”

Through the speakers program, Westmoreland Heritage and the Westmoreland County Historical Society have connected school programs with living historians, and other speakers to more than 25 of the county’s historical and cultural societies. Headley sees this as part of Heritage’s mission to better market history as a regional amenity. The speakers’ project brings groups, patrons, and historians together towards that goal. “There’s an economic benefit to marketing history in a more unified way,” says Headley, “and alongside education, that’s another part of our mission.”

The speakers, however, have a much more straightforward mission when they visit a school or an organization: by acting as an example of actual early-Western Pennsylvania life, they offer a glimpse of the past that’s less a page out of a history book, and more a page out of history.

“When someone like Dr. Kinorea Tigri—a Native American living historian—goes into a school, it’s a different way to get kids thinking and learning about history: a way that grabs their attention.”

**History Booking**

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THE BEAUTY OF THIS IS THAT IT TurnED OUT TO BE THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG.
No schoolyard bell rang on January 1, 2009, marking the end of Pittsburgh 250.

There was no finish-line tape for the region to collectively crash through as the 250th year passed into the 251st. Most importantly, the people, projects, and motivations that together comprised Community Connections didn’t sit back in relief once this momentous year in Pittsburgh’s history technically ended. Instead, the work carries on because the pressing needs of a region don’t watch the calendar.

Community cleanup volunteers, Allegheny County
For some of the 100 projects involved in Community Connections, their work was specifically tied in to Pittsburgh 250. But even though events such as Won’t You Be My Neighbor? Day and many of Diversity Outdoors interested in water activities, and environmental education.”

Diversity Outdoors sought to reflect the diversity of the community it serves. Building upon their Grassroots Grant, the group sought extensive funding for two more classes in the Spring semester, and at least three more classes next year!”

But Scott and Powell’s aspirations go farther than 2009: “We were able to get a lot of unrelated groups involved, their initial plans. And regionally, the Philanthropy Project is one of a handful of like projects being funded and watched through Campus Compact, a national service-learning organization, which wishes to bring philanthropic education to a national level. And, regionally, a similar course has begun at the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, which both Powell and Scott have helped with idea exchanges.

For many projects, the regional scope and far-reaching prestige of Pittsburgh 250 and Community Connections opened doors that had previously been tightly shut, and allowed new ideas and new relationships to prosper — along with the projects themselves. At Slippery Rock University (SRU), the plan was to use a Grassroots Grant to help purchase new bicycles for the Great Bike Initiative, as part of Slippery Rock Green and Growing — a project that couples the lending of free bikes together with a campus-wide tree-planting movement. But the grant from Community Connections provided much more than needed financial support. Attention from outside their immediate community and participation in Pittsburgh 250 helped the group to leverage further grants and carry the project beyond their initial plans. “We were able to get a lot of unrelated groups involved, from the University’s president on down,” says Diana Wolak, SRU’s cooperative activities assistant. “The president was so impressed by the prestige that came from this grant, he really...
Diversity Outdoors
Awarded: $5,000
bought into the idea and provided matching funds — then we got another matching grant from a local company.”

By the time the project officially launched at the end of September, Green and Growing had already surpassed its dream goal of 10 new bikes — there are 14 new and plenty of refurbished old green bikes on campus today — and had planted 100 trees on SRU’s campus. Cycling Club advisor, and SRU’s coordinator of outdoor adventures, Steve Roberts was even able to commit paid student hours to bike repair and other project-related work. And with the continued publicity garnered through its Pittsburgh 250 connections, Green and Growing will keep on doing just that well beyond 2008’s official celebration of the anniversary.

Moreover, the organization has a whole new sphere of regional relationships to build upon. It’s not just that Olsen can now talk to new corporations and foundations about support; her staff can honestly tell children that there are people out there — not just in Mercer County, but all over — who care about their future.

Olsen knew the importance of such cross-border investment for herself, but had it reinforced by a conversation with one of the students that AWARE staff member Jaimie Kratochvil visited throughout the year. She explained to the student that people were coming from Pittsburgh to visit the organization — and that money from Pittsburgh allowed the meetings with Jaimie to happen.

“The concept that strangers down there in Pittsburgh would pay for a staff member to visit this student — it blew her away,” says Olsen. “This student will be able to see Jaimie through the balance of the school year and beyond. I explained how the relationship was supported — and important — to people from outside the county, and this student was so surprised that she asked me, ‘Wow — I matter?’

