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Antonelli’s: making a go of it on Main Street
Dear Reader,

Bloomfield is a neighborhood where scores of Italian, German and Irish immigrants came to make a new home during Pittsburgh’s industrial heyday. These newly-settled Americans toiled in mills and factories along the city’s three rivers, producing the metals and bricks that built the country’s grandest structures. They also became rooted in the community by establishing new businesses, schools, ethnic organizations and places of worship.

Today, that same work ethic and pride in heritage remains evident in Pittsburgh’s “Little Italy.” In contrast to the impersonal chain stores and restaurants that dot many of America’s neighborhoods, business in Bloomfield is a family affair. Second-and-third-generation shops line Bloomfield’s streets. Brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives work side-by-side, greeting people with a grin and an invitation to try the Chicken Alfredo or indulge in a meatball sub -- freshly made, of course.

But, like the wild flowers for which the neighborhood was named, Bloomfield has sprouted new families and traditions over the years. A day in Bloomfield could include experiences as varied as playing a game of bocce ball to studying abstract art at one of Liberty Avenue’s many galleries to attending (or maybe even bellowing out tunes at) open-mic night.

This varied community -- ranging from retirees shooting the breeze at Dan Cercone’s Barbershop to twenty-somethings sipping lattés at Crazy Mocha -- retains a shared identity. They’re from Bloomfield, and they’re proud of it. After losing one of their own in 2009, when police officer Paul J. Sciullo II fell in the line of duty, the community came together to preserve his legacy and begin the healing process. Dean’s Field was renamed in Sciullo’s honor, and a sculpture of St. Michael, the patron saint of police officers, now overlooks pictures of Sciullo and fellow slain officers Stephen Mayhle and Eric Kelly in front of Immaculate Conception-St. Joseph’s Church.

Last fall, the students from Dr. Mike Dillon’s Magazine Journalism class discovered the characters, places, issues and history that define Bloomfield’s distinct culture. They invite you, the reader, to venture Off the Bluff and become a part of the Bloomfield family. It won’t take long for “Little Italy” to feel like home.

Special thanks to Dr. Mike Dillon, Jordan Power, Robyn Rudish-Laning and the contributing JMA students for making this publication possible. We hope it inspires you to go Off the Bluff – you never know what you may find.

David Golebiewski
Kate Dillon
Editors
Off the Bluff
In April of 2011, the ALT Project, a student media crew that travels the country to reveal its history, was awarded the “Overland Flag” from the Overland Society.

Each year, the flag is awarded to a media crew recognized as creating materials that most effectively promote responsible use and management of our landscapes. From a pool of international media developers, the Overland Society chose the ALT Project as the 2011 honoree.

To find out more about the ALT Project and their future plans, go to http://www.thealtproject.com.

Above: Professor Jim Vota and ALT Project photographer Dave Onomastico receive the Overland Flag.

Bottom right: The ALT crew poses on Cadillac Mountain in Acadia National Park, ME.
International Media class tours Europe

Last year, a group of Duquesne students visited Europe as part of the International Media Class. While touring various media facilities across Europe, the students ventured through France, Belgium and the Netherlands. A trip to the European Union Media Center was a highlight of the trip.

The Duquesne Duke moves into McAnulty

This fall, student newspaper The Duquesne Duke will move its headquarters from the basement of Fisher Hall to a room in the McAnulty School of Liberal Arts. The newsroom will be located next to the WDSR studio as well as the Duke TV station on the first floor.
Tattoo shops: you walk in and sit gingerly upon some moth-eaten old couch while leafing through a three-ring binder chock-full of prefabricated designs before selecting the one you think will make you look the coolest. You then show it to the invariably counterculture man sitting bored behind the counter and wait half an hour before a stranger etches this insignia into your skin, where it will remain until you're 75 and can't recognize it or remember what it is. That's what it's like to get a tattoo, right?

Nah – at least, not necessarily.

“We're more into the art than the lifestyle,” says Kati Burgess, co-owner and artist at Tattoo Noir in Bloomfield. She attended art school for 11 years before beginning a career in tattooing, including four years at Pittsburgh’s Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) High School.

She and husband Mike Gallone own the store with friend Jason Angst. They and artist Bill Gilliland stand out amongst the local crowd, according to the tattoo artist trophies that line the walls and the clients that keep coming back.

