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OFF THE BLUFF
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Letter From The Editor

Dear Readers,

Pittsburgh is truly a city of contradictions and the South Side is a perfect place to observe them. Young mixed with old, new mixed with historical, modern mixed with traditional — these extremes are what make Pittsburghers a proud population. In this issue of Off the Bluff, Duquesne's JMA students have captured this essence in the third installment of the Pittsburgh Neighborhoods Project, which originates in Dr. Mike Dillon's Feature Writing Class.

A glance down the main stretch of East Carson Street provides a snapshot of Pittsburgh today: Brand new bars, many of which will not make it through their first year of business, mixed with old mom-and-pop establishments that have survived decades of changes.

Young college students traipse down East Carson Street bars on the weekends and come back from school to their South Side rentals on the week days. These — often temporary — South Side residents might not realize the history of the neighborhood in which they party, walk and live.

In the pages you're about to read, our writers go off the Bluff in mind and spirit by getting away from the typical college establishments of East Carson Street. You will also find student commentary, stories of unsung campus heroes and student photography.

Off the Bluff is a publication of the DU Society of Professional Journalists and the JMA Department. Modus is responsible for design and production. Special thanks to Modus Project Director Joe Ball, Modus President Mark Magill and Advisors Dr. Mike Dillon and Professor Jim Vota. Special thanks also to Sally Richie for her continued assistance with student work.

Enjoy this collection of student work and your journey off the Bluff.

Cristina Laipple
Editor
Off the Bluff

In Memoriam
Dr. Albert Labriola, 1939 - 2009

This issue of Off the Bluff is dedicated to Dr. Albert Labriola, Distinguished Teacher, Scholar and Administrator ... and Friend.
JMA professor Joseph Sora was named Teacher of the Year by the Duquesne Chapter of Omicron Delta Kappa, The National Leadership Honor Society. The award was created to give students the opportunity to recognize a teacher they believe exemplifies leadership and excellence in the classroom. In addition to Sora, the late Dr. Albert C. Labriola, Acting Dean of the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts who passed away on March 11, was also named Teacher of the Year. Dr. Labriola was an enthusiastic supporter of JMA programs and instrumental in developing the Caulfield Digital Media Center, which now houses WDSR and the JMA television studio.

SPJ and Modus Want You!

Interested in getting involved with Off The Bluff and other media projects? Join the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) or Modus, the multimedia club.

For information about Modus, contact Prof. Jim Vota at vota@duq.edu

For information about SPJ, contact Dr. Mike Dillon at mikedillon.duq@gmail.com

Visit Off The Bluff online at INSERT URL.
**Duquesne Duke Staff Wins Awards**

The Duquesne Duke won a number of awards for excellence in Spring 2009. Duke Editor Jess Eagle and Associate Editor Brian Tierney won a 1st-place Keystone award for Editorial Writing and a 2nd-place award in the regional Society of Professional Journalists competition. 10 members of SPJ who also serve as editors and reporters at the Duke attended the regional conference in Columbus, Oh., in April. Two other Duke staffers captured Keystone Awards this year:

- 1st Place, Spot News: Maddy Lauria
- 2nd Place, Feature Story: Shawn Klocek

**Communicator of the Year Awards**

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reporters Len Boselevic and Patricia Sabatina were honored with the fourth Annual Sean Doherty Communicator of the Year Award by the JMA Department in April. Cultivating sources and masterfully using public documents — including some that had to be obtained through the courts — the duo investigated the awarding of a fraudulent degree by West Virginia University. Their stories led to the rescinding of an MBA to a politically connected executive, led to the resignations of key administrators who aided in the deceit, and led to reforms at the University.

The Communicator of the Year award is named for Sean Doherty, who overcame tremendous physical challenges to become an accomplished sports reporter and Sports Director at WDUQ-FM. Sean passed away in December, 2007.

**International Media Trip**

Professor Margaret Patterson took a group of 14 JMA students abroad last spring to study media in Europe. Professor Patterson is taking a new group of students on the International Media trip this spring.
Father Clement Okoye fondly recalls meeting Carmen Thomas. Okoye was still new to the United States and did not have a complete grasp of the English language. “When I came into this country, no one could hear what I was saying,” Okoye says. “The accent problem is always there for internationals.”

Okoye entered the advisor’s office of College Hall. He spoke with many of the workers, but no one could help him. “It was so frustrating. No one could understand a word I said, but she (Thomas) listened.” Years later, after forming a friendship with Thomas, Okoye understands why she was able to help him. According to Okoye, patience and compassion are two things that just come natural to her.

Thomas is now using that compassion and patience to serve students. Hired recently as an academic advisor for the McAnulty School of Liberal Arts, Thomas helps students solve academic problems and plan their future.

Thomas is still getting the hang of advising but is an enthusiastic learner.

“Advisement is a brand new experience for me,” she
says. “But I love it. I must admit, I love it. I get to be a part of [the student’s] success so to speak.”

Thomas first formed relationships with Duquesne students in 1998 when she started work as an administrative assistant in the advisement office. This was also the time that Thomas started to entertain the idea of going to college and earning her degree.

“When you work in education, it’s around you, and your curiosity starts to pique. It took me so long to go because I had a fear of failing,” Thomas says.

Finally, in 2003, Thomas started working on her degree.

“I made up my mind, no more fear. Just get over it, Carmen, and do it.”

This past year, Thomas graduated from Duquesne with degrees in Psychology and Professional Communications. This was not just a big milestone for Thomas, but also for her family. Thomas was the first of member of her family to graduate from college.

“*When you work in education, it’s around you, and your curiosity starts to pique*”

- Carmen Thomas

Growing up in Pittsburgh with nine sisters and two brothers, family has always been an important part of Thomas’ life.

“It had its ups and it had its downs. Sometimes I disliked it because it was almost like a big gang. You have to learn to fend for yourself,” she says. “[But] we had some times that right now I just wish it could be like that.”

Family is also the primary reason Thomas loves Duquesne.

“My favorite thing [about Duquesne] is that faculty, administration and students alike are like a big family. Everyone is so friendly. We stick together,” Thomas says.

Before making the transition from secretary to advisor, Thomas was nervous about how students would react.

“It was actually one of my fears in deciding if I was going to take the position. I didn’t know how the students would receive me,” Thomas says.

Fortunately, the students have been very welcoming. In fact, Thomas’ favorite thing about her job is the fact that she gets to work with so many students. She loves helping them and seeing all of their different personalities.

Cheryl Winterhalter, another former administrative assistant, worked alongside Thomas in the advising office for six years. Winterhalter says Thomas will do an excellent job as an academic advisor because of her experience and kind heart.

“She’s always pleasant. She’s very strong, very spiritual. That just reflects in everything she does,” Winterhalter says. “I think she will do a wonderful job. She has that experience, and she has that rapport with the students.”

A typical day for Thomas working as an advisor is much different from a day at work as a secretary.

“A typical day is replying to a lot of e-mails, returning a lot of calls, planning their academic success, evaluating transcripts and that’s just a little bit of it,” Thomas says.

However, Thomas is not afraid the problems that she will face as an advisor.

“I like challenges. I like when the students have a problem that’s very unique. I like trying to find an antidote to that,” Thomas says.

The best advice Thomas gives students is to manage their time and become active on campus. She suggests that students take advantage of every opportunity presented and join multiple organizations.

While Thomas is very passionate about students and her job, she does have other passions. She hopes to one day write a book.

“I want to write. I want to put that real Carmen Thomas story out there. There can be things that could be very valuable for [readers],” Thomas says.

Singing is another passion. In fact, Thomas was even asked to sing at the University’s commencement; however, she had no choice but to turn the offer down.

“I don’t know how to sing without soul,” Thomas says.

According to Okoye, Thomas is a great success story for students.

“Carmen is a lesson to students that age, sex and class don’t matter. Carmen is an example of motivation to everyone. You can be what you want to be,” Okoye says.

Winterhalter is confident that Thomas will perform admirably as an academic advisor. She values her friendship with Thomas, and she knows that Thomas’ passion and upbeat attitude will only help matters.

“She is a shining star. She’s always positive and pleasant no matter what. I love her dearly,” Winterhalter says.
As a boy, John Stolz read science-fiction novels and dreamed of life on other planets. Today, the Duquesne University biology professor studies tiny, hidden worlds on Earth where microorganisms create energy with sunlight and the poisonous element arsenic.

Strangely enough, Stolz’s latest research shows that the worlds of science-fiction and microbiology are not so distant from one another.

Working with a NASA-funded research team, Stolz found that bacteria in Mono Lake, near Yosemite National Park in eastern California, do not need water or oxygen to survive, suggesting possibilities for life in harsh areas of the solar system.

“Instead of breathing oxygen, they’re breathing arsenic,” Stolz said. “As it turns out, there’s a whole ecology based on arsenic.”

The group published their study last month in the journal, Science.

Stolz explained that the bacteria use arsenic and sunlight to create energy much like plants use water and sunlight to do so. The bacteria evolved to deal with arsenic, which water eroded from rocks on the Sierra Nevada Mountains when the lake formed about a million years ago.

Despite Stolz’s role in the research, he has yet to visit Mono Lake. Ron Oremland, a senior scientist for the U.S. Geological Survey, took samples from the lake and sent them to Stolz. From the samples, Stolz determined what microorganisms were living in the lake and how they interacted with
the lake's arsenic.

Despite working on opposite ends of the country, Oremland said the exchange of ideas between he and Stolz was exciting.

“If we were any closer, we’d probably be publishing too much,” Oremland said with a chuckle.

“The idea is that this may be translated into some kind of probe to detect arsenic [on other planets], but we’re not there yet.”
- John Stoltz

During their weekly phone calls, Oremland has tried to persuade Stolz to fly to the test site. Stolz said if it weren’t for his busy schedule — and the hassle of airports — he might consider it.

“Mono Lake is scenic,” Oremland said, recalling his work this past summer. “[It’s] more like a lunar-scape. It’s a hot, dry place — salty and hot. [It’s] not conducive to the summer weather, but we love it,” Oremland said.

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Having just returned from further field work, Oremland said the scientists are trying to repeat past findings for consistency, though they hope to branch out. Despite the extraterrestrial excitement his research has created, Stolz said more work has to be done before the research is put to practical use.

“The idea is that this [research] may be translated into some kind of probe to detect arsenic [on other planets],” Stolz said. “But we’re not there yet.”

Though Stolz’s research is a significant leap toward connecting microbiology on Earth to life on other planets, it is not the first time his work has touched on both fields.

During the 1980s Stolz worked for a little over two years at NASA, studying bacteria that can sense Earth’s magnetic field.

His eyes widened when he talked about his time at NASA. Gesticulating, he spoke of the excitement around NASA when pictures of Saturn and Jupiter were being sent back from the spacecraft Voyager.

Then he sat motionless. The time was also difficult, he said.

Stolz recalled walking into NASA one morning. All the monitors displayed the same picture: an open sea.
Perry Blatz reaches to the top of the bookshelves lining the wall of his small office. He clutches a framed black-and-white photo of a man who looks like he was caught mid-speech. “Rinaldo Cappellini,” Blatz says. As Blatz’s favorite historical figure, Cappellini’s personality and life experiences provide a fitting parallel to Blatz’s.

Although Blatz has never worked in a coal mine, or led one of the largest districts in the Mine Workers Union, as Cappellini did, he is just as hardworking and driven as his historical hero.

Blatz has been a History professor at Duquesne University for 21 years, but he does more than just teach. He is also the head of the Public History Graduate Program, which involves directing graduate students, accepting new students, dealing with financial aid, and giving advice about jobs and related programs. Blatz also teaches a number of grad and undergrad history courses.

Blatz is most interested in Pennsylvania labor history in general and coal miners in the eastern United States in particular. Blatz’s fascination with the Industrial Revolution is apparent in his office. Among his many books, Blatz knows exactly where to find the book he authored, his opus: Democratic Miners: Work and Labor Relations in the Coal Industry 1875–1925. It is a revised version of his Princeton Ph.D. dissertation. Blatz has also authored a number of articles and helped write another book, but is proudest of this particular book about his favorite time period in history.

History runs deep through Blatz’s veins. “I
“My favorite thing about teaching is when I get the sense that I have really connected with a student. Whether it is when they ask a good question or do well on an exam, I like to know that I have communicated the information correctly to them.”

- Perry Blatz

have always been interested in history,” Blatz says. Had he not become a professor, he might have found his calling working in a museum or historical library.

After over two decades of teaching, Blatz has experienced highs and lows. “My favorite thing about teaching is when I get the sense that I have really connected with a student,” Blatz says. “Whether it is when they ask a good question or do well on an exam, I like to know that I have communicated the information correctly to them.”

It seems he has successfully connected with a number of students. Katelin Lambert describes what she has taken from Blatz’s history class. Blatz, she says, “is extremely knowledgeable, which is evident through the details and interesting facts he provides in class. I can also tell that he really enjoys teaching and getting to know his students. Every time I have seen him on campus, he has always spoken to me and known my name.”

Blatz’s teaching style has also made a big impression on student Ben Grance. “He pulls the lecture format off without it becoming dry,” Grance says. “He knows the material so well that he doesn’t have to go off on tangents like some professors.”

Blatz occasionally takes his students on field trips; it is a unique part of his teaching style. This past year, Blatz took students to the William Pitt Museum at Point State Park.

“The field trip is another characteristic that sets Professor Blatz apart from the rest,” Lambert says. “I was very excited for the field trip, and was not disappointed with the museum. It was very relevant to our coursework, and throughout our walk downtown, Dr. Blatz offered historic information regarding Pittsburgh and the surrounding area.”

Student Amy Hoysan agrees. “I thought [the field trip] was awesome,” she says. “I miss having field trips. It was interesting to see some of the historic sites in Pittsburgh. I’ve lived near here all my life and didn’t know any of the history behind it.”

Being a professor is not always easy. Blatz says that his least favorite part of teaching is when he knows he has not communicated well with a student. “Someone is paying a lot of money for some students to come to class and text [message],” he says.
On her first day as the Maureen P. Sullivan Curriculum Center Coordinator at Gumberg Library, Danielle Buck sat in a small cubicle and wondered where to begin. A few minutes earlier, her boss had smiled, said “go ahead,” and left the petite 22 year old surrounded by towering bookshelves and an overwhelming task.

Buck graduated from Duquesne’s School of Education in 1999 and was well prepared for a teaching career, but she was nowhere near ready to develop a state-of-the-art curriculum center, the job that had just been handed to her.

“At the time, there was a small room in Canevin where professors would bring junk back from conferences or workshops,” Buck said. “But there was really only one book on the subject of designing a center.”

With no materials, no room and no resources, Buck felt defeated but was determined to complete her task. She thought about the types of things she needed as an undergrad and visited numerous colleges and libraries in search of ideas, but couldn’t find what she was looking to emulate.

“I found a lot of what I didn’t want,” she said. “I would take bits and pieces … and see how they did things and bring them back.”

Buck’s vision took nearly 10 months to complete, and the colorful center was officially opened in March 2001. Buck wanted to return to secondary education, but soon found herself immersed in the growing center and began teaching children’s literature for the university instead.

“I realized that I can still change lives. I am giving [students] things that will help 20-plus kids at a time down the road,” said Buck with a smile.

Tracie Ballock, Head of Collection Management at
Gumberg Library and close friend, said Buck is extremely dedicated and always searching for ways to improve the center.

“It makes me laugh because it’s almost like she’s been too successful,” Ballock said. “She gets calls from people with resources … and once we literally had to borrow a jeep and go rummage through this facility and load up with stuff for the curriculum center.”

Over the years, Buck has built an extensive collection of children’s and young adult literature including chapter and picture books, and works with book companies to get sample textbooks like those being used in local schools. Students also have access to audio-visual materials, teaching props, how-to books, and special education materials.