“How do you measure the impact of a student who did not have relief or support, who now can begin to trust adults again? How do you measure a more positive vision of the future?”

Moments like these — when we realize with startling immediacy just how closely linked our lives have become with those around us—are moments that alter our understanding of what it means to be a responsible community member, a caring neighbor, and an engaged fellow citizen.

While it may have begun as an initiative to enliven the celebration of a city’s founding anniversary, Community Connections became much more than that. By bringing new people to the table and amplifying their voices during a year of reflection and aspiration, the initiative not only gave people a stake in commemorating the region’s past, but also planted seeds for the future.
“The vibrancy and feeling of possibility that’s in the Pittsburgh region—it’s almost palpable,” says co-chair Aradhna Dhanda. Neither a beginning nor an ending, Community Connections instead has been another gateway through which Southwestern Pennsylvania has traveled to emerge only more resolute. And, what’s more, the initiative built a regional network of connections that will last far beyond Pittsburgh 250.

“The process behind Community Connections was just as valuable as the projects it supported,” says co-chair Cathy Lewis Long. “For the first time, at the grassroots level, we have begun knitting together the communities of Southwestern Pennsylvania.”

Ultimately, what Community Connections produced is something more than the sum of its 100 funded projects, more than the number of people who applied or dollars that were awarded. Rather, the program laid the groundwork for continued collaboration, mutual support, and greater awareness among all of the region’s constituent parts.

“I can’t tell you where it’s going,” says co-chair George Miles. “But I hope that when somebody looks back someday, they’ll be able to say, ‘That was the start—that’s when people started being proud to be a part of this region. Not just their part of it, but a whole.’”

New social and economic ventures that lead to new relationships between neighbors and communities, a greater understanding of the connections between the grassroots and the treetops, a Southwestern Pennsylvania whose counties are strengthened as much by their unique diversity as by their common interdependence; Community Connections helped to make Pittsburgh 250 about all of these things. Indeed, its most lasting outcome and immeasurable success will be those community connections, forged from the raw materials and natural resources that have always enabled this region to grow: the talent, energy, and imagination of its people.
A new Community Connections project in the city of Pittsburgh is being used to promote and revitalization of the area. The project is being funded by a $250 Million grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The project is being coordinated by the City of Pittsburgh and is being managed by the Allegheny County Community Connections program.

The project is being focused on several key areas including:

- **Central to the region**: Westmoreland County is being looked at for the things that make it unique, including its history, green space, and its role as a gateway to the Laurel Highlands. The project is being focused on outdoor recreation and community health.

- **Somerset County**: With its natural areas like Ohiopyle State Park and Laurel Highlands, the project is being focused on the ongoing revitalization of the area.

- **Fayette County**: With its industrial heritage, the project is being focused on the glass industry that helped build the county.

- **Greene County**: With its abundant natural resources and wildlife attractions, the project is being focused on the importance of preserving this storied history.

- **Armstrong County**: With its history of oil production, the project is being focused on the early discovery of oil in Petrolia and the Pioneering settlers and breadbasket region.

- **Butler County**: With its history of steel production, the project is being focused on the founding of AK Steel or the heydays of the defense industry and burgeoning of American cities like Greensburg, Latrobe and Ligonier, Trail Towns of the Great Allegheny Passage, and leading to the heydays of the glass industry that helped build the county.

- **Fayette County**: With its industrial heritage, the project is being focused on the glass industry that helped build the county.

- **Lawrence County**: With its history of steel production, the project is being focused on the early discovery of oil in Petrolia and the Pioneering settlers and breadbasket region.

- **Washington County**: With its history of oil production, the project is being focused on the early discovery of oil in Petrolia and the Pioneering settlers and breadbasket region.

- **Monroe County**: With its history of steel production, the project is being focused on the early discovery of oil in Petrolia and the Pioneering settlers and breadbasket region.

- **Clearfield County**: With its history of oil production, the project is being focused on the early discovery of oil in Petrolia and the Pioneering settlers and breadbasket region.

- **Fayette County**: With its history of oil production, the project is being focused on the early discovery of oil in Petrolia and the Pioneering settlers and breadbasket region.

- **Greene County**: With its history of oil production, the project is being focused on the early discovery of oil in Petrolia and the Pioneering settlers and breadbasket region.

- **Allegheny County**: With its history of oil production, the project is being focused on the early discovery of oil in Petrolia and the Pioneering settlers and breadbasket region.