“Most customers are repeat customers,” Burgess says. “We’re sort of like bartenders or therapists to them.”

Burgess says many Tattoo Noir patrons maintain long-term relationships with the artists. That’s necessary for the large-scale, intricate work often inked onto the backs and bellies of the clients; the most expensive can cost as much as a few thousand dollars. But that’s not to say you can’t get a small tattoo, either. Burgess says the shop has seen it all.

“We have every kind of person you can imagine,” Burgess says. “Jason even tattooed a nun.”

The designs themselves are almost always hand-drawn. That’s partly why the process can take a few weeks at Tattoo Noir: drawing a concept borne from someone else's brain is pretty time-consuming.

The shop itself sits along busy Liberty Avenue, and the zombie flapper girl painted on the board outside seems almost rude juxtaposed with the prim State Farm office nearby. The spindly, gothic script of the sign seems foreboding until you actually enter, whereupon you find a lime green interior infused with natural light and the teasing odor of pizza baking next door. According to Burgess, the newly-remodeled shop is a far cry from its predecessor, Monster Tattoo.

“The old shop was really spooky and dungeon-like,” Burgess says. “The main room was full of coffins and mummies. Nobody could even tattoo in there.” However, the old owner left a year and a half ago, and former employees Burgess and Gallone took over the space.

Now, the shop is run to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards – which, by the way, are not mandatory in Pittsburgh. Patrons are seated in what look like modified dentists’ chairs as they’re inked in a spacious room. A new hardwood floor looks up at a decades-old ceiling, newly painted but still faithful to its original, sophisticated design. The music shifts easily between punk rock, bluegrass, and hip hop. The owners even take requests.

“I order lunch for my all-day clients,” Burgess says. “I’m really nice.”

But the renovation didn’t entirely purge the shop of all its gloomy amenities. After all, it is Tattoo Noir. Dark tapestries face off with a painting of
Elvis, two-headed and mutated. A painted vampire Madonna strokes her pet snake. A deer skull stares at paintings of itself, like a wealthy baron surveying his latest commissions. Most of this art was created by the Tattoo Noir artists.

Gigi Garofalo keeps the place clean, but she’s paid in ink instead of paper. Garofalo says she has swept, mopped, and cleaned the mirrors for months now to get a portrait of her bulldog tattooed on her leg. Mike also did her whole sleeve in “Sailor Jerry” style.

“I got a two-headed, three-breasted, one-legged pirate,” Garofalo says. “I think tattoos should be meaningful sometimes, but sometimes they should just be fun.”

You can’t eat ink, though, so Gigi’s also a bartender at Belvedere’s in Lower Lawrenceville. But she says it’s worth the work at Tattoo Noir.

“I spend so much money on tattoos anyway; this is an awesome gig,” Garofalo says.

Co-owner Jason Angst’s girlfriend, Danielle Drew, recently opened the Vamp’s Boutique, a small shop of assorted goods. Kati says most of the merchandise is from local sellers and artists, including some artwork from the shop’s owners.

Teacups, T-shirts, jewelry, deodorant, soap; it’s hard to imagine such random items make for a lucrative business, but they do. Burgess says the boutique is profitable, but not as much as the tattoo parlor.

While the artists are generally open-minded, they refuse any Nazi or otherwise offensive tattoo ideas. They don’t want their names associated with tattoos like that. Burgess says she likes creative ideas much more. “I like to do portraits… I do a lot of flowers, I don’t want to say, unfortunately.”

Burgess says Tattoo Noir is proof not all tattoo shops are dark and dramatic, calling the parlor instead “extremely chill.” Garofalo agrees wholeheartedly, describing the atmosphere as “awesome.”

“I get to see a lot of amazing artwork every day,” she says.

Having recently signed a three-year lease, Tattoo Noir is in Bloomfield to stay. The artists were invited to the 18th annual Meeting of the Marked, a Pittsburgh tattoo convention, in October 2010. And with parents like her and Mike, Burgess says daughter Zoe was made for the trade.

“We plan on being a family business.”

---

Inside the iron gates of Eden

by David Golebiewski

During the Industrial Revolution, Pittsburgh was known as the iron-and-steel capital of the world. James Patton, writing for Atlantic Monthly in 1868, famously called the Iron City “hell with the lid taken off.”

He always seems to be able to translate any style into iron - and no project is ever too big or too complicated.