The center also offers binding and laminating services but the biggest attraction, and one of Buck’s favorites, is the Ellison machine. It is a special “die-cut” press that uses rubber blocks with blades, like cookie cutters, to make shapes. Anything that can be cut with scissors can be used in the machine to make creative displays and educational materials.

Sara Sevald has worked as a student aid in the curriculum center for three years. Over that time, she has seen Buck raise thousands of dollars to expand the room and build a huge collection of dies for the Ellison machine.

“She is the nicest person I’ve ever met,” said the junior secondary education and math major. “She’s always in a good mood, even when she has something mean to say.”

After spending time helping students at work, Buck also finds ways to give of herself in her spare time. “Danielle found this organization in Uptown that was asking for donations and she nearly cleaned her house out to give these people stuff,” Ballock said grinning.

Buck has also spent the past nine years dedicating herself to Therapeutic Support Staff, working with an autistic boy.

“I did it the summer before I started here because I needed the extra cash, and I just fell in love with the family and child I worked with,” she said.

Buck doesn’t have children of her own, but she loves spending time with her niece and has recently been thinking about adopting a dog. In her spare time she travels and collects children’s literature.

“I’m a book dork,” she admitted. “People always know that they’re going to get a book from me on birthdays and holidays.”

Despite her love of books, Buck admitted it was hard to pick a favorite.

“There are so many good children’s books, but I love one called “Dinnertime,” by Jan Pienkowski,” she said. “I like the illustrations just as much though.”

Bright colors and exciting scenes, like those in a child’s book, are a direct reflection of Buck’s personality.

“I reorganize and reinvent all the time, it’s who I am,” she admitted. “I’ll re-do my closet at one in the morning and paint my walls different colors.”

She has wasted no space or effort making the curriculum center just as vibrant. After nine years and nearly doubling the size of the room in the summer of ’07, Buck has been able to add to the Ellison collection, purchase new books, set up computer stations, and provide seating for classes with up to 40 students for hands-on instruction.

Now the towering bookshelves of the curriculum center are full of lively puppets that stare wide-eyed back at you as you walk down the isles. Handmade laminated signs cover the walls with bright announcements about new resources and information. And fitting in perfectly with the setting, Buck sits behind her desk greeting visitors with a big smile and hello.

She works hard every day listening to students’ needs, eager to help with projects and point them towards supplies and resources. But what does she get out of it?

“This is my place, and I built it,” she said proudly. “I get a lot of personal satisfaction. I like to see teachers getting excited to take things back to the classroom, and I love doing this for [the kids] because of their excitement and the opportunities that lie ahead of them.”

“I like to see teachers getting excited to take things back to the classroom, and I love doing this for [the kids] because of their excitement and the opportunities that lie ahead of them.”

- Danielle Buck
Pittsburgh Neighborhoods Project

Welcome to the South Side

The South Side is a neighborhood that hides in plain sight.

Most Duquesne students associate the neighborhood with the bars, clubs, music stores, student party houses, and the funky shops that line East Carson Street, but they do not represent the whole fabric of the South Side.

Peel back those relatively modern layers, and you will find a neighborhood rooted in Pittsburgh’s industrial past.

Artisans, single family homes and businesses that serve the older residents of the neighborhood are tucked away on the narrow side streets and along the spidery staircases that climb to the steep heights of the South Side slopes. The Oliver Baths, founded as place for mill workers to bathe and swim, continues to serve a mostly older clientele on 10th Street.

In another reminder of Pittsburgh’s past as a steel and glass center, glassblowers work out of a garage on 16th Street. Overgrown outlines where inclines once carried workers to their homes on the slopes are still visible, and trains rumble on both sides of the flats night and day.

South Side may be the most distinct of Pittsburgh’s 88 official neighborhoods.

The city’s shrinking population has shuttered many neighborhood schools, but the school buildings have found new life as luxury condos. One defunct rail line now serves as a leg of the Allegheny trail that connects hikers and bicycles to the C&O Canal trail and, ultimately, Washington, D.C.

Overall, about 10,000 people call the South Side home. And while students and permanent residents sometimes coexist uneasily, the neighborhood is a hotbed for civic activism and knows how to pull together when necessary.

When developers proposed a huge retail complex for the old Jones & Laughlin site near the refurbished Hot Metal Bridge, community activists fought to ensure that the complex would blend in with South Side’s existing architecture. South Side Works, as a result, does not sprawl and offers the same sort of pedestrian ambience as the rest of the South Side.

In this third installment of the Pittsburgh Neighborhoods Project, you’ll meet the young and old who help the neighborhood thrive, from the proprietors of a bed and breakfast, to the quirky purveyor of nostalgic toys and games, to the patrons a Dee’s Cafe, a classic throwback bar.

You’ll hike the steps to the top of the slopes and accompany a writer as she sojourns through the Carson Street bar scene in the heart of a Saturday night.

The South Side that students seek when they walk 222 steps down from the bluff and cross the 10th Street Bridge is just a part of the South Side. It’s our hope these stories will inspire them to range a little farther and look a little more closely at this unique Pittsburgh neighborhood.

- Off The Bluff Staff
Under the Birmingham Bridge, in the shadow of a chickdowntown.com billboard, sets an old burnt-orange warehouse covered in ivy and faded graffiti, closed off from the South Side by a barbed-wire fence and three large garage doors. At first glance it appears abandoned.

But inside is a world that the “chicks” downtown – or at least the fashionistas that shop there – have probably never heard of, let alone experienced.

This is the world of Zotter the Potter. In his studio, Walt Zotter and his two employees, Xavier Evans and Jocelyn Garcia, produce traditional blue-grey stoneware, characteristic of 19th Century Southwestern Pennsylvania. Over the past 32 years, Zotter has created pottery reminiscent of a time and place inhabited by Amish and farming communities, long before the age of vintage clothing stores and sports bars.

Orders come through zotterthepotter.com and other distributors, but each piece is crafted from start to finish in the warehouse. Crock, urns, pitchers and pet bowls are only a few of the products Zotter offers and each piece can be fully personalized for weddings, birthdays and other special events.

When an order comes in, Zotter begins with a large block of soft brown clay. He runs a wire through it, slicing it into sections. Weighing one of the smaller chunks, he tears a handful of clay off the end and places it back on the scale.

“We have several different shapes, and each has a specific weight,” Zotter explains.

When Zotter is satisfied with the number on the scale, he kneads the clay into a ball. Placing the sticky mass in the center of his pottery wheel, he begins to “throw” it. In this important and difficult step, Zotter makes the clay wet and uses his hands to shape it as it spins on the wheel.

Zotter uses his fingers as if each were a separate tool, pinching and pulling the wet clay upward, forming the walls and mouth of the piece.

“You really have to watch what you’re doing,” Zotter
says. “[The clay] is teaching me as much as I’m teaching it what to do.”

Once the formed piece has dried out a little, Xavier Evans stamps letters on individually. If the piece requires a handle, such as a mug or a stein, it is added at this point.

Next, Zotter lights up the kiln for the “bisque” (the first of the two firing steps). The kiln is brought to a blistering 1,800 degrees, but the shop remains cool and silent as the fire blazes inside.

The piece is fired for eight hours and then cooled for six. After cooling, the stamped letters and designs are painted with blue ink in a step called “cobalting.” The piece is then dipped in glaze and heated for a second and final time at 2,400 degrees. This firing lasts about nine hours followed by a 14 hour cooling period.

Traditionally, these pots were made by throwing rock salt into the kiln when it reached peak temperature, but Zotter has developed his own method to create the same look. The gray color in his pots is achieved when the fire robs oxygen molecules from the glaze and clay.

The process can be painstaking and take a long time, but Zotter and his team guarantee orders in three to five weeks.

“It is really a joint effort,” Zotter says. “If one little thing goes wrong along the way, everyone’s effort is ruined.”

Under fire from large numbers of orders, one would think Zotter would crack, but his years of experience keep him cool.

A self-proclaimed “natural,” Zotter has been throwing pots since he was in college.

“I don’t know in what decade I hit six figures of throwing pots, but I’ve made a lot,” he says, a smile peeking out from behind his bushy, gray mustache.

While majoring in business at Thiel College in Greenville, Pa., he took an art history class and toured the art department. He was fascinated when he saw a student sitting at a pottery wheel, molding a piece of clay.

“I had never even seen it done before, not even on a ‘Mister Rodgers’ episode,” he says. “The physicality of it, the way your hands move, there is nothing else like that.”

Zotter immediately changed his major to art and left his first pottery class with a new passion and a new nickname, “Zotter the Potter.”

In 1976, Zotter and his brother Randy opened a shop in Eighty-Four, Pa., and began making pottery to commemorate the American bicentennial. With traditional images like a log cabin and horse, the pots were a big hit and were soon picked up by a major department store.

Zotter’s sister Jo Ann bought him his first pottery wheel, which still sits on a shelf in the South Side shop.

“It goes with me wherever I go,” he says. “I’m a sentimental person and that’s steel proof of it.”

After relocating to Lancaster, Pa., Zotter decided it was time to expand his shop and begin offering customized pieces. He started Zotter the Potter, Inc. in 1994, and moved the shop once more to Pittsburgh, where he was born and raised.

Now settled on South 22nd Street, Zotter is still making customized pottery and has recently taken on Evans as his first apprentice.

Zotter is teaching Evans the art of making pottery, but Evans’ young and modern influences are teaching the 57-year-old Zotter new things as well.

“He is drawing me back into the artistic side of it,” Zotter admitted. “The stuff you would think I do in my spare time, but I just never got around to.”

Crock stamped with hearts and messages like, “Jayne & Scott, Mar. 19, 2000,” sit on desks and shelves all over the studio. The customized pieces are Zotter’s favorites.

“It’s the simple fact that they’re personalized for someone’s special day,” he says, showing his sentimental side once again.

Zotter had to shut down production for all of 2007 because of a bad fall that threw him into a grand mal seizure and left him with a severe concussion. Now fully recovered, Zotter has taken on a new project making commemorative pieces for Pittsburgh’s 250th Anniversary.

“Now it’s come full-circle,” he says, reminiscing about making pots for the American bicentennial. Zotter shuffles from shelf to shelf inspecting pots and moving boxes of sample tiles; his shoes and khakis speckled with dried clay.

Wanda and Stella, Zotter’s two Jack Russell terriers, scamper around his feet and squeeze into the chair behind him as he throws a pot. They are as much a part of the studio as the pots themselves.

Garcia is an asset to the studio, keeping orders and other business organized amidst the chaos. Zotter crouches behind his potter’s wheel, the lenses of his glasses reflect the spinning lump of clay in front of him. He runs his weathered hands through the mass like he has done thousands of times before, and in less than two minutes another crock has emerged.
Before Pittsburgh’s South Side became a mecca of bars, restaurants and coffee shops, and before college students began moving to the neighborhood, the once-industrial community was struggling with the closing of steel mills and local businesses, leaving vacant storefronts where commerce once thrived.

“At that time, East Carson Street was looking like Swiss cheese,” said Jennifer Strang, manager of marketing and communications of the South Side Local Development Company (SSLDC).

A nonprofit organization that was formed in 1982 by business owners and residents concerned with the welfare of the South Side, SSLDC has since helped transform the struggling community into a strong one. It is the only nonprofit community organization in the South Side that has a full-time staff.

Since 1982, SSLDC has helped bring in more than 150 new businesses, more than 100 new homes and renovated more than 120 storefronts. It also helped reduce the vacancy rate from 40 percent in 1982 to 10 percent in 2003.

Strang said student volunteers account for much of the service SSLDC provides to the neighborhood, helping with street cleanups and food drives. Aside from the direct benefits the community receives from the volunteer work, students also become more connected to the community in the process.

“[Students’ volunteering] goes a long way to help building relationships with older residents,” Strang said, adding that Duquesne University students and staff make up a large part of the ranks of the volunteers.

Luci-Jo DiMaggio, a Duquesne campus minister, said that last spring more than 500 students, faculty and staff helped with SSLDC’s annual spring cleanup project. The volunteers worked in communities such as the South Side, Uptown and Mount Washington as a part of the citywide “Redd Up Pittsburgh” project.

“The idea, yes, is to clean up the streets, but the greater goal is for students to form a better relationship with the communities in which they live,” DiMaggio said.

Along with Campus Ministry, Duquesne University Volunteers (DUV) also pitches in to improve the South Side community.

DUV coordinator Alia Pustorino-Clevenger said the South Side, with its history as a steel town of citizens from diverse ethnic backgrounds, provides a connection to Pittsburgh’s culture that college students can benefit from.

“It’s a very special place, and we’re lucky to have it here,” Pustorino-Clevenger said. “I think that a connection to the past really drives [a community] into the future. It’s important for people...
to understand the investment they can make in the South Side as good citizens.”

In addition to volunteer programs, SSLDC also employs two individuals who clean the streets six days per week. Having a full-time staff allows the company to organize events that a volunteer-based organization might not have the time to accomplish.

SSLDC partners with the Brashear Association, another nonprofit organization in the South Side, during their holiday food drive. Last year, the Brashear Association ran out of food for needy residents. In hopes of avoiding a repeat of last year, the two organizations teamed up and got local businesses to donate coupons for the cause. South Side coupon books are given away to anyone who donates at least two cans of soup. The books contain a variety of coupons from local restaurants to tattoo parlors.

As a member of the South Side Planning Forum, an amalgamation of various South Side organizations including the Brashear Association and the South Side Community Council, SSLDC participates in community planning agreements.

When proposals for new buildings or residential areas in the South Side are made, companies come to the South Side Planning Forum to seek their approval. The forum then develops a steering committee to negotiate with the companies and report back to the constituent organizations.

Before the forum decides to approve any planning measure, a unanimous vote from the organizations is required.

Evan Stoddard, a member of SSLDC’s business development committee and the Associate Dean of the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts at Duquesne, said the connectedness of community organizations in South Side is the community’s strongest asset.

“[The South Side Planning Forum] has been a very powerful force in bringing the community together,” Stoddard said.

Comprised of residents and business owners, SSLDC allows the community to have a voice in developmental decisions and takes action to serve the interests of the people who live there.

“It’s a very unique community in that it’s such a melting pot,” Strang said. “And it’s starting to blend more.”

With South Side being a popular residential community for students, Strang stressed the importance of fostering an understanding of the community’s cultural history. While bars populate much of East Carson Street and bring business to the area, Strang said people should acknowledge that much of the area is residential.

“We understand that everyone wants to come here and have a good time, but we emphasize respect,” Strang said. “You wouldn’t want somebody going and [littering] on your grandma’s porch; why would you do it to somebody else’s?”

“The community has taken a hit recently — it’s gotten that ‘party neighborhood’ tag,” she said.

Stoddard agreed that it’s important for people to remember the residential aspect of the South Side. He added that getting involved in the community, rather than simply residing there, is an important part of developing a successful neighborhood.

“I was once given the advice that, wherever I live, I should act as if I would always live there, even if I know I won’t,” Stoddard said. “I think it’s a happier way to live. I hope our students take that approach. They have so much to offer; they can really improve that community.”

“The idea, yes, is to clean up the streets, but the greater goal is for students to form a better relationship with the communities in which they live.”

- Luci-Jo DiMaggio,
Duquesne Campus Minister
The skinny three-story houses on the South Side flats are packed together like hardback novels on a bookshelf. Their dull yellows, reds, creams and greens stand one after the other down the narrow streets. Somewhere beneath the most recent exterior layer of paint lies the original row house.

More than 100 years after many of these homes were built for Jones & Laughlin Steel Company workers, many are still standing, supporting and leaning against each other ... holding each other up.

Some, though, are crumbling down — often with the help of a bulldozer.