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Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections Regional Projects were 12 compelling initiatives that affected large audiences, left a lasting impact on communities, and contributed to the “Pride & Progress” of Southwestern Pennsylvania—the theme of Community Connections. Most projects received awards of $50,000 for their activities in 2008. Decisions were made by a panel of regional leaders that included representatives from all 14 counties.

When additional details appear within the text of the book, page reference numbers are listed (in italic) after their description.

No. 01: Celebrate Pittsburgh: Music Commissioning Project Awarded: $50,000
River City Brass Band commissioned seven new Pittsburgh-themed musical works from seven regional composers. The commissions premiered throughout 2008 and were featured during the River City Brass Band’s performance at concert venues in eight communities in Allegheny, Beaver, Cambria, and Westmoreland counties. Project Manager: James Sideris (97–98)

No. 02: Civic Rites; Oral Histories of Two Generations of Pittsburgh Artists Awarded: $35,000
August Wilson Center for African American Culture collected the work and personal stories of local African American artists as well as the memories of those who knew them in a multimedia presentation that premiered at the Center’s dedication in 2009 and became part of its permanent collection. Project Managers: Staci Baker, Ada Griffin, and Neil Barcley (109–110)

No. 03: Explore Western Pennsylvania’s Wild Waterways Awarded: $50,000
Wild Waterways Conservancy coordinated a series of boat launches throughout Butler, Beaver, and Lawrence counties to create a new, welcoming environment for residents and visitors to enjoy the rivers and waterways of the Connoquenessing and Slippery Rock waterways. Project Managers: Frank Mosser and Sheree Dougherty (128)

No. 04: Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town Public Art Project Awarded: $50,000
Progress Fund coordinated a community process to bring public art installations to each of six Trail Towns communities in Allegheny, Beaver, Cambria, and Westmoreland counties. Project Manager: James Sideris (97–98)

No. 05: In the Making: 250 Years/250 Artists Awarded: $12,500
The Fe gallery created a museum-quality, full-color catalogue documenting unique signage from the Pittsburgh region’s environmental history and preserved the signs from a region based on resource extraction to a burgeoning leader in green environmental practices. Project Manager: Kathy Kriva (119–120)

No. 06: Mobile Ag/Ed Science Lab Awarded: $50,000
PA Friends of Agriculture Foundation constructed a mobile science and agricultural laboratory to travel to schools throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania. Building on a previously successful model, the mobile learning environment brought the science of the farm into schools regionally and nationally. Project Manager: Tony McElroy and Amy Camp (119–120)

No. 07: Mobile Ag/Ed Science Lab Awarded: $50,000
 PIT Friends of Agriculture Foundation constructed a mobile science and agricultural laboratory to travel to schools throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania. Building on a previously successful model, the mobile learning environment brought the science of the farm into schools regionally and nationally. Project Manager: Tony McElroy and Amy Camp (119–120)

No. 08: Pittsburgh Environmental Oral History Project Awarded: $50,000
Thomas Moran Cater produced a four-on-a-side multimedia exhibit featuring 20 influential leaders and contributors to the environmental movement in Pittsburgh during the latter part of the 20th century. Project Manager: Dr. Patricia Ulrich (119–120)

No. 09: Roadside Giants of the Lincoln Highway Awarded: $50,000
Allegheny River, Western Pennsylvania’s only environmental radio program, produced a series of personal stories, interviews, and features to celebrate the Pittsburgh region’s environmental history and present it from a region based on resource extraction to a burgeoning leader in green environmental practices. Project Manager: Kathy Kriva (119–120)

No. 10: Roadside Giants of the Lincoln Highway Awarded: $50,000
Allegheny River, Western Pennsylvania’s only environmental radio program, produced a series of personal stories, interviews, and features to celebrate the Pittsburgh region’s environmental history and present it from a region based on resource extraction to a burgeoning leader in green environmental practices. Project Manager: Kathy Kriva (119–120)

No. 11: Pittsburgh Signs Project: 250 Signs of Western Pennsylvania Awarded: $50,000
The Fe gallery created a museum-quality, full-color catalogue documenting unique signage from the Pittsburgh region’s environmental history and preserved the signs from a region based on resource extraction to a burgeoning leader in green environmental practices. Project Manager: Kathy Kriva (119–120)