But John Walter, a blacksmith and owner of Iron Eden, has brought one of the world’s oldest trades into the 21st century with custom iron work that’s simply divine.

For more than a quarter of a century, Walter has crafted hand-forged ornamental and decorative iron work for gardens, businesses and houses in the Pittsburgh area. Barrel-chested with a clean-shaven head and a well-groomed goatee, Walter looks the part of a no-nonsense Merchant Marine.

The Midshipman’s discipline, though, is tempered by waves of imagination.

Walter’s free-flowing, nature-based creations - gates, chairs, staircases, trellises, tables and sculptures featuring trees and flowers that curve and jut in all directions- wouldn’t look out of place in Alice’s Wonderland or Halloween Town from “The Nightmare Before Christmas.” “Organic iron work - that’s my signature style,” Walter said.

With the tagline of “our garden is always in full bloom,” Iron Eden’s one-of-a-kind artwork springs up all over the city.

At Phipps Conservatory, Walter conjured up a two-headed dragon topiary adorned with bulging red eyeballs, jagged gold teeth and smoke billow-
ing forth from the beasts’ mouths. Behind a Cerberus-like three-headed dog that Phipps put together, Iron Eden created the “Gates of Hell,” featuring iron tree branches rising from the ground like flames. When the world’s leaders gathered at Phipps for a working dinner leading up to the September 2009 G-20 summit, they chowed down at a table that Walter helped craft made with wooden slabs from Riverview Park trees.

Walter restored worn-down gates at the 100-room Sewickley Heights estate of iron and steel industrialist Benjamin Franklin Jones. Fixtures and mirrors at Maxalto and Moda in Shadyside are Iron Eden-produced, and a wood-burning pizza oven at Enrico’s is stoked by Walter’s faux flames. He has done work for the pious (fences at the restored Trinity Cathedral, Downtown) and the playful (a 35-foot high chimney stack at the Nemacolin Woodlands Resort).

While Walter’s line of work can be dangerous – “it’s a high workman’s comp rate, if that’s any indication” – he doesn’t let occasional cuts and burns get in the way of taking on ambitious projects that make people stop and stare.

“I think he has the unique ability to pull almost anything off,” said Walter’s wife, Jody, a jewelry designer who once owned Sunshine Bead Company in Mount Lebanon and Sunshine in the City in the Strip District. “He always seems to be able to translate any style into iron - and no project is ever too big or too complicated.”

Pittsburgh architect Matthew Schlueb considers Walter his go-to guy for custom iron work. Schlueb sought out Walter to fabricate the hinges on the front door of his Franklin Park house, a circular red and yellow creation dubbed “Villa Vuoto” that was featured in the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. But Walter’s work quickly sprouted up elsewhere in the house.

“After meeting him and visiting his studio, seeing his other work for the first time, I began to imagine all of the areas in our house we could use his talents,” Schlueb said. “We began with the stair railing, which he developed into a tree motif in the vertical tracery, to reflect the tall, slender trees found in the woods that surround our home.” The style of Walter’s spiraling staircase, twisting down from the second floor like a DNA strand, became the building block for other projects.

“I liked the imagery so much that we decided to repeat it throughout the house, in the fireplace screen [and on] bar stools, to tie the house and the woods together visually,” Schlueb said.

“In my opinion, John is the best metal worker in the region. Not only for his technical skill but more so for his artistic sensibilities, which is why I continue to work only with him,” Schlueb said.

The material for many of Walter’s creations comes from industrial and manufacturing leftovers. “Their scrap is my beginning piece,” he said. Modern gas forges and welding equipment make Walter’s life a little easier, but fine touch and attention to detail remain paramount. “Most of the really good work relies on hand work,” Walter said.

Walter’s admiration for iron was forged at sea. The South Hills native graduated from the United States Merchant Marine Academy in 1974 and sailed around the world with the Merchant Marines for a decade. In addition to unloading cargo at ports, Walter ran the power and propulsion systems on the ships.