Replacing them, between old houses with thin walls, broken windows and dirt and vines on the front siding, are rebuilt, renovated and newly-restored houses. They're the same size as their neighbors, but with their modern features they look like they belong in a different neighborhood. In reality, they are transforming the South Side.

The aesthetic fix-up is improving the overall appeal of the neighborhood's streets. Companies like Welte Roofing, where Ron Loreski has worked for 32 years, are hired to revitalize the roofs and facades of houses in Pittsburgh's neighborhoods.

“South Side is all run-down homes, and then you have new people coming in and fixing them up. A middle class person like me fixing up the place,” Loreski says as he peers up and down at a house on Jane Street. “Looks nice, though.”

At 1719 Jane St., he is replacing parts on the facade of the house with aluminum.

“Wood will warp, shrink and expand,” Loreski says. In the long run, colored aluminum is a better investment for the homeowner because it won't need to be repainted.

The daily problem Loreski faces is simple math.

“Everything might look the same [for] measurements, but the numbers are completely different,” he says, pointing to a ledge spanning the front of the house.

The width should be the same on both ends, Loreski explains, but the beam narrows on one end by two inches. On projects like replacing a window frame, the process is long and tedious.

Loreski, a Pittsburgh native, explains a bit of history.

“These were all mill hunkie homes,” he says. “They used to be called ‘mill hunkies’ because that’s what they did with their lives.”

Like the house on Jane Street, the average width of a flat is pretty narrow, according to Harry O’Brien, an agent with Carlson & McGinley Real Estate.

“The smallest I’ve seen is 14 feet wide, but that’s too small for normal occupation. Now [the
standard is] 22 feet,” he says.

The tiny square footage isn’t affecting the housing market in South Side or elsewhere in the city, however.

PMI, Inc., a group that promotes homeownership and services for building communities, found that while home prices are falling nationally, the home prices in Pittsburgh had a 4.65 percent increase in the 3rd quarter of last year.

“Older people don’t really have the jingly to fix them up,” Loreski says of the houses in South Side. But college students and young 20- and 30-somethings who savor Carson Street’s nightlife are creating a demand for South Side living.

Contractors like Jeff Sawyer see the potential in South Side’s maze of streets.

Sawyer, originally from California, moved to Pittsburgh to take advantage of the market. On his eleventh renovation, he maintains that he’s not a “flipper.”

“There’s so many colleges, that [South Side] makes a good rental market. I decided that would be my business,” he said.

He prefers to build from scratch, ripping down the old homes—poor insulation being one of his primary reasons for starting over.

“Our people don’t really have the jingly to fix them up.”
— Ron Loreski, Developer.

“Renovation costs more and you don’t get as much value,” he says.

Sawyer usually takes one day to bulldoze down the bricks, wood and shingles, but 1819 Larkin Way turned into a two-month project. Because of the cramped quarters, he had to take it down by hand, creating a dirty mess for his crew.

Thanks to steel’s sooty heyday, the walls were filled with what Sawyer describes as black talcum powder. Starting from the top to the bottom of the house, he and his crew tore down one piece at a time.

“There was four inches of soot in the wall,” he says. “We had eyeliner for a week.”

Sawyer outfits his brand-new homes to be energy efficient, provides four internet connections and wires in surround sound. Marble countertops are also standard.

When Sawyer began five years ago, he could pick up a house for $20,000. After appraising his homes again, some are valued at more than $400,000.

While Sawyer rents his homes out to Duquesne students, there are permanent buyers searching for their South Side home.

“What’s different between South Side and most other areas is that it varies by the house rather than the whole neighborhood. The appraisals are different. It’s unique to say the least,” he says.

No matter the cost of rent or purchasing a house, what keeps people living in the South Side is the easy accessibility to restaurants, cafes, theaters and, obviously, the bars, O’Brien says.

“It’s more of a small town atmosphere with a big city flair,” he says.
Even though Moore’s Mount Washington residence has a court right next to it, he prefers to practice his free throws three times a week at Armstrong Park.

“I just like the South Side — period,” Moore says. “The whole aura of being around this place brings out the best in me. I’d rather get the extra exercise walking down P.J. McArdle. Plus I like the people, I like the way they play,” Moore says as he scoops up the basketball.

Several feet away from Moore, who is the tallest on the court at six-feet-two inches, a child is being lifted on to the swings. A few giggling children run around the playground shouting at one another. Their playful bellows are suddenly overshadowed as “Luna” erupts with a loud yelp.

“Piece by piece we are losing this park when we should be preserving it.”
- Kitty Hitz, Neighbor

Luna and her owner, Joe Nikoula, 22, faithfully visit the park each day. Luna is a medium-sized dog with a black shining coat that is as soft as linen straight from the dyer. If it weren’t for the lights Luna would blend into the darkness.

“Luna, means moon in several different languages. It means moon in Italian, which is my heritage,” Nikoula says. “She has those spots on her legs, kind of like craters of the moon. Luna! Luna!,” Nikoula calls.

Luna faithfully dashes to her owner and a small dog trails behind. Nikoula begins to pet the mystery dog and reaches for its collar. “Puma, that’s his name, Puma. It seems suiting – he’s real muscular,” Nikoula says.

As Nikoula strokes the small energetic dog, he explains the etiquette of the park. “Knowing the dogs by name is just as important as knowing the owner’s name,” Nikoula says as he waves to Puma’s owner.

“Most dogs are real friendly and their owners, too,” Nikoula says as he watches Luna and Puma chase a red ball. “One time there was this huge, full-grown pit bull. Man, were the dogs scared. Not Luna, she walked right up to him.”

“The [owner] and I started talking. All of a sud-
The pit bull was gone. I helped him try and find the dog … [The pit bull] went into Dave's Music Mine, he was just standing in the isle, maybe to get the new Snoop CD," Nikoula laughs. “I had to help the owner get the dog out.”

The park is not entirely closed off, making it easy for dogs to wander off. Nikoula and other owners have concerns about the open section because Armstrong Park is located just a block from East Carson Street.

“I've seen some close calls," Nikoula says. “Some dogs just take off, and before you know it they are inches away from a car.”

However, Kitty Hitz, a South Side resident, “born and raised on 12th Street,” believes there should be no changes made to accommodate dogs. Hitz has lived on the South Side for over 70 years and during her childhood, she used to play marbles at Armstrong Park. Hitz is steadfast in her belief that “the playground belongs to the people.”

“Piece by piece we are losing this park when we should be preserving it," Hitz says. “To me that is a historical piece of property and now when you take your little ones to the park guess what they are stepping in," Hitz says in reference to the dog droppings all around the park.

Hitz along with five generations of her family have played at Armstrong Park. She knows the park’s history and sees value in that history. “[Pittsburgh] was the biggest glass making city in the U.S, that’s what we were before steel in the 1800s,” Hitz says.

“Right here on Armstrong Park, there was originally a glass factory. I was told my grandma worked in that factory,” Hitz continues.

Hitz explains that the site of the factory was turned into a park after a sinkhole was uncovered. In her lifetime, the location has always been a park and a place for young people to congregate.

“Everything was centered around the playground,” Hitz says. From Halloween parades to little league baseball games, Hitz recalls a park that was geared toward younger children. Hitz longs for all the kids who once occupied Armstrong Park. Now Hitz says, “it seems to be forgotten.”

Even though there are some children who visit the park, most visitors appear to be in their 20s. This could be attributed to a large population of college students who are making South Side their home.

Yet, for Hitz the South Side is a family-oriented neighborhood and offers advice to attract families back to the South Side. “[If] you want young kids to raise their families here you’ve got to offer them something—starting with Armstrong playground. That little park … it just means so much to the community,” Hitz concludes.
For a newlywed couple, a small reception at a bed and breakfast was love at first sight. They decided to get married at the Morning Glory Inn on Sarah Street, in the South Side. Morning Glory sets behind a dark cast iron fence. Bamboo, rhododendrons and other brightly colored plants nestle against the walls of the front. A pair of thick wooden doors open to reveal tall, bright rooms that stretch back to lengthy carpeted stairs that seemingly ascend forever.

Each of the five guest rooms has comes complete with decorative floral wallpaper and an elaborate working fireplace and exude warmth like grandma’s house.

Surprisingly enough, this quaint getaway is located only one block away from the bustling East Carson Street; if you were taken blindfolded to the magnificent brick courtyard surrounded by trees and flowers you would never guess you were in the middle of a big-city neighborhood. The noise of nearby traffic doesn’t seem to reach this peaceful place.

The courtyard plays a big role on a romantic wedding day. The bride and groom come together for their first dance in its center, under an arch of bamboo and assorted greens, after the best man makes a toast with a glass of red wine in hand. A table with older women on the other side of the arch looks fondly on the newly married, and they clink their wine glasses amongst each other. The cool, autumn air brings the group a little closer together.

Wedding guest Barb Candusso, of Bethel Park, thinks the moment is very appropriate, and the place that captures it is a perfect fit. “This is as comfortable as a home,” Candusso says. The bride and groom were looking for a place they could easily agree on for the big day. “Then they came down here and loved the place!”

Innkeeper Nancy Eshelman is hostess to those who visit Morning Glory, while here husband, Dave, focuses
on money and marketing matters. Nancy says they are a
great team.

Eshelman says thousands of people have passed
through the house over the past 12 years; guests come
from as far away as Australia and as near as just down the
street.

On this particular morning she makes blueberry
pancakes with yogurt and juice for her guests. She strays
from repeating the same kind of breakfast every morning.

“Someone can stay two weeks and not have the
same meal,” she explains.

Nancy also points out that she decorated the
entire house with her style and her ideas. While it’s a
Victorian-style house that was built in the 1860s, she be-
lieves lighter and brighter decorations are more welcom-
ing for her guests. (Bold Gothic styles overwhelmed the
house before she redecorated.) She finds antiques from
different eras, such as the grand piano from the 1940s,
and assorted ceramics she has found from earlier eras,
and places them where she sees fit.

“I’m more eclectic than purist,” she says with a
laugh.

However, the Morning Glory Inn does more than
simply operate as a small business. Nancy is also involved
with the Brashear Association, a local community service
group, and she serves on its Board of Directors.

She says being active in the community is very
important. Small businesses and neighborhood commu-
nities give places personality. Corporate America doesn’t
have an overbearing presence in South Side, and she
likes that. She says she never shops at Wal-Mart.

While Morning Glory advertises in magazines,
Nancy says that “word of mouth is the best business.”

Perhaps that is why weddings are incredibly
popular here. Nancy estimates there have been 35 wed-
ding receptions this season alone. (The season runs from
April to mid-October.)

For a wedding, the entire house is occupied.
Morning Glory puts a package deal together that
includes every facet of the event, including the catering,
the music and all of the guest rooms.

But there are a variety of social events that
also take place here, such as surprise birthday parties,
wedding showers, christenings, bar mitzvahs and office
meetings. However, the reasons to come can only be
limited by one’s imagination.

“There are lots of Pittsburghers that come here
to get away,” Eshelman says. “South Side is a great
neighborhood.”
Soaking Up History at the Oliver Baths

Descending 211 steps and crossing the 10th Street Bridge, Duquesne students take their first steps into the larger world that is the South Side. As they make beelines to raucous parties, cozy coffee shops, or vintage clothing stores, students may miss some of the more eclectic features of the South Side. The Oliver Bath House is one of the hidden gems they pass almost immediately as they head toward the folly of East Carson Street. Everyone who crosses the 10th Street Bridge sees the large, white sign for the Allegheny Millwork & Lumber Co. Coming off the bridge, and continuing down 10th, past Muriel Street, they come to the corner of Bingham Street. The Oliver Bath House is at this corner, right next to the Holiday Inn Express.

Although it is not apparent from its façade, the Oliver Bath House is home to one of the city’s oldest indoor pools. Henry Oliver — for whom the building is named — donated $100,000 for the construction of a public bath house in the South Side. Public bath houses were built for the families of mill workers, steel workers, and coal miners during an age when few had indoor plumbing. When it opened in 1915, it was the first bath house with not only a pool but also rows of bathtubs where weary workers could scrub soot and grime from their skin. It was the last public bath house built in the city. Now, The Oliver Bath House is under the management of Pittsburgh Parks and Recreation.

Admission to the Oliver Baths — as it’s popularly known — is only $4 for adults and $3 for children. Season passes are available in several different categories. A family of four can swim for $60, with $10 for each additional family member. For people 16 years and older, a pass is available for $30. Children 3-15 pay $15 and children under 3 are free.

The building has three floors. Swimmers enter on the street-level first floor where the 20-yard pool is located. They pass a trophy case and a Pepsi machine as the lifeguard-on-duty at the front desk greets them as early as 9 a.m.

There are three lifeguards on duty while the pool is open: One sits at the front desk, one cleans when necessary, and one watches the swimmers, who must show their passes to the lifeguard at the front desk and then ascend the cathedral-like steps to the second floor mezzanine before plunging in. Also on this floor are lockers and partitioned changing areas overlooking the pool.

The third floor is off-limits and houses the four-room apartment where, years ago, the caretaker lived. No one lives there now; it is used as storage for CPR dummies and pool equipment.

After the swimmers change into their swimsuits they get into the pool. Zachary Coleman, a 21-year-old lifeguard says that in the morning there are older people and that the nights are usually reserved for water aerobics or
One of Coleman’s colleagues — Kayla Fetherlin, 21 — smiles when water aerobics is mentioned. She laughs and says, “That’s fun.”

Coleman laughs too. “It’s not busier, just more hectic,” she says.

One lifeguard leads the group of water aerobics students. Using weights, the swimmers follow the lifeguard making motions with their arms underwater. The swimmers, ranging from young to old, tone their muscles just like they would with any other workout, save for the fact that this one is in the water.

They do jumping-jacks, arm curls, squats, and run in place — which also helps keep them afloat. After working their arms for 30 minutes, they work their legs with the assistance of foam noodles for about 15 minutes.

Toni Mizgorski, 67, of Polish Hill has been coming to water aerobics for two years. Mizgorski chooses water aerobics over regular aerobics because she likes swimming and it is easier on her legs, she says.

“I like coming here,” she says. “It’s just a nice place to meet people and have a lot of fun.”

To have this fun, the swimmers do not have to take part in an organized exercise program. There are blocks of open swim time for swimmers of all ages. During a session, Kathy Fajerski, 62, of South Side, calls the lifeguards “phenomenal.” She says, “They make it a pleasant experience for you.”

Fajerski has been coming to the Oliver Bath House for eight years. Staying afloat with the help of a foam noodle, she talks about why she comes to the pool every week. “There are three things,” she says. Along with the lifeguards, Fajerski says she likes the “accessibility of hours” and “the cleanliness [of the place].”

Preparing to do her laps, another senior swimmer, Pat Wank, 70, of Allentown says, “The nicest thing is that it’s convenient and doesn’t cost a lot of money.”

With earplugs in and her goggles pulled up onto her forehead she adds, “It’s good for me when I feel like I’m getting lazy. I’m trying to talk my husband into coming” — she stops to grin — “but he says the water’s too cold.”

Most of the seniors say that swimming is a great way to stay healthy. One even says that swimming is better than taking his daily medications because he actually enjoys swimming.

To a silent observer, it might seem that the Oliver Bath House is a gathering ground for spirited seniors — that it is a relic from another time and that it belongs to them. This idea is shattered like a pebble tossed into a still pond when Dave and Lynn Devers of Dormont bring their 8-year-old daughter and about 10 of her young friends to the pool for her birthday party. The same pool that just had a relatively docile group for a water aerobics class in it is now full of splashing children. Their laughter echoes throughout the Oliver Bath House until it closes at 9 p.m.

When it opened in 1915, it was the first bath house with not only a pool but also rows of bathtubs where weary workers could scrub soot and grime from their skin.