No. 12: South Side Sculpture Project Awarded: $50,000
Industrial Arts Co-op completed the final stage of the South Side Sculpture, a monumental piece of public art created from salvaged artifacts of the old mill industries of the South Side and U.S. I-79 maintenance mills. The monumental sculpture used metal to depict the towering figures of two laboring steelworkers and will be placed on permanent public display along the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh’s South Shore. Project Manager: Tisha Beamer (129–130)

No. 13: What’s Your Beef? Days Awarded: $20,000
Family Communications, Inc. promoted a series of events honoring Fred Rogers on the 80th anniversary of his birth in March 2008. “What’s Your Beef? Days” focused free or reduced admission to many cultural and educational venues and events across the region and educational programming on how to be a good neighbor. Project Manager: Wendy Whitmer (130–131)
Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections

Granted:

Alley Magnet House Co-op
Awarded: $5,000

Alley Magnet House Co-op is located in first-quarter driving distance, a necessary initial stop in the establishment of cooperative grocery for Pittsburgh’s Northside communities.

Project Managers: Brad Spencer and Elena Firsova

Alley Park Pocket Park
Awarded: $3,000

Alley Park Pocket Park is a small pocket park in the heart of Pittsburgh’s Northside community.

Project Manager: Bill Gould

Ante Up!
Awarded: $5,000

Ante Up! created a public green space in the heart of the Hill District’s business district. Community space can be used for the various events and organizations that are hosted within the community.

Project Manager: Ken Fink

Bridges to Broadway
Awarded: $5,000

Bridges to Broadway is a creative project that connects communities of Southwestern Greater Pittsburgh. The project involved the installation of artistic and historical elements along the route of the original Greater Pittsburgh Beltway.

Project Manager: Jude Vachon

Citywide Salon
Awarded: $5,000

Citywide Salon is a monthly public lecture series dedicated to sharing stories and knowledge about Pittsburgh’s past and present.

Project Manager: Tom Barnishin

Colonnade of History
Awarded: $5,000

Colonnade of History is a documentary series that gave voice to the experiences of African American athletes in Pittsburgh. The series of nine short narrative films portrays the experience, character, and stories of the diverse neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. The project was curated by Hyperbo Media and financed by new patrons who live in and take pride in their neighborhoods.

Project Manager: Sean Brady

Dean of History
Awarded: $3,000

Dean of History is a documentary series that focuses on targeted health topics, gave presentations at related events, and distributed resources. The project distributed booklets and fliers to help uninsured Pittsburghers leading to form the entrance to the new Natrona Park.

Project Manager: Bill Gould

Grant Avenue Pocket Park
Awarded: $5,000

New Sun Rising created a public green space in the heart of the Hill District’s business district. Community space can be used for the various events and organizations that are hosted within the community.

Project Manager: Bill Gould

Greets from Pittsburgh:
Awarded: $5,000

This series of postcards and short narratives aims at portraying the experience, character, and stories of the diverse neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. The project was curated by Hyperbo Media and financed by new patrons who live in and take pride in their neighborhoods.

Project Manager: Sean Brady

Hill District Bloom Up!
Awarded: $5,000

Hill District Bloom Up! is an ongoing educational initiative that brings awareness to the beauty of the Hill District.

Project Manager: Sean Brady

Homewood Redd Up!
Awarded: $5,000

Homewood Redd Up! is a community clean up effort that takes place throughout the year.

Project Manager: Diane Turner

Hyperbo Media
Awarded: $5,000

Hyperbo Media is a multimedia production company that produces a variety of content. The project is known for its unique approach to storytelling.

Project Manager: Jude Vachon

MLK Community Mural Project
Awarded: $5,000

MLK Community Mural Project is a project that creates murals in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. The project seeks to improve access to outdoor amenities, bringing recreational equipment to neighborhood festivals, and organizing outdoor events and activities.

Project Manager: Bill Gould

Maybe You’re Just Not That Into Me
Awarded: $5,000

Maybe You’re Just Not That Into Me is a film that explores the experiences of African American senior citizens. Participants were selected based on interest in the project.

Project Manager: Aisha White

Musicians of Wylie Avenue
Awarded: $5,000

Musicians of Wylie Avenue is a documentary series that focuses on targeted health topics, gave presentations at related events, and distributed resources. The project distributed booklets and fliers to help uninsured Pittsburghers.

Project Manager: Bill Gould

Operation Better Block
Awarded: $5,000

Operation Better Block is a necessary initial step in the establishment of cooperative grocery for Pittsburgh’s Northside communities. The project involved the installation of artistic and historical elements along the route of the original Greater Pittsburgh Beltway.