“Working with iron and tools was part of my Marine engineer training,” Walter said. “More than 90 percent of a modern
The style of Walter’s spiraling staircase, twisting down from the second floor like a DNA strand, became the building block for other projects.

merchant ship is made out of steel.”
As Walter navigated the globe - Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, France, New Zealand, Tahiti and Indonesia are but a few of the places he stopped while in the Merchant Marines - he immersed himself in the local culture. “Indonesia was my favorite,” he said. “Exotic. 3,000 islands in the chain. Good food. Pretty women.”
He also studied artistic styles while abroad. “When I started getting real interested in iron work, I started taking photos everywhere I went,” Walter said.
Europe in particular proved inspirational. “That’s where the really decorated stuff emanated from,” Walter said. “Stunning examples of iron work.” Walter appreciates the time and effort expended by artists in places like Venice, Florence and Paris.
“Before the days of workman’s comp and social security, those guys had the time to bring a job to completion,“ he said. “It’s not just a hobby,” he said. “It’s a business. A lot of people can handle the iron work aspect, but not the business side. There’s a lot of people who can handle the business side, but not the iron work.”
They opened EdenHouse, a short-term residence and event space located directly above Iron Eden’s art gallery on Liberty Avenue. John and Jody used to live in a studio apartment above the gallery. But when they moved to Mount Lebanon, they converted their former home into several living spaces where people can crash as a hotel alternative.
“They can rent it for a day, a week, a month, whatever,” Walter said.
All of the fully furnished spaces feature Iron Eden’s distinct artwork, as well as modern amenities like Cable, DVD players and WiFi Internet access. Some of the floors are made from recycled wood from bowling alleys.
“The Loft,” which can sleep up to six people, has a designer kitchen, a “wine deck” and a Jacuzzi tub. “The Apartment” sleeps four and has an eat-in kitchen. Looking for something more intimate? “The Studio” is designed for couples, with a queen platform bed that’s snugly placed in a sleeping “nook.”
With Iron Eden producing irresistible art work and EdenHouse providing paradise close to bustling Downtown Pittsburgh, Walter is delighted with the direction of his business.
“We haven’t had any problems so far,” Walter said. “Knock on wood” - he looks around for some lumber and, finding none, raps his own head - “it’s been good.”

Paul’s Records: last of the independents

by Dan Hill

Whether you’re a fan of reggae, jazz, rock, or hip-hop, Paul’s has what you want. The Bloomfield shop, one of just six independent record stores left in Pittsburgh, has managed to survive the iPod era by filling its racks with an eclectic mix of tunes, both old-school and obscure. At Paul’s, uncovering a long-lost treasure or stumbling upon an up-and-coming band provides a thrill that can’t be replicated from a laptop at home.
“How do you browse online?” asks owner Paul Olszewski musingly, who has operated the music shop since 1993. “You can’t just accidentally stumble across something online.”
Paul’s has plenty of unique music for people to unearth. “We definitely don’t cater to sort of, the pop,” Paul says. “We don’t look at the charts and say, ‘Ok,
Taylor Swift is the big seller, we should carry Taylor Swift. It’s more things that we and our customers listen to,” he says.

“You can’t replicate a record store feeling online,” says Jason Baldinger, an employee of Paul’s for three years and a long-time customer of the store.

Music plays at a volume just low enough to hear the buzzing of the fluorescent lights hanging over racks of CD’s and vinyl covering the store, reverberating off the walls plastered with old posters of bands ranging from Devo to Joe Jackson. Jason calls a customer named Jim, a regular at the store picking up his weekly dose of 12-inch vinyl LPs. The two quickly strike up a conversation, and before Jim leaves, Jason tells him to get some time off and come in again soon.

Coming in to the shop and talking with other music aficionados about favorite bands and new discoveries creates a sense of community, Jason says. “It’s something you can’t get on the internet where you walk in and someone’s like, ‘Hi, it’s nice to see you, James, you haven’t been in in a while,” he says. Almost all of the regulars to the store are on a first name basis with the employees.

Many Paul’s employees met by coming in regularly as customers. Jason and Bob Jungjunz used to meet on Saturdays when the store was packed. Now they’re good friends.

“We’d both be here around the same time and he’d be one of the people that [I] would sit down and talk with,” says Jason about Bob. “We’d go around the store like, ‘Have you heard this record?’ ‘Oh, no, I haven’t heard that.’ Well, have you heard this one?’ ‘Yeah, I’ve heard that record,’” Jason recalls.

John Bell, another long-time customer and an employee for 14 years, knows people want variety. “There’s a lot of stuff here that’s outside the mainstream of even indie,” John says. “We have jazz stuff that goes into the late 20s and early 30s that you’d be hard-pressed to find online or anywhere else.”