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Preparing to do her laps, another senior swimmer, Pat Wank, 70, of Allentown says, “The nicest thing is that it’s convenient and doesn’t cost a lot of money.”
When Rob Desteffano set out to deliver one of his first pizzas, he knew the South Side address he was heading for was on a hillside.

He didn’t know he would have to climb 482 steps to reach it.

“All the guys I work with were laughing, I paid no attention. It turned out the house was on top of what looked like a never ending staircase.”

Welcome to the South Side, home to more than 44,645 steps totaling 24,108 vertical feet — Pittsburgh’s very own Mt. Everest.

The thing is, nearly all of these ‘never ending’ staircases are legal streets. Print out directions on MapQuest and chances are you’ll end up climbing a few stories to reach your target.

Pittsburghers should recognize that they have quite a big deal in their backyards. Places like San Francisco pride themselves on their “steepness.” But San Francisco has 362 fewer sets of staircases than the South Side, which has 712 sets. If all the sets were piled on top of the other they would stretch over four and a half miles.

But why were the South Side Steps built in the first place? Resident Derek Fallecker says it was the easiest way to get around. “The neighborhood is so steep, real roads would have been nearly impossible to construct, therefore the Steps became the roads,” said Fallecker. “They have street lights and street signs.”
These huge staircases would have been the first forms of public transportation, helping people navigate from the “flats” to the “slopes.” They allowed people to go to where they normally could not, unless of course they were willing to crawl and climb.

Today, the Steps are so popular that every year the South Side Slope’s Neighborhood Association hosts “Step Trek,” a walking tour of each and every step. There are two trek options appropriately named black and gold, gold being the more difficult. Some people do both routes while others just choose one. Either way it is quite a workout.

“I think the gold trek we took was close to three miles, it may not seem far, but walking up steps that far is a killer. Although walking down felt pretty good,” said Shannon Miller, a Monroeville resident who participated in the walk in 2006.

Every year approximately 500 people sign up to walk the Steps, anxious to get the feeling of what it was like to walk up 300 steps after 12 hours of work at the steel mill.

Walking up the well-known steps is worth it. The views are unbelievable. The views that the top of the Steps provide are heavenly and have even earned praise from the national media.

A *New York Times* story chronicled the rehabbing of once-cheap row houses into multimillion-dollar dwellings. And a recent article *The Washington Post* observed life from the top of the Steps: “From here, the city looks like a life-size version of a 1950s train set, whirring with action. Little cable cars race hawks down the green bluffs, river barges chug past the confluence, railroads trundle busily around the mountains, and cars beetle over bridges. I count a dozen churches below, from onion domes to towers — a separate-but-equal ethnic approach to God.”

Step Trekker Shannon Miller was also enthralled by the view: “It’s so interesting; you can be walking in the middle of what seems like nowhere and all of a sudden there is the city,” Miller said. “You’re surrounded by trees then all of a sudden it opens and you’re in a neighborhood.”

Dozens of distinct neighborhoods straddle the Steps. A densely packed block gives way to a wooded area where a house is tucked away amid the foliage. Goats graze in a few yards at the very top, in full view of the top of the Mellon Bank and UPMC skyscrapers.

Most of these homes alongside the Steps were built there so the steel workers did not have to walk too far after work. It is obvious that most of these homes were not built for comfort but rather convenience and affordability.

Since most of the Steps were built between the 1920s and 1940s, they are slowly deteriorating, and need a great deal of maintenance.

Promoters say the costs are worth it. The Steps are beginning to be marketed as a tourist attraction, just as the inclines are.

So if you’ve been dreaming of climbing Mt. Everest but can’t make the trip, just look in your own back yard. It’s really only a “step” away.

Photo by Joe Ball
At one time in the early 20th century, there were hundreds of mill workers who daily descended from, and later climbed, the slopes on the South Side of Pittsburgh to go to work at Jones & Laughlin Steel, South Side Works (one of the largest integrated steel mills in the United States at the time) and the glass factories between South 16th and 20th streets.

During the day their wives had to perform the same trek to buy groceries. How did they do the 370 foot vertical climb up the sometimes snowy, always smoky, South Side hills of Pittsburgh?

The inventive answer was that there were as many as seven inclined planes which ran on tracks, drawn by cables, that carried these people to and from their destinations. One incline had a curve of 68 degrees and was large enough to carry automobiles and small trucks. This was during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Incline Locations**

On West Carson Street at the Smithfield Bridge, two inclines ascended Mount Washington, then called “Coal Hill.” “Monongahela #2” carried coal and other freight and has disappeared. The other, known as “Monongahela #1, carried both passengers and vehicles, operating from Grand-view Avenue on Mount Washington down to Carson Street near the present-day trolley tunnel.

The Monongahela Incline still operates as a major...
Pittsburgh Neighborhood Project: South Side

tourist attraction taking visitors from trendy Station Square to the overlook of the city on Mount Washington. The vertical distance is 370 feet!

Two inclines combined to create “Castle Shannon #1” and “Castle Shannon #2”. These lifted people and vehicles from Carson Street near Terminal Warehouse up to Bailey Street. Castle Shannon #2 ran from Bailey Avenue up to Warrington.

The Mount Oliver Incline, which opened in 1871, climbed the hill from 12th Street at Bradford to Warrington Avenue in Mount Oliver. It closed in 1951.

One headhouse still exists today, 100 years later. The bottom station for the Mount Oliver incline to Warrington Avenue, which was a magazine and newspaper stand, also sold bananas, oranges and apples to the clientele inclined to travel these ‘slopes’. Today, to find ‘Mary’s Store’ one turns right off 18th Street before going under the railroad tracks. The headhouse was actually a ‘foothouse’ although they were never called that at the time.

Today, as silent witnesses to the incline presence, blackened stone walls, sturdy supports for the long-gone heavyweight girders, stand silent stacked between parenthetical houses.

The Knoxville Incline, which was the longest with nearly half mile of track, curved when it reached Warrington Avenue on its way up to Arlington Avenue. These metal garage-like carriers conveyed people, horses, wagons, goods and, later, automobiles. Cables in the center of the route, between the two rails hauled the carriers up and down the hills. This incline was one of only two in Pittsburgh which utilized a curved route.

The St. Clair Incline lifted passengers and freight from 22nd and Josephine streets in the South Side ‘Flats’ to Salisbury Street on the ‘South Side Slopes’ near Arlington Avenue. Operation was from 1886 to 1935.

Only Two Inclines Remain

Because of the proximity of great seams of coal in these hillsides, the inclines were operated by stationary steam engines located usually at the base of the tracks. After 1905 many were converted to electrical operation, the power coming from the city of Pittsburgh.

Fare for the inclines varied from a penny to five cents per trip.

For people who lived on Mount Washington and the South Side Slopes, including the towns of Mount Oliver and St. Clair, these inclined planes, covering as they did a lift of 350 to 500 feet vertically, saved many a heart and leg from extreme exhaustion. The residents and shop keepers of the heights had to have easier access to the South Side flats and the businesses and factories in the boroughs of Birmingham, East Birmingham and Ormsby.

The two inclines which still exist today in Pittsburgh are reminders of a time gone by, and with the one in neighboring Johnstown, serve as a unique present attraction for tourists in the state of Pennsylvania.

Today, as silent witnesses to the incline presence, blackened stone walls, sturdy supports for the long-gone heavyweight girders, stand silent stacked between parenthetical houses.

A view from inside the Monongahela Incline

Photo by Emily Basch
Like a senior citizen at a speed-dating event

by Shawn Klocek

Sandwiched between a copy store and a trendy novelty shop, Schwartz Market sticks out like a senior citizen at a speed-dating event. While the Beehive coffee shop attracts a flock of college students down the block, this 80-year-old business draws a sparser crowd.

Martin Dorfner, owner of Schwartz Market, says most of his customers are elderly residents who have shopped there since the South Side’s steel mill days.

“They were here during the heyday of the South Side,” Dorfner says of the Market’s customers. “People are thinking now is the heyday, but it is a different kind.”

With 33 colleges and universities drawing more than 150,000 students to Pittsburgh each year, South Side’s population is now largely transient. A Duquesne University honors seminar reported last spring that only 35 percent of the area’s inhabitants consider their houses family residences. And when college students surged to the South Side, businesses took note. There are three bars on the 1300 block of East Carson Street, where Schwartz Market is located.

“Everywhere you go, it’s bar after bar after bar,” Dorfner says. “Most people are not especially interested in the welfare of South Side — they are interested in having a good time.”

While the influx of young people to South Side bolsters business for bars and clubs, Dorfner says it hasn’t helped his Market.

“It threatens all small business, because bars don’t support us,” he says. “They might buy ice occasionally.”

Pat Pitulski, a manager who has worked at Schwartz Market for more than 45 years, says the older residents of the South Side feel the surge of college students to the community has eroded the neighborhood’s small-town atmosphere.

“Years ago, the old people used to sit out and talk,” Pitulski says. “Now, you don’t even know your neighbors.”
In the early 1920s, the Market opened at 1507 East Carson St. under the name “Schwartz Sanitary Market.” Dorfner says that “sanitary” was dropped from the Market’s name as the city’s living conditions improved.

“Back in the ’20s, the streets and everything were different,” Dorfner says. “They had horse manure on the street, you know?”

In 1938, the Market moved to 1317 East Carson St., where it has remained. The Schwartz family owned the Market and building before they retired in 1985. They then sold the business to Dorfner, although a daughter — the only living member of the Schwartz family — still owns the building.

The building was constructed around 1900 and named the “American Building” because of its American Renaissance style, which features arched windows and decorative brickwork on the facade of the upper stories. The building was originally home to a real estate office. Though the architecture stands out, what really grabs the eye is the Market’s storefront windows, displaying sales signs handwritten in blue and red marker.

Much like the handmade signs, the Market has long been run in an old-fashioned way. Recently, the Market began taking credit cards and accepting payments for utility bills in hopes of drawing more customers.

“People don’t come to South Side to grocery shop. Young people don’t cook.”
- Martin Dorfner, Owner

But Dorfner says that for the most part, not much has changed in the way the business has been run. His office is in the corner of the Market’s loading dock. Unlike corporate grocery store owners, Dorfner says he takes a hands-on approach to the business.

“Your customers can deal with an owner ... and many of them do,” he says, adding that he often makes special orders for customers.

Dorfner flips through inventory sheets as an employee walks in the office.

“What did we do with the lettuce this week?” Dorfner asks, removing his glasses.

“We raised them,” the employee says.

But Dorfner says that because of high gas prices shipping costs are a bigger challenge to the Market more than competition from other grocery stores. He adds that close walking distance and a small business atmosphere help the Market keep a steady base of regular customers.

One such customer ambles toward the back of Schwartz Market, dragging his slippers across the floor, sometimes scraping against concrete where tiles are missing.

The old man stares at a stack of generic brand cleanser, asking aloud where the cleanser is. No one else is around him.

“It used to be yellow,” he says. “That’s blue.”

“Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk,” he says as he shuffles further down the aisle, stoops over, and picks up a canister of Comet scratch-free cleanser.

“I guess this will work,” he says. “Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk.”

The man’s evident confusion aside, his search for the old order of things isn’t much different from Dorfner’s.

“I just keep hoping that the people will come in and make a few changes,” Dorfner says, referring to the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh. “The community can’t control it — the city can.”

“We’re finding that things were a lot better 20 years ago,” he says. “People don’t come to South Side to grocery shop. Young people don’t cook.”
Welcome to the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community.

Sunday morning at 11 a.m., the patio outside of a renovated bar on 27th and Jane streets is packed with worshipers of all ages and styles. There are babies crying, middle aged parents dressed in casual jeans and out-of-date T-shirts, even the occasional elderly couple. The overwhelming majority of parishioners, however, are in their 20s.

“We want to be a ministry for college kids,” Jim Walker, pastor and co-founder of Hot Metal, says. Since forming the community with Jeff Eddings in 2002, Walker has done everything he can to appeal to young adults. In addition to placing ads in college newspapers, every fall he goes to the campuses to recruit new worshipers.

Jim and Jeff started out as youth ministers. After a while in the field, both began to notice the age gap in most churches.
vice. “Not too many people trust church,” he says. “You have to be real.” Indeed Walker begins the service with gusto, hopping up in front of everyone and exclaiming, “God is good!” To which the congregation enthusiastically replies, “All the time!”

Instead of a robe and collar, Pastor Jim is dressed in jeans and a sport shirt. Behind him is the hymnal accompaniment: two acoustic guitars and a set of bongo drums.

According to Walker, the key to attracting young adults is to have nothing to prove. College students want to see authentic worship. “Even the music proves we’re just trying to be us,” he says. “A couple of kids with acoustic guitars are more authentic than a full band with screaming guitars.”

At the beginning of the service, Walker gives a quick prayer and encourages worshippers to “stand up and say ‘Hi’ to someone who may not look like you.” People then introduce themselves to each other with a smile and a handshake. The bond between regular congregants is clear when they kiss each other on the cheek and ask about each other’s weekends. Newcomers are greeted with the same enthusiasm.

A tight connection between people was the goal of Hot Metal in the first place. Instead of building yet another church, Pastors Jim and Jeff decided to start a place of worship where relationships are the central goal. “A church can turn into a place where all you find is fakeness and rejection,” says Walker. “You don’t find community, you just find rules and dogma.”

The community, it turns out, is what matters most to the students who attend. Duquesne University student Jess Haney says other churches she has attended were too big and felt impersonal. After attending Hot Metal on and off for a few years, Haney began coming regularly this past summer when she began to feel lonely in Pittsburgh. “Hot Metal is more of a tight-knit community, which I felt I needed during the summer,” she says.

Another Duquesne student, Laura Botkins, shares the same opinion. “I like the true welcoming of it all,” Botkins says. “I appreciate the non-judgment people receive here.”

The community has also attracted a large number of homeless who attend services weekly. Hot Metal provides a free lunch after the service.

In addition to Sunday morning worship, Hot Metal runs a homeless ministry on Saturday afternoons where volunteers hand out food downtown. They also host a soup kitchen on Tuesday nights. “I like how I can go there and talk with the homeless,” Botkins says. “You don’t get many opportunities to do that.”

Pastor Jim says working with the homeless is another way to help young adults “put their faith in action.” The community also “adopts” families on the South Side slopes who need help with home repairs.

The church has an apprenticeship program that meets Wednesday nights to discuss the Bible. Church members even travel the world: For the past two years, 25 students from the community have gone on mission trips to Mexico.

This Christian faith community is multi-denominational and sponsored by the United Methodist and Presbyterian churches. This helps Hot Metal appeal to a wider range of people and also helps keep the community open.

“Jeff and I want young adults to come in and enjoy worship their way,” Pastor Jim Walker says. Whether it’s the lack of dress code or the feeling of community, Hot Metal provides a comfortable place of worship for any who desire it.
In a city where ranch dressing seems to come on the side of every dish and fried food makes up the bulk of every menu, finding a restaurant that serves sophisticated fare feels like discovering another country.

Customers of Mallorca in the South Side can get away and enjoy fine European food without the jet lag. “I want to give the customers authentic Spanish and Portuguese cuisine,” Antonio Pereira, Mallorca’s owner says. Even before tasting the food one feels the authenticity of the restaurant.

Mallorca is positioned on East Carson Street at the terminus of the Birmingham Bridge. When customers step through the French doors they are immediately greeted by an old wooden bar with brass details. There, they are able to pass time amiably as they wait to be seated. And, they most likely will wait unless they have reservations. “We are completely full for that evening sir,” Pereira says into the phone in his deep voice and strong accent on a typically busy night.

The room’s dark walls display framed awards that create high expectations for customers: Wine Spectator Award for Excellence; City Paper, Best Outdoor Dining and Best Spanish Food.