Project Manager: Chris Ivey

Out of this World
Awarded: $5,000

Out of this World is an online community that helps implement city-wide public safety initiatives in order to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Project Manager: Jude Vachon

The Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group
Awarded: $5,000

The Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group continues to support community efforts to help implement city-wide public safety initiatives in order to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Project Manager: Jude Vachon

Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections

Following is a list of 38 projects noted by Pittsburgh Community Connections. Each project is identified by its community and by its type. The projects are listed alphabetically (in italic) after descriptions.
Boyce Park, near the site of General John Forbes and Colonel George Washington’s encampment on November 22, 1758. Project Manager: Tom Klingensmith

During Plum Borough’s annual community festival Allegheny Foothills Society highlighted the historical accomplishments of early American settlers and gens by recreating a traditional frontier scene and, it, a rejuvenated sense of civic pride by acquainting them with the people of the past who built their homes.

Awarded: $5,000

JoAnn Kline

and mobilizing participants in new and existing wellness as well as social interaction by identifying project that investigated informal, local economies throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania together to achieve the effect that these local economies have on various communities.

Awarded: $5,000

The gateways became a source of pride for residents and market their creativity. The project culminated with new uniforms and the reenactment regiment representing the Fort McIntosh–First Company Fort McIntosh

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Awarded: $5,000

Committee to Clean and Beautify Ambridge revitalized the points of entry into Ambridge, a former company town named for the American Bridge Company. The gateways became a source of pride for residents and market their creativity. The project culminated with new uniforms and the reenactment regiment representing the Fort McIntosh–First Company Fort McIntosh.

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and progressing through the
Buck House reflective
memorial.

Schellsburg Borough improved Schellsburg Borough
N
projects:
Projects: 3  
Total Awarded: $15,000  
No– : 53
100
Ft. Bedford Park Riverfront Trail  
Promenade  Awarded: $5,000  
Old Bedford Village Redbud
Constitution  Awarded: $5,000
Old Bedford Village landscaped around the
enclosure that matched those found there in 1768,
adding to the historical atmosphere and vibrancy of downtown.
Project Manager: Roger Krips

Schelbusch Community Park
Projects: 3  
Total Awarded: $15,000  
No– : 53
100
Ft. Bedford Park Riverfront Trail  
Promenade  Awarded: $5,000  
Old Bedford Village Redbud
Constitution  Awarded: $5,000
Old Bedford Village landscaped around the
enclosure that matched those found there in 1768,
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Project Manager: Roger Krips

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Project Manager: Roger Krips

Schellsburg Borough improved Schellsburg Borough
Park in time for the borough’s bicentennial in 2006.
Improvements included a walking trail,bushes, pin
slabbery, lighting, bathrooms facilities, a monument
in the town’s founder John Schell, and a veteran’s
memorial.
Project Manager: Dorothy Wolthoff

Buck House reflective
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slabbery, lighting, bathrooms facilities, a monument
in the town’s founder John Schell, and a veteran’s
memorial.
Project Manager: Dorothy Wolthoff
As a regional performing arts venue, the event featured tours led by an area the town’s founder termed “Eden.” Photographs and fun trivia were featured on illustrative and whimsical tour maps featuring vintage urban areas.

Economically viable for rural communities as well as the town center and college campus in Waynesburg, a nature trail in the recently-acquired Tanoma Wetlands Educational Trail was added. Evergreen Conservancy added informational signs and crafters demonstrating their work. The W.R. McIlwain Store and Warehouse Preservation Project awarded $5,000.

The Red Cross Kids Club program provided information, education, and to prepare kids for public transportation. Damaged by the floods of 1912, Arcadia Theater’s 10th Anniversary Celebration awarded $10,000.

Projects: 4 
Total Awarded: $20,000

Morgan County

W.R. McIlwain Store and Warehouse Preservation Project Awarded: $5,000

Salisbury Township preserved the historic W.R. McIlwain Store and Warehouse. Known locally as the “Crossroads,” the structure was transformed from a dilapidated system into a restored historic site.

Project Manager: PJ Hruska and John Magruder

LAWRENCE

Operations

Pittsburgh.

Indoor Tennis Courts

Huntington.

Indians

Projects: 2 
Total Awarded: $10,000

INDIANA

Projects: 2 
Total Awarded: $8,000

Indiana County Covered Bridge Festival Awarded: $1,000

Indiana County Parks and Trails celebrated the four covered bridges of Indiana County during an all-day festival in Blue Spring Park in September 2008. The event featured tours led by covered bridge enthusiasts and shared local artisans and crafters demonstrating their work.