Pereira greets his customers as they walk towards the back of the room. Regulars are easy to spot as Pereira shakes hands with the men and kisses women on each cheek. This place seems like home to them.

The hostess walks customers to their seats. There are two dining rooms. The first is noticeably older: Dark, green, stuffy. Tables are placed just inches away from each other, making it a challenge to squeeze by. Everything aside from the tablecloths and plates is dark green. The room gives off the feeling of a mysterious European castle.

The other room — yellow, bright, spacious — offers a dramatic change of scenery. This room’s walls are painted
in soft yellow, and blue-and-white Spanish tile lines up half of the wall. The right-hand side is lined with wine bottles. The skylights overhead allow natural light to peek in and create a bright and welcoming atmosphere. There is noticeably more room for waiters to get around and tables are spread out further away from each other.

Large French doors with blue drapes open to the terrace patio, perfect for cool summer nights. Lights twinkle in tree branches dangling overhead. Large pots, each with an array of flowers, surround the tables. A large mural of a beach brings to mind calm Mediterranean waters, making the South Side chaos seem a million miles away.

Throughout the entire restaurant, waiters run around taking care of each table. Visibly stressed, they converse with one another while working as a team to make sure all of the diners are properly cared for.

There is a huge possibility customers will leave Mallorca reciting the daily specials: “24-ounce lobster tail, roast suckling pig, mahi-mahi ... the waiters repeat the specials to every table as customers’ eyes light up.

“And that is all we have for specials,” one the waiter says. Spanish sausage, a popular appetizer, is served on a ceramic plate shaped like a piglet and arrives at the table on a bed of flames. It’s a real attention-grabber.

Once meals begin to come out of the kitchen, the rooms are filled with the aroma of seafood and sauce. Every meal looks appetizing with its bright colors and thick lemon, butter or garlic sauce. Yellow rice topped off with red and green peppers, Spanish style fried potatoes, and fresh vegetables are served with every dish. Everyone digs into their meals, and by the time the waiters come back to take dessert orders, no matter how full everyone seems, it’s hard to resist flan or a cup of authentic Spanish coffee.

The bill arrives with a complimentary glass of Licor 43, a sweet citrus or vanilla flavored Spanish liquor that will leave your stomach burning. The dining experience at Mallorca is different from the typical Pittsburgh restaurant. Aside from leaving with a full belly customers will leave knowing a little more Spanish.

¡Buen Provecho!

Maitre d Manny Cardosa greets customers at Mallorca. Photo by OTB Staff
The music is blaring. Speakers are vibrating. Hips are swinging. Heads are bobbing. No, you are not at one of the many bars and clubs that dominate the main drag of East Carson Street. Instead, you are at an aerobics class — Zumba to be exact — at the Dance Café, located at 401 Bingham St.

Without a doubt, most people would rather be in a nightclub than a gym. But luckily for them, Sheerree Buchanan has done a good job of blurring the lines.

“I love this class,” says a smiling Heather Sims, a Zumba regular. “You sweat a lot, but you don’t realize you’re working out — which is good for me because I hate working out.”

With familiar J. Lo tunes and bass-heavy reggaeton blaring from the speakers, you just might forget where you are. This is not your mother’s aerobics class. Gone are old-school commands like, “Grapevine!” and “March it out!” Instead Sheerree, the Zumba instructor at the Dance Café, instructs her class to “Shake it!” and “Shimmy!” and “Cha Cha!”

Zumba is one of the latest workout phenomena to captivate gym-rats across the country. A modern fusion of salsa dance and mainstream aerobics, Zumba came about in 2005 when celebrity fitness trainer, Beto Perez, walked into his Miami aerobics class and realized he had forgotten his music. Thinking quickly, Perez improvised and hurried to his car to retrieve some tapes from his personal collection, which included mostly salsa and merengue music. To make the music work, Perez added stylistic variations to his old aerobic moves to create a routine that wound up striking a chord with a national audience.

Without much of a Hispanic presence in the city, Pittsburgh might seem like an odd place to launch a Latin-based fitness and dance program. But Sheerree has built up a strong base of clients that spans generations, ethnicities, and walks of life.
“Pittsburgh has been receptive,” says Sheerree. “Every month, Zumba gets bigger and bigger. Over the past couple of years, I know Pittsburgh Magazine and Whirl Magazine have covered it; it’s also been on the news several times.”

In the front corner of Sheerree’s class, two college-age girls wearing hooded sweatshirts and ponytails talk animatedly. One row behind them, two women in their 50s swap recipes. And just to the right of them, a forty-something woman in a unitard is practicing her salsa steps. They each may have different techniques and abilities, but once the music gets going, their enjoyment levels seem to be the same.

“The feedback I’ve gotten from clients,” says Sheerree, “is that they like that my class is easy to follow. It doesn’t matter what your level of dance is. Everyone will sweat, and nobody will be bored.”

Despite her current success and the increasing interest in Zumba nationwide, Sheerree has faced her share of challenges. Since the Dance Café opened its doors on the South Side in early 2007, Sheerree has had to rely heavily on word-of-mouth advertising.

“Word-of-mouth was the main way I helped build up the business,” Sheerree says. “But I was also one of those annoying people who put flyers and postcards on people’s windshields. I really had to hustle.”

Once Sheerree managed to attract more and more people to class, space — or lack thereof — quickly became an issue. The building at the corner of 4th and Bingham, which houses the Dance Café, is not equipped with rooms that are very conducive to holding class.

“As classes keep growing, it gets tough to find enough space without having to move,” says Sheerree.

Sheerree has converted the space she does have into a modest, makeshift dance studio. Although it may not have the glossy floors or sparkling mirrors of a larger, more high-profile facility, Sheerree and her clients seem to appreciate the charms of this more intimate space.

“I actually like the fact that there are no mirrors in here,” says Carol, one of Sheerree’s earliest clients. “You don’t have to be constantly reminded of your body flaws. You can just relax and have fun doing the routines.”

The casual, down-to-earth atmosphere is underscored by the tight quarters and the array of mismatched portable fans that line the perimeter, providing a welcome breeze to sweaty participants.

The no-frills surroundings do not at all deter the loyal clients, who genuinely enjoy the music, the dancing and the easy camaraderie that exists among them.

Even though Sheerree’s clientele is decidedly diverse, there is one aspect in which it is almost entirely the same: It’s virtually all female.

“We have a number of different ethnicities represented,” Sheerree says, “but it’s pretty much all women, ranging in age from 25-65.

“The youngest client I’ve had was seven years old,” she continues. “Parents like to bring children, particularly those with weight problems, because it is a bonding experience, and the kids have so much fun they don’t realize they are working out.”

A lot of clients tend to travel in pairs, and Sheerree’s classes are often filled with mother-daughter duos, sisters, and best friends.

“Everyone is friendly,” says Carol. “Even if you come by yourself, you immediately feel welcome.”

“The Zumba experience is social and fun,” Sheerree says, “to the point where you forget how effective it actually is. You tone, you build endurance, and you create a healthy heart.”

After finishing one of Sheerree’s classes, it’s not hard to see why the Dance Café has found a home on the South Side. It brings a brand new dimension to the community, by being a unique place to increase fitness and make friends.
At 7 a.m. the sky is black. Not a single ray of sunlight penetrates the cold, crisp, city sky. The wind is howling as two artists labor over a kiln. They’ve been at it for an hour already. Their workspace is a street-level garage. The large garage door remains open, welcoming the frigid temperatures.

Artist Drew Hine and his apprentice, Steve Stens, are glass blowers. While the city is cast in darkness and cold, the two work happily in T-shirts, warmed by the kiln and illuminated by glowing-orange metal rods placed into the flame. Light, heat and smoke spill out of the garage onto 16th Street.

“This is glass blowing season, its perfect,” Hine says as a cool breeze rushes in. The cold air balances the heat seething from the furnace that is kept at 2,000 degrees.

As Hine sticks a metal pole into the reheating chamber, he explains the project for today. “We are doing bathroom light fixtures for someone,” Hine says.

He motions towards a translucent, bowl-shaped glass piece that was perhaps purchased at Wal-Mart. “The customer wants a fixture this size,” he explains. But definitely not of that pedigree.

“No one has ‘handmade’ anymore. It’s really cool [that] people venture outside of that, most people don’t,” he says. “[Customers] are going to want something no one’s ever seen before. So we try and do it custom.”

Even though they have to produce two light fixtures of the same height and weight, Hine assures each one will be unique.

“Glass is a very unstable material. It’s never the same job twice, even if we are making matching fixtures,” Hine says.

The glass blowing process is just as unique as the art it produces. Hine and Stens’ process seems to be an intuitive dance. When Hine moves, Stens knows to counter.

“Steve knows exactly what the next step is,” Hine says. “It’s pretty much a team effort. You need to know where you are.”

Even Hine’s two German short-haired pointers, Millie and Dexter, know when to move out of the way.

“They know,” Stens says as he motions towards Dexter and Millie, “Oh man that’s hot, got to stay away.”

The process begins when Hine dips a large metal blow pipe into the furnace that holds the glass. “It’s like a big bowl of honey — a bathtub full of honey in the furnace,” Stens says.

The pole emerges from the furnace with
a metallic-orange glowing blob, which is the glass. As Hine sits down on the bench adjacent to the furnace, Stens knows to counter to Hine’s left and blow through the hole located at the end of the metal pipe.

“The air creates the vessel part,” Hine says rolling the pipe that has Stens blowing through one end and the orange blob on the other end.

Hine is seated and must keep the glass in motion in order to mold its shape. He carefully rolls the pipe backwards through his knuckles and then forward finger to finger tip. This steady, systematic movement makes it look as though Hine is rolling dough.

Even though Hine is orchestrating this constant movement without breaking a sweat, he admits it is more difficult than it appears.

“It’s really heavy,” Hine says. “Most glass blowers are really strong.”

Stens, who is becoming the staccato king of one-liners, removes his lips from the pole and laughs: “We just make it look easy, this is our gym.”

The once amoeba-like orange blob is now taking the shape of a bowl. Hine continues the rolling movement and rubs the bowl-shaped glass with wet newspaper to cool it.

Hine places the metal pipe back into the honey-pot furnace to retrieve more glass. The fixture is not the correct size yet.

“You add [glass] in layers,” Hine says as he removes an ever larger orange glowing vessel. “Add a layer let it cool. Add a layer let it cool.”

After repeating the process a few more times, the fixture has met the correct measurements. Stens instinctively knows to get a clean metal pole and dip it into the glass furnace.

“We will make a wrap that goes around the vessel,” Hine says as he is seated rolling the vessel waiting for Stens.

Stens approaches Hine with the other pipe that now has glass on it. “See how it stretches?” Stens questions as the glass on his pipe elongates into a thin strand and warps around Hine’s round vessel.

“It was pretty plain and boring but [the wrap] adds something else to it,” Hine comments as a thin strand of glass coils around the vessel. The wrap looks like taffy being pulled; Stens compares it to molasses.

When the piece is complete, Hine places his pipe into the reheating chamber as Stens puts on protective gear to remove the fixture from the pipe.

“It’s way easier to have an assistant,” Hine says. It is important for both artists to get along because one misstep could yield severe burns.

“All glass blowers have the same personality for the most part, a little bit crazy, ready to have some fun, you can’t take everything seriously,” Hine says.

Just then, Stens emerges from the back of the garage with a sweatshirt on to protect his arms, and a giant silver head covering. Stens looks like a space cadet with the protective gear on. It looks like he is wearing an empty box that once contained a big screen TV.

Stens reaches for the glass piece on the pipe as Hine is spinning. With a few gentle tugs, the piece is free from the pipe and Stens hastily marches towards something that looks like an oversized cabinet.

“Glass is a very unstable material. It’s never the same job twice, even if we are making matching fixtures.”
- Drew Hine, Glassblower
GAMES N’ AT
THE PLACE FOR PLAYERS ON THE SOUTH SIDE


No one ever said good fun comes cheap. After a night at Dave and Buster’s, a patron may search his or her pockets to find nothing but a few pennies and lint.

There has to be a cheaper alternative, right? Fortunately, impoverished college students and other South Side residents do have an alternative — Games N’At Party Emporium and Game Center on Josephine Street.

Make no mistake about it — Games N’At is not Dave and Buster’s. It doesn’t have a menu filled with everything from blackened tilapia to blackjack BBQ ribs. It doesn’t have every new arcade game mere seconds after it’s released. And it doesn’t have a bar that offers two million different drinks.

However, Games N’At does have its advantages. It does offer customers a snack bar that sells hotdogs and hamburgers for just a couple dollars. It does have a wide variety of arcade games in addition to a bowling alley upstairs. And it does allow patrons to BYOB (provided they show proper ID of course).

For more than five years, Games N’At owners Marian and Bill Jones have offered Pittsburghers a cheap way to relax and enjoy some quality gaming. Located right off of 18th Street, Games N’At previously served the Pittsburgh area as Triangle Messenger, a service that made about 750 deliveries a day. However, following September 11, insurance rates began to skyrocket. The Jones’ didn’t want to sell their building, and a family member suggested that they open up an arcade to capitalize on the popularity of Dave and Buster’s. Thus, on April 5, 2003, Games N’At opened for business.

According to Marian Jones, Games N’At was not an immediate success.

“Our first night, I think we made 300 bucks. People, for some reason, would look in the one [arcade] window and think that’s all we had,” Jones says.

However, word-of-mouth began to spread, and business picked up. Jones recalls that Games N’At’s first breakthrough came when she pitched a news story to Dave Crowley of KDKA, Pittsburgh. Three weeks later, KDKA interviewed Jones for a story. For the interview, Jones was wearing a shirt that featured Games N’At’s logo, a baby chicken with a party hat. The camera focused on the chick, and Jones credits that for helping to spread the word about Games N’At. Jones says that the party chick became synonymous with Games N’At.

“The whole time he interviewed me, the party chick was in the picture. To this day, people ask me, ‘Weren’t you on with Dave Crowley?’” Jones says.

It’s clear Games N’At is not a corporate creation from the moment you walk in the door. Old children’s memorabilia decorates the walls: Mighty Mouse, Hulk Hogan and Pee wee Herman are all on display.

Jones explains that Games N’At does not have a target audience. She says the arcade appeals to all people, regardless of age.

On a normal day, 53-year-old Betty Baird sits in the corner of the one room, playing away at video card games and slots. Baird has been coming to Games N’At for four years; lately, she’s been there every day.

“This is my time of relaxation. The peacefulness that I have here, it’s kind of an escape for me,” Baird says.

Jones remembers a day when she heard screams coming from the arcade room. She checked, and to her amazement saw an 85-year-old woman having a blast playing Hydro Thunder, a water racing video game.

“She hadn’t laughed that hard in 25 years. ‘Best damn party I’ve ever had’ is what she said,” Jones recalls.
Parties are crucial to the business. Games N’At hosts many children’s parties, but its clientele is not limited to the mothers and fathers of children. Weddings and bachelor parties are also common.

Jones says that she typically does not run into problems. In five years of business, she has only called the police once, and that was for a disruptive mother at a child’s party.

“For the volume of beer that goes through this place, we really don’t have problems,” Jones says.

However, the biggest problem that Jones does run into is people trying to cheat or not pay for the games. The games do not require the user to insert coins, so visitors often attempt to play the games without paying Games N’At’s cover price. But Jones knows how to handle the thieves.

“I’ve got a line for everyone,” she says.

In fact, Jones says that a part of her enjoys when she encounters trouble at the arcade. She finds it fun.

“Sometimes I think I like the trouble because I know how to handle it and get it over with,” Jones says.

So, has Games N’At achieved the goal of offering Pittsburgh residents a cheaper alternative to Dave and Buster’s?