Project Manager: Ad Patterson

Tamaqua Abandoned Mine Drainage Watershed Educational Project Awarded: $4,000

Converse Conservancy corridors informational signs that now stand in the newly-sprayed Tamaqua Wetlands, a 10-acre abandoned coal mine drainage practice stormwater treatment system. The signs included information about the methods used to remediate the previously polluted wetland system.

Project Manager: Cindy Briggs

No—: 77

No—: 100

No—: 74

No—: 100

No—: 86

No—: 73

No—: 86

Projects: 4 
Total Awarded: $20,000

No—: 87

Projects: 2 
Total Awarded: $8,000

No—: 100

A Day in the Life of an Enslaved Child Awarded: $2,264

Grandma’s Good Eats! Awarded: $2,500

The sessions explored how art can pass along traditions and craftsmanship to a new generation. The previously-polluted water supply was restored. Three of its tennis courts were opened.

The event provided information, education, and to support, and spiritual involvement.

The Arcadia Township Community Park Fund helped residents to the specialized expertise of psychiatrists. Damaged by the floods of 1912, Arcadia Theater’s 10th Anniversary Celebration awarded $10,000.

Projects: 4 
Total Awarded: $20,000

No—: 87

Young Advocate Project Awarded: $5,000

G上学planned various miniscale risk-reduction education and victim support services directed at students who attend Grove City area schools.

The programs provided information, education, and to develop skills and strategies that young people can employ to reduce the negative impact of violence in their lives.

Project Manager: Lizette Olsen

Grants for Gangs Awarded: $5,000

To assist the concert started with reunions at the Recreation Center and Mansion in Jenner Township. Project Manager: Keith Barrick

Projects: 5 
Total Awarded: $15,000

No—: 94

Indian Spiritual Healing Meditations

Projects: 5 
Total Awarded: $15,000

No—: 100

Recreational Tennis Courts Resurfaced Awarded: $5,000

Meyersdale Area School District funded renovations to three of its tennis courts as a capstone project to its capital improvement campaign.

Project Manager: Tracey Karlie

No—: 100

Green City College Student Philanthropy Project Awarded: $5,000

Green City College established a partnership between faculty, students, philanthropists, and the surrounding community to introduce students to the challenges of fundraising and grantmaking.

Students determined objectives for their community investments, the method for identifying and communicating with potential recipients, and the criteria used to make small grants.

Project Manager: Julie Finley

No—: 100

Telepsychiatry Program Awarded: $1,500

Community Counseling Center of Mercer County addressed the ongoing shortage of local psychiatric assistance by using technology to connect rural residents to the specialized expertise of psychiatrists at the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic in Pittsburgh.

Project Manager: Tom Trenk

No—: 100

Passport to Freedom created an interactive exhibit that provided information, education, and to support, and spiritual involvement.

Students determined objectives for their community investments, the method for identifying and communicating with potential recipients, and the criteria used to make small grants.

Project Manager: Julie Finley

No—: 100
Bradford House Historical Association restored aspects of the historic 18th-century house of David Bradford who would become, along with his estranged house, a central figure in the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. Project Manager: Clay Kligon.

NORTHWEST
Projects: 3  Total Awarded: $10,000
No– : 90
Bradford’s Kitchen Reconstruction
Awarded: $5,000
Ligonier Valley Historical Society promoted history education and appreciation through living history events that helped raise awareness of the Community Inn Museum—a unique, enhanced historical attraction in Ligonier. Project Manager: Jim Arcorso.

No– : 91
Downtown Greensburg Heritage Campaign
Awarded: $5,000
Greensburg Community Development Corporation purchased vinyl street light pole banners to line the historic and cultural district of Greensburg and enhance the aesthetic nature of this heavily traveled commercial district. Project Manager: Steven Gillford.

No– : 92
JAYS After School Program
Awarded: $5,000
Community Lea Schools supported the Joining to Achieve Youth Success (JAYS) Program, a grassroots, community-based volunteer program after school academic enrichment program offered at no cost to students attending McKee Middle School in Jeannette. Project Manager: Don Bartowick.

No– : 93
Operation Fresh Express
Awarded: $5,000
Westmoreland County Food Bank expanded Operation Fresh Express—a program to distribute perishable food items throughout Westmoreland County—by providing increased distributions in Greensburg, Monessen, and Mount Pleasant. Project Manager: Deana Pastor (108).