“This is more family-oriented. It’s reasonable to get in,” Baird says. “The warmth I feel here, I just love it.”

24-year-old Pat Doss agrees that Games’N At is a great alternative.

“Oh yeah, it’s reasonably priced. There’s a whole bunch of games. I just bring beer, have a couple, you know,” Doss says.

Five years later, Jones is gratified she’s succeeded in offering Pittsburghers a cheap way to have fun.

“Everybody really likes it. If you get somebody who is complaining, it’s because they’re trying to get something for nothing,” Jones says. “I think we really do have something for everyone.”
The epic history of the Pittsburgh Jeans Company — as spun on its Web site — is a story of hard work and perseverance. The story describes how founder Jacob Scott worked to supply clothes to the steelworkers and coal miners in the 1920s. Alas, none of it is true.

The real history of the Pittsburgh Jeans Company begins in 2001, when it opened as a supplier of women’s designer jeans. In 2007, it introduced men’s designer jeans on the second floor of the building.

Owner Lawrence Scott explains that the story on the Web site was designed to create an image. “We have a really unique identity. We provide vintage and designer work wear. The Web site is a part of that image. It helps to capture who we are and what we stand for.”

This “vintage image” can be seen throughout the store. The Pittsburgh Jeans Company displays an abundance of old memorabilia signs and antiques.

The men’s department resembles an old-fashioned men’s club. A moose head hangs over the fireplace. An old bar and pool table are covered in jeans. Antique benches and tables are also set up to display jeans. And photos of old sports teams decorate the walls.

Downstairs, the women’s department is set up like a grocery store. Old-fashioned signs hang overhead. They advertise Coca-Cola, baked goods, and milk. Jeans are displayed on old worn out dressers beside an old gas pump.

“Jeans are so old and so identifiable with our culture,” Scott explains. “So I like old memorabilia. It’s a part of our thing. I collect very American pieces, and I think it works in the store.”

The image that the store creates and the product it sells must be working. Scott ranks the company as one of the top 10 jean stores in the country.
“I couldn’t find jeans anywhere else. I heard about this store, and when I walked in I knew I was going to have a good time.”
- Olena Thomas, Customer

“We don’t advertise. It’s all word of mouth. Our customers shop here because we have the biggest selection of designer jeans, and the best customer service. Our goal is to find our customers the perfect pair.”

Leslie Calhoun, the manager, agrees with Scott about the Pittsburgh Jeans Company’s customer service.

“We [the employees] all strive to give customers the very best service. We have in-depth denim knowledge, which is very important to our customers. Customers can’t find that in a department store. Customer service at those stores is always very basic.”

Olena Thomas is a frequent customer. She says department stores can’t compare with the Pittsburgh Jeans Company.

Thomas walks into the store, and is greeted with a smile and hug from Calhoun.

Thomas laughs and tells Calhoun about her adventures in one of the dreaded department stores. “What was the store like?” Calhoun asks Thomas. “How were the employees? Did they know what they were doing?”

Thomas laughs again and talks about how overwhelming the experience was. “There were just too many jeans. It was suffocating. The sales associate couldn’t have been older than 16, and she was so clueless.”

Thomas and Calhoun laugh like old friends, but then it’s time to get down to business.

Calhoun quickly selects three pairs of jeans for Thomas to try on. Calhoun knows her sizes, the styles she likes, and the different washes she prefers. It’s only a matter of time before Thomas is led into a fitting room.

Thomas comes out of the fitting room to get Calhoun’s opinion. Calhoun nods in approval. Thomas tries on five different pairs of jeans and loves three of them. “I can always find something I like here.”

“I’ve been shopping here for four years,” Thomas recalls. “I couldn’t find jeans anywhere else. I heard about this store, and when I walked in I knew I was going to have a good time.”

Thomas walked out with three pairs of jeans on her first day. “After that I was addicted,” Thomas says. “I shop here at least once a month. This store is wild. Everyone should experience it.”

Sarah Mitchell, a customer and newly hired employee, agrees that this store is an experience.

“I walked past the store and loved their window display. I walked in and was ecstatic they had designer jeans here. These kinds of brands are hard to find in Pittsburgh.”

Mitchell believes that this store has a great client base because it really takes care of their customers.

“It’s really one-on-one here. We are all honest, and we won’t let you leave here without the perfect pair of jeans. We will find the best pair for your body, and you’ll love them.”

Calhoun agrees that their client base is the best. “Customers are always bringing their friends in. Weekends get crazy. We are always busy on Saturdays. It’s so much fun. There is so much energy in the store.”

Calhoun hopes that a second store will open soon. “I keep waiting to hear that it’s a for sure thing. It’s the best case scenario for us.”

Scott says that he is looking into another store. “We are keeping our eyes open. It would be a great thing for us. We might even open a store with a completely different focus, but we also want to keep our image.”

The history on the Pittsburgh Jeans Company Web site might not be true.

But the owner and employees are working hard to create their own history in the jeans industry.
Feelin’ Groovy!

Pop Culture Shop Offers a Trip Into The Past

by Ross Marshall

Renee Dupree is the owner of Groovy! Pop Culture Emporium on the South Side and she lives in two worlds.

The first is a world where Dupree, 41, worries about the economic problems of the country and when and if her next paycheck is coming. Obviously, this is the real world.

The second is the fantasy world of her store, where she has opened up her toy box to the public. This is a place where rocket ships and airplanes hang from the ceiling on fishing wire and bins of assorted action figures populate the floor. This is the kind of world where it is not unusual to see a Church Lady figurine sharing a countertop with 12-inch Darth Vader and Robocop figurines.

This second world is where Dupree feels completely at home. In a Mighty Mick’s Gym T-shirt, she tidies up the store filled with any and all kinds of toys imaginable as a customer comments: “It’s nice to come back into my childhood.”

After he leaves, Dupree jokes, “I paid him to say that.”

Dupree grew up in Bethel Park and settled in the South Side when it was a “hip, upcoming neighborhood [in] the ’90s.” In 1996, her landlady sold her the building she had been renting at 1304 East Carson St. Dupree describes the building wedged between The Smiling Moose bar and The Glazing Pot ceramics store as having lots of space but being a little rough. “You take the good with the bad,” she says while she arranging Spider-Man action figures on a shelf.

She enjoys the benefits of being her own boss, but also admits, “I have lists that I am usually way, way, way behind on. I still gotta get work done.”

Dupree closes the store on Sundays and sometimes on Tuesdays to get caught up on paperwork and other projects, such as authoring a book entitled: “Toys That Should Have Never Been Made.” She wants the help of her customers in compiling the list. On the store’s website — www.groovypop.com — customers e-mail Dupree stories or suggestions of weird toys.

As the proprietor of Groovy!, Dupree starts every day by watching the news and reading the Huffington Post and the 9/11 Blogger. She lights a stick of incense while a mellow mix of indie pop fills the store. Then, she waits for the customers to arrive.

“I get a broad array of customers, young and old,” she says, unplugging a vacuum cleaner and moving it from one end of the store to the other. “Kids are my favorite, but collectors keep me in business.”

In fact, it was collectors who got her started in the business. Dupree’s first job was selling toys and other collectibles at science-fiction and comic book conventions. “That’s where I got my Associate’s Degree in Toys,” she says, smiling wide.

One might assume that Dupree started out by collecting her Barbie dolls when she was young, but that is not the case. “It wasn’t like a ‘thing,’” she says, cupping her hands in front of her as if she is waiting for the nondescript toy to fall into them. “It was anything that was bizarre, unique or unusual.”

And she has seen a lot of unusual items come and go in her 20 years of trading. In one of the many glass cases in Groovy! are drinking cups with Looney Tunes characters
on them. Shelves toward the back of the store are filled with board games. Dupree has the classics like Scrabble and Battleship as well as more unusual board games, such as one based on the videogame Donkey Kong and another simply titled Meet the Presidents.

In another glass case in the very back are high-quality sculpted figurines of Johnny Depp as Edward Scissorhands or Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates — dressed as “Mother.” From LEGO blocks to Mr. Potato Head, anything can be found at Groovy!, but Dupree explains why super-rare toys are not that exciting to her.

“I get a broad array of customers, young and old ...”
- Renee Dupree, Owner

“If there’s only one of something, no one wants it because they didn’t have it as a kid, you know?”

Dupree recalls a time when the first prototype of G. I. Joe was for sale on eBay. “It was the couture grande, somewhere in the multiple thousands.” Dupree did not bid on it though, because it felt pointless for her. “It’d be like, ‘I have a Joe, but who gives a shit?’ I usually just get loose, random stuff. As long as it’s a toy, I take an interest in it. I get the He-Man figures that are worthless on eBay.”

Those He-Man action figures and the other toys in Dupree’s store come from collectors and traders. “This is something I’m really proud of,” she says, as excited as a child who has opened her first toy. She says her store is “95 percent post-consumer.”

Being post-consumer means that Dupree’s merchandise is recycled; someone already purchased it from a major toy store and then traded it to her. That explains why there is a wall in Groovy! full of “Star Wars” action figures and Hot Wheels die-cast vehicles still in their packages. She is the first to admit that customers might not always be able to find exactly what they want or need in her store, but she will eventually have it. She waits for collectors to offer her things cheaper. “It’s very unique,” she says, then smiles. “That’s how I roll.”

In her 20 years of trading and selling, Dupree has seen a number of changes. For example, the marketing of toys. “It’s kind of like an art. Marketing is hugely different and very precise with the release of the [corresponding] movie or DVD.” But even today’s marketing is not as good as it could be, according to Dupree. “Marketing of a toy is okay, but distribution is lacking.”

This is where her traders come in. She will have an item when it cannot be found anywhere else. “Why can’t you walk into Target and find it?” she muses with faux-wonder. “Somebody screwed up.”

Trading and selling is not without its downsides, however, especially when real-world thieves invade her fantasy world . . . and take valuable pieces of it with them out the door.

Dupree recounts when she caught a man stealing some trading cards from her store. “Confronting a grown man stealing a handful of Garbage Pail Kids is the weirdest thing. I felt sorry for him. I put stealing in the ‘loss’ category. It’s the cost of doing business.”

Still, Dupree remains optimistic and tries not to take the thefts too personally. In fact, she admits that thievery is not the worst part of running the store.

“The biggest pain-in-the-ass part is all the little parts and pieces [of the toys]. I don’t want to know what weapon Rafael from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles gets, but I have to know.”

Looking into the future of toys, Dupree hopes to see more electronics. “Sculpting and pose-ability of MacFarlane toys is great, but you think you’d see more merging of toys with technology. More talking!”

Customers who leave Dupree’s fantasy world — where Luke Skywalker hangs out next to Captain Kirk and where Batman and The Joker stand on a shelf without killing each other — take a step back into the real world. Even though all their childhood senses have surged back to them with the intensity of a waterfall, they’ve really never left the present.

Dupree just smiles. “People definitely dig it. It’s a trip, right?”

“I get a broad array of customers, young and old ...”
- Renee Dupree, Owner

“...and old ...”

-Renee Dupree, Owner
South Side Tattoo
‘Everybody Bleeds’

On TV’s LA Ink, a reality show about a Los Angeles tattoo shop, customers don’t cry, they don’t bleed, and a tat that took 12 hours of inking appears like magic in a 5-minute segment of each episode. This air-brushed portrayal of the inking world has helped remove the taboo from tattoo. But the true reality of tattoo shops can only be found in places like South Side Tattoo and Piercing, where no one lies about how much it hurts and the customers aren’t celebrities with nerves of steel.

“Everybody bleeds,” says tattoo artist and owner of South Side Tattoo Veronica Ray, her white gloves speckled black and red with ink and blood. “Everybody’s different though; having a little more iron in your system can make your blood thicker and you will bleed less.”

The shop opens at 11 a.m. on Saturday and by 11:06 a.m. there are already two customers waiting to be tattooed. They sit comfortably on the overstuffed leather couch, peering at the hundreds of colorful designs displayed on the walls. A glass case displays a variety of piercing merchandise; from dainty hoop earrings to inch-thick “plugs” for individuals with stretched or “gauged” ear holes – a style popular with indigenous tribes of Africa and, apparently, punk rockers.

The glass-block walls of each tattoo station are topped with knickknacks. A statue of the Virgin Mary guards the waiting room. It is a typical day at South Side Tattoos.

Pulling two new surgical gloves out of a box on her desk, Ray sits down to begin a tattoo on a man named Joe. Next to him, she seems even more petite than she really is.

At first glance, Joe appears to be a tough guy; he has quarter-inch-thick barbell earrings in each ear, a wiry beard down to his chest and sleeves of tattoos on both arms. But as Ray transfers a stencil onto his thick forearm, Joe squints his eyes and fans himself to keep from passing out.

Ray has been tattooing Joe for years and says she laughs at his reaction every time. For such a tall and imposing man, three small skulls on his inner arm don’t seem like
much, but he has a surprisingly low tolerance for pain.

Ray unwraps a sterilized needle and loads it into her tattoo gun. As she steps on a pedal beneath her desk, the gun suddenly begins to vibrate. She wipes a blob of petroleum jelly on the inside of Joe’s elbow to allow the needle to penetrate the skin more smoothly.

“I’m gonna start you off with some little lines to get you used to it,” says Ray as she drags the buzzing needle across his skin. “You know how it feels.”

Ray goes to work, tracing around the stencil on his skin. She keeps a paper towel wrapped around her right ring finger, a glob of ointment on the side of her pinky, and holds the gun with her thumb and forefinger.

In one quick motion, she wipes away excess ink and applies more ointment. She uses her left hand to hold the skin taut as Joe squirms in his chair.

“I’ve seen people damn near on the floor in here,” says shop manager Randy Feden. “But she’ll still have a hold of their arm somehow and just keeps tattooing them.”

Apparently, squirming is justified during the outlining process.

“I think color’s worse than shading, but outlining hurts the most,” says Ray. “I sat through six hours of outlining on my back piece and I’m here to tell you — yes, it sucks.”

After a smoke break, Joe calms down and Ray dips her gun in orange and red ink to tattoo flames behind the skulls. When the piece is finished, she cleans the area with distilled water. Joe takes a deep sigh of relief and smiles at his new tattoo in the mirror next to his chair.

Like many of her customers, Ray’s employees are close friends and family members. Her sons Brandon and Garrick Dauberger, cousin Amy Ausiello, and friend Joe Capone all apprenticed with Ray and now tattoo at the shop. Ray’s mother, Jewels Helmich also works at the shop as a body piercer.

“Everyone here is the best, otherwise they wouldn’t be here,” says Ray of her employees. “They’re also really well rounded … it’s not like ‘she’s good at this, he’s good at that.’”

Ray first learned to tattoo from her brother, Jim Allchin, owner of Island Avenue Tattoo in McKees Rocks. After majoring in accounting and finance at Duquesne University, she worked for the IRS and at her brother’s shop until she decided to quit both jobs and open her own tattoo parlor.

“I got tired of being a low-income single parent,” she said. “It doesn’t leave much time with the family when you work two jobs.

In February 2009, South Side Tattoos will celebrate 15 years in business. Over the years, Ray and her team have tattooed thousands of customers, creating a unique and loyal following.

“There’s nothing like getting tattooed, and Veronica’s the best,” says Shirley, one of Ray’s oldest clients. “I would be here every week if I had the money.”

Shirley, now 73, has been getting “inked” at South Side Tattoos since she was 65. She brought her granddaughter in to get her first tattoo from Ray because “she is the sexiest and most talented tattoo artist around,” she says.

In the next station, Ausiello sets up for her first tattoo of the day on Casey, a junior English and communications major at Penn State. Casey and her friend Gia are at the shop to get matching tattoos. This is their first time getting “inked,” and they giggle nervously as they leaf through books of sample artwork, or “flash” as it is known in the tattoo business.