No– : 94
Compass Inn Museum Living History
Awarded: $5,000
Ligonier Valley Historical Society promoted history education and appreciation through living history events that helped raise awareness of the Community Inn Museum—a unique, enhanced historical attraction in Ligonier. Project Manager: Jim Arcorso.

No– : 95
Pioneer Point Public Art Heritage Project
Awarded: $5,000
Downtown West Newton, Inc. seeded the creation of community-based public art in West Newton in conjunction with the Great Allegheny Passage—Trail Town Program. The artwork commemorated the historic role of the Northeast Territory Exposition. Project Manager: Benjamin Markle.

No– : 96
Westmoreland County History Education Program
Awarded: $5,000
Westmoreland Heritage and the Westmoreland County Historical Society established a speakers bureau to provide free living historians and knowledgeable speaker to schools, historical groups, and other organizations across Westmoreland County. Project Manager: Tom Headley.

No– : 97
Pay It Forward Initiative
Awarded: $5,000
Schooner Youth Center, Inc. funded its Pay it Forward Initiative in Monessen, a program that empowered youth, with the assistance of community mentors, to design and implement three community-based projects. Project Manager: Arlene McSks Curtis.

No– : 98
Westmoreland Earth Day 2008
—Greening Your Footprint
Awarded: $5,000
St. Vincent College collaborated with more than 60 regional organizations to address issues of environmental responsibility on Earth Day 2008. Project Manager: Angela Ileli.
About The Sprout Fund

As the documentarian of Community Connections, I had the pleasure of spending 2008 meeting the people who made Pittsburgh 250 remarkable, from Bedford to Mercer and back again. But in trying to get in touch with the region, I discovered much more: An opportunity to fuel up on the high-octane black ‘n’ gold manna that is the people, places, and stories of Pittsburgh.

Some of those stories appear in this volume; so many more, of course, do not. But all of them attest to the eccentric beauty of the region we share as our home. Over the past year, it feels as though I’ve learned more than in the previous dozen: About Southwestern Pennsylvania, sure, but more so about the catalytic energy and indomitable spirit that arises when ordinary people are given the opportunity to show that they’re hardly ordinary at all.

JUSTIN HOPPER, February, 2009

For more than ten years, Justin Hopper has covered Pittsburgh’s art, music, history and culture as a writer for a broad variety of publications. After four years as a writer and section editor for Pittsburgh City Paper, he left to pursue a freelance career. Hopper’s work has appeared in regional publications including Pittsburgh, Carnegie and Pitt magazines and Pop City online journal, where his “Guide of Pittsburgh” proved one of the site’s most popular essays.

Nationally, Hopper has written about music, art, travel and culture writing for publications such as Paste, XLR8R, Spin, as well as other magazines and web sites, often concerning either Pittsburgh or his other primary interest: obscure English culture and history. He is currently working on two book projects: an exploration of England’s 100-mile South Downs Way, and a history of popular music during the British miner’s strike of 1984–85.

The Sprout Fund enriches the Pittsburgh region’s vitality by engaging citizens, amplifying voices, supporting creativity and innovation, and cultivating connected communities.

Founded in 2001, Sprout facilitates community-led solutions to regional challenges and supports efforts to create a thriving, progressive, and culturally diverse region. With strong working relationships to many community organizations and regional stakeholders, The Sprout Fund is one of Southwestern Pennsylvania’s leading agencies on issues related to civic engagement, talent attraction and retention, public art, and catalytic small-scale funding.

Sprout Seed Awards are modest financial awards offered monthly to support community-based projects and strategic initiatives. Sprout Public Art enhances the visual landscape of neighborhoods and communities by creating high-quality public art in a collaborative community process with local artists. Engage Pittsburgh promoted civic engagement and supported projects of community interest through ideation and online discussion. Community Connections was a grassroots initiative of Pittsburgh 250 supporting projects that encouraged civic engagement to commemorate the region’s 250th anniversary. Spark energizes the creativity of children in Southwestern Pennsylvania through support for technology and new media projects. Hothouse, the summer’s hottest party, is Sprout’s “live annual report” to the community and a major fundraising event.

Sprout is dedicated to serving those who demonstrate the drive and capacity to think creatively about their communities. Directed by a board of young, creative and civically engaged people and led by co-founders Cathy Lewis Long and Matt Hannigan, Sprout is located in the Penn Avenue Arts District in the East End of Pittsburgh. Supported by lead contributions from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, Sprout has also received funding from more than 20 local foundations and more than 65 corporations, nonprofits, and governmental entities.

With ongoing local support and continued appreciation by the communities it serves, The Sprout Fund will continue to catalyze creative solutions to pressing challenges, engage people in community conversations, respond to the needs of its target audiences, open doors to civic participation, and promote responsible stewardship of community interests.

About The Author

As the documentarian of Community Connections, I had the pleasure of spending 2008 meeting the people who made Pittsburgh 250 remarkable, from Bedford to Mercer and back again. But in trying to get in touch with the region, I discovered much more: An opportunity to fuel up on the high-octane black ‘n’ gold manna that is the people, places, and stories of Pittsburgh.

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JUSTIN HOPPER, February, 2009

For more than ten years, Justin Hopper has covered Pittsburgh’s art, music, history and culture as a writer for a broad variety of publications. After four years as a writer and section editor for Pittsburgh City Paper, he left to pursue a freelance career. Hopper’s work has appeared in regional publications including Pittsburgh, Carnegie and Pitt magazines and Pop City online journal, where his “Guide of Pittsburgh” proved one of the site’s most popular essays.

Nationally, Hopper has written about music, art, travel and culture writing for publications such as Paste, XLR8R, Spin, as well as other magazines and web sites, often concerning either Pittsburgh or his other primary interest: obscure English culture and history. He is currently working on two book projects: an exploration of England’s 100-mile South Downs Way, and a history of popular music during the British miner’s strike of 1984–85.
With Thanks

The co-chairs of Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections, Aradhna Dhanda, Cathy Lewis Long, and George Miles, Jr., would like to offer thanks to the following organizations and individuals for their dedicated support of Pittsburgh 250 Community Connections and Making the Connections: To the members of the Community Connections Committee, who envisioned that a grassroots funding program could touch every corner of our region—you made this a priority, thereby speeding its development and enabling its growth. To Bill Flanagan, Pam Golden, and the rest of the staff at the Allegheny Conference on Community Development for their interminable work throughout Pittsburgh’s 250th anniversary year. To the project managers, for working with such diligence and devotion. To the moderators and facilitators, for traveling to every county in Southwestern Pennsylvania armed with a brush and a pen, ready to help determine what “Our Community Is...” To the expert reviewers and decisionmakers, for thoughtfully participating in a process that was designed to give you the power to choose what was best for our communities at this unique moment in time. To the private foundations, who in many ways provided the spark that set this program aflame: Your support and guidance, in the early stages, was critical to the eventual success of the program. A special thank you to the members of the funding community who took an early and active role in supporting Community Connections: Pat Getty, Scott Izzo, and Gregg Behr—thank you for your leadership and commitment to this initiative. To the corporate community, for your support and commitment to the betterment of our region: It is no secret that the generosity of companies across Southwestern Pennsylvania contributes largely to the quality of life we enjoy here. To the community foundations who proved to be invaluable partners: Gaining your financial support was key, but building upon your networks of influence was, perhaps, even more important to establishing a truly regional initiative. To our media partners, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, WDUQ-FM, and deepLocal, who created both opportunities for promotion and innovative tools to promote this program. To the board and staff of The Sprout Fund, for your continued guidance and support; in particular, the tireless work of Dustin Stiver, Matt Hannigan, and Ryan Coon does not go unnoticed. To Jennifer McNulty for keeping the monthly Community Connections newsletter looking fresh. To our photographers Nathan Schritter and Nate Boguszewski for capturing so many faces and memorable sites of Southwestern Pennsylvania. To Justin Hopper, the voice of Community Connections, whose insightful reportage, epic prosody, and unending wit captured its stories perfectly. And also to Landesberg Design, for your keen eye and instructive advice. This program’s success is indebted to all of these contributors and others still, for their commitment to this important regional initiative.

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In 2008, Southwestern Pennsylvania united to mark its 250th anniversary—an occasion to honor its past, invigorate its people, and imagine its future.

As part of the year-long celebration, Community Connections supported a collection of 100 diverse and vibrant community projects. With ingenuity and determination, civic leaders and citizen volunteers constructed public art icons, cut environmental pathways, recorded regional lore, and heightened social responsibility.

Making the Connections amplifies the voices of these grassroots innovators through compelling stories that demonstrate how civic engagement connects American communities.