“We’re getting 10 stars on our sides to represent our 10 years of friendship,” says Casey.

Once Ausiello has finished sketching the girls’ design, Casey prepares herself for the outline. She grips the chair and closes her eyes, but soon takes a deep breath and relaxes.

“They say the ribs and side are the worst place to get tattooed,” says Casey. “But it’s not that bad at all.”

Unlike Joe, Casey sits calmly, chatting with Ausiello about college and tattooing. She occasionally squints her eyes and bites her lip as Ausiello tattoos over her rib cage.

“So that’s what it feels like on the bone?” she asks with a pained smile.

After two hours of outline and shading, Casey’s stars are done. She and Gia admire their “tats” in a full-length mirror, still in shock from the adrenaline rush. Once bandaged up, they hug each other and leave the shop, excited to show off their permanent bond of friendship.

“I love my [tattoo],” says Casey. “We’ll definitely be back.”
Dee’s Cafe
Cheap Beer and Deep Roots

by Shawn Klocek

At night, Dee’s Cafe is a raucous barroom whose patrons range from punk rockers in studded vests to mild-mannered men in suit jackets. The jukebox blares everything from death metal to folk music, and sustaining a conversation may mean that customers have to lean over the diner-style tables to hear what’s being said.

In the afternoon, though, Dee’s is quiet enough to have a conversation from one end of the bar to the other. And for day manager Jerry Bright, that’s a good thing.

Bright, who has worked at Dee’s Cafe for 28 years, says her favorite thing about working the day shift is the relaxed atmosphere.

“I like the people,” Bright says. “We try to make everybody comfortable.”

Bright’s hair is as white as the sweatshirt she is wearing, rolled to the elbows. As she waits on customers — albeit at a slower pace than night-shift workers — it is apparent she knows them well. They tell inside jokes about her having an imaginary boyfriend who lives behind the bar. Bright laughs and plays along.

“Here you are dear,” she says, setting down a coffee with Bailey’s Irish Creme in front of John Fischer, a regular at Dee’s.

Fischer is the former manager of wine and spirits at Cafe Allegro, a swanky restaurant that was located a block from Dee’s before it closed Nov. 2. (Cafe Allegro will close five days later.)

“I’ve not had a drink before eight o’clock at night in 20 years,” Fischer says.

“I’ll let you sit there and lie,” Bright says, coaxing a laugh out of him.

While readers of Pittsburgh Magazine voted Cafe Allegro Pittsburgh’s best overall restaurant for seven consecutive years between 1993 and 2000, business declined afterward. Fischer says that...
though the recent economic downturn may have influenced the closure, the restaurant’s failure to evolve with social trends is what ultimately led to its collapse.

“It went the way of the dodo — it refused to adapt,” he says.

But business at Dee’s is steady. The beer is cheap ($5 for a pitcher of Pabst Blue Ribbon or Lion’s Head), there are pool tables in the back room, and — because the bar’s food sales constitute less than 20 percent of its revenue — it has been spared Allegheny County’s recent smoking ban.

While there are a number of attractions at Dee’s, Bethanny Howell says the daytime conversations are what bring her to the bar a few times a week.

“The agenda is different with nighttime drinkers,” Howell says, adding that she thinks too many people go to bars to pick up one-nightstands. “That is not my agenda.”

As the postman drops off mail, saying hello to Howell, Fischer and Bright, the three remark that he is the best postman anywhere.

“She was just so bizarre; I just had to be friends with her. Turns out, she’s a prostitute.”

- Bethanny Howell, Regular

Howell says that having a familiarity with people from the South Side neighborhood is what keeps her rooted there.

“I moved away a couple of times, but I always move back here, specifically here. I think it’s because I’ve made my own family here,” Howell says.

In the past few years, Howell has traveled to New Zealand, Australia, and South America. She says traveling opened her eyes to life outside of the United States, especially when it comes to financial struggles. A seamstress who is currently unemployed, Howell says she’s grateful for the humility she gained from her experience in South America.

“You see real poverty — miles and miles of people living in cardboard boxes among fecal matter,” she says.

Placing Pittsburgh in a global perspective,

Howell says the South Side has a special quirkiness about it, mentioning the way that older residents put decorations and antiques on display in their front windows.

“You can tell a lot about a person by their house and apparently, in South Side, by their front window,” she says with a laugh. “[In] a lot of places I’ve lived, you never know your neighbors. Here, it’s a big part of it.”

As Howell asks Bright for another shot of vodka, a lady emerges from the back of the bar, raises a hand to wave goodbye and walks hurriedly through the front door.

Howell and Fischer exchange puzzled looks.

“What’s her deal?” Howell asks.

“Um ... she’s very strange. She’s a regular at [Cafe Allegro],” Fischer says. “I’ll tell you what I know: She drinks green chartreuse, eats calamari and roots through our recycling bins. And that’s all I know.”

Howell laughs and says she has talked to her a few times at Dee’s.

“She was just so bizarre; I just had to be friends with her. Turns out, she’s a prostitute,” Howell says.

While Fischer puts on his jacket to leave, Bright talks to an old man at the other end of the bar, and Howell, lighting a cigarette, says Dee’s Cafe is interesting because so many different types of people gather there.

“This place is kind of ... like clockwork,” Howell says.
Pittsburgh Neighborhood Project: South Side

**Friday Night Blight**

**Bar Crawl on Carson**

by Becky Mack

“You're gonna zig-zag all the way down Carson? Forget it. You'll never make it,” Mike Scott tells me in Barry’s Pub, at 10th Street.

But that's my plan. If other people do it, so can I — especially since I plan to be sober.

This is officially my first “Carson Street crawl”— the ceremonial initiation into South Side’s drinking-age scene. I’m not a big drinker. I'm 21 now but before I became legal I was too chicken to ever use a fake ID. Living in the only country in the world to have a drinking age of 21, I didn't rebel.

“A dollar-fifty Coors Light bottle? I stick with that,” Scott says, slouching over the bar rail and holding a bottle in his right hand.

Scott stands out — the only man in the bar over 25. And, so it seems, the only-man-in-the-bar-over-25 prefers the bottle. He is splurging this evening, compared to the two dozen or so college kids drowning in the dollar drafts lining the bar’s ledge.

Still, Scott’s here for the cheap beer. Barry’s has never been known for its high-end booze or aesthetic appeal. It has to keep up with the competition; more than 50 bars wedge between the doctors’ offices, restaurants and tattoo parlors on Carson and its neighboring side streets.

The bar welcomes clientele of all kinds: mainly eager under-agers and a few people, like Scott, who need an amber pick-me-up as the setting sun signifies a successful day. He drives a school bus by day and works at a restaurant Downtown by night.

Scott will leave the bar and its lined-up drafts soon. The college crowd begins to wear on him, and he has a bus to catch at 11 anyway. And I'm heading off, too.

I start my tour at 10:02 p.m. The street, lit by the headlights of cars backed up to the 11th Street stoplight, echoes the hum of car engines, a few horns and the never-ending police sirens. The chill excitement of the autumn air doesn't match the mood inside Charlie Murdoch’s Dueling Piano Bar — at least, not yet. The near-empty bar is surrounded by vacant stools and tables. The band — “a live juke box” according to manager Dan Bowen— only performs for a few dozen people.

“It’s early,” Bowen said, and suggested I come back later.

I move on to Jack’s, at 1121 East Carson. “The hole in the wall everyone goes to and the place everyone starts and ends,” says bouncer Greg Hohman.

With its gaudy neon lights lining the bar, Jacks’ draws a pretty eclectic crowd.

“You'll have a big black guy, a hillbilly, three college girls, five old guys and a Steelers fan all in here at the same time,” Hohman says. “For all the diversity, everyone gets along.”

And he's right. There's a table of 50-something-year-old men, girls walking in, and a cowboy clad in blue jeans, a yellow and white gingham shirt and white Stetson strutting inside.

Jack’s opens at 7 a.m. weekday mornings — even before The Beehive, a coffee shop two blocks up. The bar caters to the nightshift nurses and doctors and military veterans who need an early taste of the hard stuff.
10:52 p.m. A subdued haze draws me to Dee's Café at 1314 East Carson. This is exactly the place where I would want to finish my night just to think, like the one lonesome guy at the bar peering at a shot glass in one hand and a beer in the other.

Outside, the smells from Pizza Vesuvio and Mike and Tony's Gyros tempt me, but I continue on to a classier joint, Elixer.

It might be the only bar nice enough to provide their doorman and security guard with a free-standing heater, but I still don't want to go in. A block up is The Culture Shop, a bohemian clothing and accessory shop. The clothes they sell wouldn't fit in at Elixer. Neither will my discount-store jeans, scuffed-up flats and hooded sweatshirt. I need a mini-skirt, stilettos, and as much jewelry as I can pile on.

Officer Richard Artz works with Saul Rosenberg, the toasty doorman, almost every Friday night. The duo observe that even the most intelligent people fall to pieces on the weekend.

“It’s amazing how alcohol can impair judgment in a short time. And when I say short time, I mean three hours,” Rosenberg says.

Artz says 95 percent of the problems he deals with aren’t even in the bar.

“Those bricks right there,” he says pointing to the corner’s graded-down curb, “they get slippery in the winter. We know people can’t walk.”

And on a rainy night like this one, they count on witnessing yet another mishap, to a high-heeled-wearing girl, no doubt.

On the other end of the 15th block sits Mario’s South Side Saloon, pledging pride to the Steelers, Penguins and even the Duquesne Dukes.

Opened in 1982, Mario’s was built to lure business people from downtown to come to the South Side, pulsing life into a section of the city that coded flat along with the steel mills.

“There was nothing here before,” says Cory Lewis.

The prior owner, Bob Pessolano, always told Lewis people thought he was crazy to put $250,000 into a bar. But it’s still bustling, with the older and younger generations colliding just before midnight.

And it’s still early, claims everyone walking into Diesel, the only night club in South Side, which has no entrance line. Inside it’s reminiscent of a high school dance, but only with too many strobe lights, a fog machine and beer bottles in everyone’s hand. Girls dance in their groups together, with guys standing at the bar trying to gather up their courage to ask one of them to dance.

Making it to 17th Street, where Carson suddenly doubles in width, I walk next to girls slurring their words and clinging to each other’s arms. A Desert Storm veteran discusses God, post-traumatic stress disorder and his need for alcohol to soften his pain at one in the morning.

Time is catching up with me with a yawn and a bit of déjà vu. I recognize three loud groups of girls I saw at other bars.

“Where to?” one guy asks, checking his watch. Enter my tour guides for the remainder of the night, Dallas Cogar and Ryan Baker, both 21.

“You’re out of your element on Carson,” Cogar reminds me. “You meet different people every time.”

“But I don’t know if you ever meet them again,” Baker adds.

We wander up to 24th Street, a few blocks short of the shiny and new South Side Works. They say we have to go to the White Eagle Inn, but the doors are already locked at 1:45 a.m.

Instead of last call at a bar, I follow Cogar and Baker to a house party — the ultimate end to a college night out. The truth is, the night isn’t over when the bars close. But I soon realize I’m too old for this crowd. Cringing at the teenage boys around me, I exit as soon as I can, not sure if I ever will meet Cogar or Baker again, like they said.

2:18 a.m. The traffic lights are blinking yellow now on Carson — probably not the city’s best choice considering the likelihood of a drunk-driving collision. The bars just closed, and the bleary-eyed crowd the sidewalks, kicked out by the switch of bright lights from employees ready to head home themselves. The bartenders count the piles of dollar bills and rapidly mop up the spilled drinks on the floor.

For them, the weekend is work, and tomorrow’s Saturday.
South Side Photostories
In The Eyes of Off The Bluff Photographers

Photos by Joe Ball
On February 6, 2008, a press conference was held at Jeanette High School. This was National Signing Day, and media outlets ranging from ESPN to *Sports Illustrated* were on hand to witness top football recruit Terrelle Pryor name the college he had chosen. Ultimately, Pryor announced that he was still undecided in his search, and he left the members of the sports media dumbfounded because they would have to wait a bit longer for his anticipated announcement.

With so much attention and pressure from the media, it is no wonder Pryor was unable to make a decision; he was only 18 years old at the time. For years now, college sports have seemed to be as important as their professional counterparts, but high school sports are supposed to be different, right? I always looked at high school sports as the one place where the athletes are still able to compete for the love of the game. High school sports are not supposed to be about the money, glitz and glamour. However, that is not the case anymore. Just as the collegiate game lost its innocence, so the high school game has today.

High school athletes are no longer privileged to just go out and play the game for fun. If the pressure does not come from the local newspapers or television stations, it comes from somewhere else. In recent years, Web sites such as Rivals.com and Scout.com have become increasingly popular. The sites track high school athletes and the colleges that are courting them. The sites also rank athletes on a five-star scale.

High school athletes have enough to worry about between grades, their sport and the typical stress that comes with adolescence. These athletes do not need Internet sites devoted to ranking and critiquing them.

But it goes far beyond recruiting Web sites. High school games are regularly broadcast on Fox Sports Net, and prominent high school athletes are often mentioned on ESPN. With so much media attention, do these athletes ever get a chance to be kids?

In October, three football players from my former high school were suspended for 30 days because they violated team rules. Within days, people were already discussing the issue on a high school football message board on the Web site, Pennlive.com. Was this necessary? I’m sure that these players felt bad enough already. High school sports are often a big part of the community, and I’m sure these players assumed that parents would be
whispering back and forth about their suspension. The issue had no place on an Internet message board. Some of these players are not even 18 years old. In essence, they're still children. I am sure they felt enough guilt as it was; they did not need people posting about them online.

High school sports have always been very popular, but perhaps we need to remember that it is high school students competing in these sports. In other words, these are teenagers between the ages of 15 and 18.

At times, I wonder what is next. Will high school sports continue down the road of college sports? Will high school sports one day have video games just as college sports do? Will there eventually be an entire television network devoted just to high school sports?

I realize that high school sports continue to increase in popularity each year, but I cannot bring myself to become accustomed to some of the changes that go hand in hand with the increased popularity. High school athletes are still children, and the game should still be played for the simple goal of competing and having fun. There should not be room in high school sports for recruiting Web sites, glitzy press conferences and message boards.

Three years removed from high school, I remain a big fan of high school sports. I have always looked at the high school game as being played for the sheer love of the game above all else. Anymore though, I am not so sure. High school sports continue to become a part of mainstream media each day, and I wonder about sports in general. The college game lost its innocence a long time ago, and the same thing seems to be happening to high school sports.

So, this brings me to one last question: Are sports still about the love of the game? Is there still a place where kids can go to have innocent fun and play ball while not worrying about the glitzy cameras and flashing lights? Perhaps in Little League? Oh wait, I forgot. The Little League World Series is a regular tradition on ESPN.

I give up.
At a party last weekend, I was excited to try out the newest incarnation of the “Rock Band” franchise. In fact, I’d been looking forward to testing out my pipes nearly as much as seeing some old friends. As the host broke out the game, the guys argued over who got stuck on bass guitar and the girls disappeared upstairs. In spite of all the fun I was having, I couldn’t help but wonder: “Why am I the only girl playing the game?”

The common answer would be that I’m one of the rare breed of female gamers. That answer might sit better with me if we’d been playing a more hardcore game like “Halo,” but games like “Rock Band” were designed to appeal to a broad audience. After all, everyone likes some kind of music, and many of the songs in the game are from bands with female members, like “Hole” and “Paramore.”

The truth is, this scenario is a perfect example of a bothersome trend I’ve noticed occurring in the gamer subculture. TV stations like MTV, G4, and SpikeTV devote hours to game trailers, cheats and reviews. Popular films like “Resident Evil,” “Laura Croft: Tomb Raider,” and “Silent Hill” are based on video game series. Gaming continues to go more and more mainstream, and yet the industry is still nearly as male dominated as it was twenty years ago.

Sure, according to Nielsen demographics, some 40 percent of “gamers” are female, but their definition of video game includes the solitaire that comes preinstalled on your PC. Statistics on hardcore female gamers are harder to find, but as an example, only 16 percent of the players of the immensely popular online game “World of Warcraft” are women.

The market has been driven by chauvinism for so long, it’s intimidating for women to jump in. Shopping at Gamestop or wandering into the video game section of Best Buy more often than not produces raised eyebrows. “Can I help you?” from a patronizing sales clerk is really his way of saying, “Are you lost?” or “You must be shopping for your boyfriend.” I’ve gotten used to it over the years, but I understand that this attitude drives away many women looking to try out something other than “JewelQuest” for the first time.

One argument I don’t buy is that today’s games are inherently sexist. True, heroines like “Tomb Raider’s” Lara Croft and the ladies of “Soul Calibur” may not be dressed or built appropriately for kicking butt, but they are kicking butt. I could rattle off a long list of games starring female heroines who not only beat down their male opponents, but look beautiful doing it. These games aren’t portraying women as sex objects; they’re showing that being strong doesn’t mean sacrificing your femininity.

Women typically don’t understand how a normal woman could enjoy mowing down zombies with an AK-47.

The problem in attracting female gamers isn’t the games themselves, but the intimidating attitude of the majority. Of course, not all male gamers are sexist jerks. Many of my male friends think it’s cool that I play games, but I’ve had to earn their respect. There’s still this assumption that being a female gamer means you only play female-oriented titles like “Cooking Mama,” and there’s much skepticism about how ‘hardcore’ you really are. Out of my many male gamer acquaintances, I only can think of a handful who truly respect me and see me as an equal — asking me for help on beating a tough boss, or recommending a new PS3 release.

This sexism goes both ways. Women typically don’t get the gaming culture, and are quick to write off female gamers as nerds and tomboys. They don’t understand how a normal woman could enjoy mowing down zombies with an AK-47.

This extreme reaction is probably due to the fact that video gaming has long been viewed as a place where girls just don’t belong.

A good female friend of mine came to stay with me over the summer and, looking for something to do, we went to the local mall to pick up the “Metal Gear Solid” boxed set. There weren’t any on the shelves, so we had to ask the guys behind the counter for it. The two of them exchanged mocking glances, and one of them asked, somewhat surprised, “Do you girls play ‘Metal Gear Solid’?” Not yet, obviously, since we were just purchasing the games. They nodded to each other in some kind of mutual agreement, as if it were impossible that two blonde chicks might like action games. One of them then advised us, “You’ll learn.” Except, I don’t think we’re the ones who need a lesson at all.
Songs Sound better in the Key of Free

by Charles Hearne

In the 1990s three things were on everybody’s mind: Bill Clinton jokes, tamagotchis and Napster's free music downloading software. Although some musicians are opposed to free music downloading, in our Internet-driven society artists need to embrace new ways to spread their music. Websites that allow free music downloads are fast becoming a popular method for struggling musicians to get their music out in the mainstream rather than letting popular bands and record companies dominate the industry.

Created by college student Shawn Fanning, Napster quickly became the most popular means of downloading music, with as many as 26.4 million users in 2001. Although Napster was eventually shut down and then reopened as a legal, for-pay service program, there are currently hundreds of websites that allow people to download songs for free — much to the dread of the music industry.

Some popular artists, such as Dr. Dre or Metallica, filed lawsuits against Napster over the free downloading software. Other bands, such as Radiohead or Dispatch, were able to get more recognition through free downloading, which increased album sales and helped them sell out concerts.

Anyone opposed to the idea of public access to music for free need to remember the magic of the radio. The radio has been offering free music to the public for decades now with little complaint. The Internet appears to be the next step.

When people don’t have to pay for music, they are more likely to explore new artists. When a consumer goes to a CD store and sees an unknown artist that looks interesting, the chances are slim that this person is going to shell out any money to find out if the CD is good.

“I need to get a chance to listen to the music for myself [before paying for a CD],” Squirrel Hill resident Mekenzee Nee says. “If I like the music, I’ll probably buy the CD or go to their concert.”

Duquesne student, Kate Lecci agrees that free downloading is a good way to spread music.

“In the 1990s, people would complain that an artist would have one or two popular songs on the radio to put on their CD and then load the rest of it with “filler songs,” lame tunes made with little effort to pad out a CD. People were not willing to pay the price of a CD for this type of music; this was the scene Napster capitalized on.

Napster allowed people to download specific songs or the entire album of an artist for free rather than making consumers pay for songs that they didn’t want.

In the case of Radiohead, people bought the CD even after using Napster as a preview. In 2000, Radiohead had never had a song or album in the U.S. Top 20 countdown. Yet when their new album Kid A was released on Napster three months before being released to the public, the album went to number one on the U.S. charts as soon as it was released. Napster was an opportunity for an unknown band such as Radiohead to share its music with new fans.

The Offspring attempted the same feat with their new album in the year 2000, but Sony Music threatened the band with a lawsuit if they did. The band eventually released singles for free on their website but had to wait to release the album on CD.

Napster and other free downloading sites allow people to preview music they might potentially like. When someone knows what an album is like, they are more likely to pay for it.

While none of the new free downloading websites have gained as much popularity as the controversial Napster, there are still many others in the circuit today. Programs such as Direct Connect and Soulseek have simply picked up where Napster left off.

The Internet has changed things for the average consumer. One could argue that newspaper articles should not be available for free online because it is unfair to newspaper sales, but society has accepted it and benefitted from the convenience.

While Bill Clinton jokes, tamagotchis and even Napster may have gone out of style, free music downloading is part of the Internet and the next step in music sharing.
College is great. The coeds, the free weekends, the parties. It’s all great. Then students get dragged away from school to get tortured by their families during that weird pilgrim holiday. Kids begrudgingly go home and then they see their dog, cat or whatever pets they missed so dearly. And they eat their family’s homemade recipes that apparently can never be re-created by college students, no matter how hard they try.

They see their little brothers and sisters and remember how much they missed those goofy smiles and carefree lives. Or they meet up with big brothers and sisters and remember what it was like to be younger, or get a glimpse of what life is like two or three years in the future.

They go to a football game and remember what it was like to be cheering in the student section or playing on the field.

Then it hits them: Wow, being home is awesome. College students worldwide experience that very feeling maybe two or three times each semester.

My freshman year of college, I went home for Thanksgiving and watched my high school’s football team win a state semifinal game, which put them into the championship game. I stood with a group of fellow alumni, who all agreed that the game really pulled at our heartstrings.

It’s bittersweet when former high school athletes go back and see their teams succeed, even do better than they did.

There are also students who don’t like going home. And there are students who live at home and commute to school. And there are those who live so close that they go home every weekend. Sound like anybody’s freshman year roommate?

But college students who live on campus see the big picture when they get home. They remember what it’s like to sleep in and not have to skip class to do it. And what it’s like to lie around on the couch with their dog and eat homemade cookies until they can’t move.

The phenomenon known as Facebook.com even has a group that echoes the thoughts of some 40,000 members: “I love college, but I miss my dog.” All the parties, coffee and fast food in the world can’t recreate the bond between teenagers and their pets.
I know I’m not alone in having a picture of one of my pets set as the background on my phone.

I love cooking. I love finding whatever is in the kitchen in my apartment and making magic for my roommate and I to enjoy. But there is just something about the way relatives make their special ethnic dishes and homemade desserts using ancient family recipes kept under lock and key that wouldn’t be given away at gunpoint.

Maybe your community has a specialty food that you stock up on in order to survive the next few weeks. Maybe there’s a fast food chain that you can’t get at school, so you eat there six times in one day just so you don’t miss it too much at college.

College students don’t realize they are homesick until they actually go home. Maybe we need to take a step out of the tornado that is college life and think about what we might be missing.

We see our friends from high school and trade stories about those coeds, parties and free weekends. We go to our old favorite hangouts, and maybe even venture back to our high schools.

We visit coaches and teachers; students sometimes even see us as role models.

It’s trite and cliché, but you can’t forget where you’re from. You can try, but you’d be hard-pressed to find a student who wouldn’t mind going back home and taking a break from the college whirlwind for a while.

Maybe it’s because college students relate going home to relaxing.

Maybe it’s that college students are comfortable at home and know it is a place that they can relax and spend a lazy afternoon with their pet cat. Or fish. Or little brother. Whatever helps them unwind.

Before we know it, though, it’s time to take advantage of the free laundry one more time, pack up grandma’s cookies and get back to school.
Get On Track, America!
INTERURBAN RAILROADS OVERDUE FOR REVIVAL

by Chris Milne

Where have all the railroads gone? When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was President, the Broadway Limited and the Twentieth Century Limited departed New York City at 5 p.m. every day. Both streamlined, deluxe trains arrived 1,000 miles west, in Chicago, before nine the next morning and 500 well dressed business men and women sauntered down the platforms ready to change the worlds of finance, education and science. They had wined and dined and slept in first class.

In the 1940s and 1950s, passenger trains provided service. During World War II, a million passengers a week packed 500 passenger trains. Every small town from Bangor, Maine, to La Hoya, California, heard the train whistle on rainy nights and a station where all the human emotions were presented daily. No one was forced to drive 100 miles to a big city airport in order to travel for work or pleasure. Train travel was convenient. Trains picked up people in their home towns. Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy traveled frequently by train.

When Kennedy was President, however, railroads suffered a tremendous drop in ridership. The family car followed the “blue roads” as baby boomers crisscrossed the country for vacation. Thanks to the federal government, tax dollars were sucked up to build the Eisenhower Interstate System. Millions of other tax dollars were dedicated to build 53 airports, including 12 with international terminals, all at taxpayer expense.

What about the railroads? Thanks to the voracious oil industry, clean, quiet inter-urbs and inner-city trolleys were replaced by smog-spewing buses.

In the 1970s, when Nixon was President, the federal government got into the act by taking over all passenger trains except two on the Southern Railway and four on the Denver & Rio Grande. Under the National Railroad Passenger Act, Amtrak, run by the National Railroad Passenger Corporation inherited a worn out, neglected, broken down infrastructure, and a couldn’t-care-less system of people who could not even spell service or convenience, much less practice them.
Amtrak took 20 years, until 1990, to purchase and upgrade the Northeast Corridor from New York City to Washington, D.C. Finally, by 2001, a person could travel as quickly by train from Boston to the nation’s Capitol as by plane. Moreover, the train is far cheaper, with fewer security hassles, and more convenient, with mid-city arrivals and departures.

The electric-powered Northeast Corridor trains are far cleaner and greener than jet fuel or diesel emissions. While Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have been presidents, states have taken the initiative to bring service back to travelers, convenience to rural Americans, and safe transport to commuters. In places like San Diego, California, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, rails have been laid and streamlined, double-decked passenger cars have been added to take people who do not have automobiles to and from their work in these cities.

What we need is a national policy, equipping Amtrak with the power to add new passenger equipment outside the Northeast Corridor and new authority to place freight trains on a second class status so that passenger trains may arrive on time.

In this time of high unemployment, constructing additional rail infrastructure would be as helpful to millions as the Civilian Conservation Corps was to the victims of the Great Depression.

All Aboard!

Photos by Joe Ball

Abandoned urban railway track.

Abandoned Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad Station, built in 1879.
“It’s just not gonna happen,” I said smugly to my friend, almost a year ago, when she asked me what Barack Obama’s chances were in the upcoming Presidential Election. Confident in my assertion, I continued, “Honestly, I just don’t see a black person ever getting elected in my lifetime.”

When I spoke those words, I wasn’t bitter or resentful toward this country, or the people who live in it. I just thought I had reason and logic on my side. After all, my dad’s memories of integrating high schools as a student in Florida during the 1960s were far too fresh — not nearly removed enough to allow any reasonable person to think that this country could choose a black man as President, less than 50 years later.

As an African American, it was easy for me to swell with pride when Obama announced his candidacy. But I couldn’t let my emotions get the best of me. I couldn’t commit to a candidate, who — in the end — I just knew America would reject. So for me, pragmatism prevailed, and Hillary was my choice for nominee. “She’s more electable,” was my standard explanation.

Now, with Obama actually in office, never before have I been happier to acknowledge the error in my thinking — and my underestimation of the progress this country’s made in race relations. It is important, however, for us to not overstate the larger effects of this historic feat.

We can’t forget that, in spite of Obama’s undeniable transformational quality, his victory still required the confluence of several critical factors that doomed the other side.
George W. Bush unwittingly played the biggest role in getting Barack Obama into the White House. For Obama to have a realistic chance, the outgoing president couldn't have just been sub-par or mildly disliked. Instead, he had to have the lowest approval rating of all presidents in our country’s history. His ineptitude had to reach historic proportions. He had to become an embarrassment to both Democrats and Republicans alike. 

*Mission accomplished.*

Obama’s victory also required the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. We had to be five years deep into an unpopular and unnecessary war, which was costing taxpayers $10 billion a month.

There were other factors that made “President Obama” possible. Foremost of those factors was the decidedly weak opposition posed by the Republicans. After John McCain captured his party’s nomination, much of the base was still so underwhelmed that he struggled to attract even a couple thousand people to his rallies. Meanwhile, Obama drew crowds by the tens of thousands.

It didn’t hurt that McCain represented a carbon copy of George W. Bush. He had famously — and inexplicably — bragged about voting with Bush 90 percent of the time. McCain seemed to channel Bush’s intellectual shallowness. Like Bush, McCain had finished near the bottom of his class, and his answers to thoughtful questions were simplistic and frustratingly abstract. Once, on the campaign trail, when asked what we should do when confronted with evil, McCain responded neatly: “Defeat it.” He admitted to being undereducated on the economy, and he turned in three less than impressive debate performances.

But McCain truly bolstered Obama’s chances for victory with his dubious selection of a running mate: Sarah Palin. To be fair, Palin started off as a much-needed shot in the arm for Republicans. An ultra-conservative, she energized the base of the party, which never fully embraced McCain. She delivered a sarcasm-filled speech at the Republican Convention that mocked Obama’s experience as a community organizer. After the convention, polls swung McCain’s way — but his lead proved to be fleeting, once Palin began speaking unscripted.

She was stumped when Charles Gibson mentioned the “Bush Doctrine.” She was equally stupefied when Katie Couric asked for a Supreme Court ruling she disagreed with — or even which newspapers she read regularly. It was revealed that, at age 44, she had only recently obtained a passport, and the extent of her foreign relations experience was her direct line of vision to Russia from her Alaskan perch.

But perhaps more important than the feebleness of her intellect was the limited slice of America towards whom she directed her message. Every time she addressed hockey moms, Joe Six-pack, Joe the Plumber, and the “Pro-America” regions, there were sections of the country that automatically felt alienated. She brought a divisive element to the campaign that turned off moderates and independents.

For all of Obama’s talent and intellect, we cannot forget that his election was still dependent on major Republican blunders and historic economic and military disasters. Any suggestion that the majority of us see past color is negated by a review of the electoral map from this past election.

While we cannot discount the Obama victories in states like Virginia and North Carolina (where the demographic make-ups have changed significantly over the last four years), it is disturbing to see how solidly “red” the rest of the South is. States like Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia and others voted convincingly for McCain. It’s important to note is that the South is still largely an impoverished region of the country. You’d think that they would lean toward the Democrat, who would cut their taxes. The fact that they were so solidly against him means that there was another factor at work in their decision. And I think we all know what that is.

*Never before have I been happier to acknowledge the error in my thinking — and my underestimation of the progress this country’s made in race relations.*
“Designing the Future”