Paul also stocks vinyl, which helps draw more customers. “We’re selling a lot more vinyl,” Paul says. “We’ve always sold a fair amount of vinyl but in the last three or four years it’s picked up. We’re selling almost as much vinyl as CDs.”

They know vinyl is a format most big chains don’t carry. “We’ve carved ourselves out a niche in the market,” Jason says.

For as small as the store is, Paul’s has an impressive variety of music genres. New releases and singles sit at the front of the store. CDs and vinyls cover the walls in their entirety. Hip-hop, reggae, and contemporary music can be found in the bins that dominate the center of the store.

If it’s on the shelves, chances are Paul’s employees can rattle off the product’s details. “Everybody here is very informed about music and what’s going on,” Jason says. “I don’t think there’s ever been a lapse in that at this store.”

He thinks that knowledge has helped Paul’s endure during a period in which the number of record shops has dwindled. “There’s always that feeling that you can come in and we all know our s—, and if we don’t know we’ll ask one of the other ones, y’know, there’s six of us,” Jason says.

The people behind the counter here are more than employees, they’re fans of the culture. “There’s that sense of community in talking to people that are just as much of a fanatic about the stuff as you are,” John says. “We’re all geeks.”
The words ‘anarchism’ and ‘anti-capitalism’ tend to call up images of angry individuals alienated from society. The Big Idea, a Bloomfield bookstore, offers a different view of radicalism.

When a customer walks through the narrow entrance of The Big Idea bookstore, the progressive nature of the books is anything but uninviting and scary. In fact, the store prides itself on openness and acceptance, volunteer Kent Moyer says.

“We want everyone to feel that they have a space regardless of their race, religion or sexual orientation,” Moyer says.

Sha’Kuana Ona has only volunteered at The Big Idea for two weeks, but already understands the value system of the store.

“Part of this is being a community bookstore,” she says.

Moyer agreed.

“We seem to be able to operate because of our friends in the community and our friends in the radical community,” Moyer says.

Simply glancing around the store highlights the establishment’s goals. On top of the mismatched bookshelves in the small store are various books such as a biography of W. E. B. DuBois, a book on police brutality and an updated feminism manual. A history book, “Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong” stands near a large sex encyclopedia.

‘A Bookstore to Reach People’

Although the Big Idea did not have an official location until Valentine’s Day 2004, the ideas supporting the radical movement were still there.

“I guess we were the Big Idea even though we didn’t have a space,” Moyer says.

Volunteers joined and started the small non-profit organization with hope that the community would appreciate its message.

Volunteer Anne Marie Toccket says the bookstore began to provide the neighborhood with new perspectives on important issues.

“It’s a bookstore to reach people and provide a medium for radical movement and radical politics,” Toccket says.

Book ‘Em & Food Not Bombs

Ona’s work with a charitable group called Book ‘Em led her to The Big Idea. On top of providing the local community with radical literature, the bookstore helps with Book ‘Em and Food Not Bombs.

Ona is a volunteer for Book ‘Em, a program providing books to incarcerated individuals, primarily those in Pennsylvania. The Big Idea donates books to the organization, which strengthens literacy programs within the local penal system.

This charity is one of the reasons Ona started volunteering.

“Why would we take away their right?” Ona asks of reducing literacy programs in the system. “I think the part of that is encouraging. So many people want to read, to fill that time. It’s an excellent way to continue their knowledge.”

Although the prison system might be hesitant to receive books from a progressive bookstore, Ona says the limitations are stricter for the packaging of the books, rather than their content.

The Big Idea’s impact on Food Not Bombs is less direct but still important. Food Not Bombs is an organization providing vegan and vegetarian meals weekly for the community. The Big Idea volunteers every Sunday when Food Not Bombs distributes the food, Moyer says.

‘Dissemination of Information’

Though the bookstore’s space is limited, it provides more than simply books.
Amidst the small bookshelves and tables on the second floor is a computer. Besides simply offering free wireless like other bookstores, The Big Idea provides a computer for anyone to use. On the old Dell screen is a black and white mug shot, dated 12-7-11. It's a photo of Emma Goldman, a woman known for her political activism and promotion of anarchism. Goldman, one of the most famous anarchists of her time, dated a man who tried to murder Henry Frick.

Although the radical support is subtle at times, the photos and book selection are fundamental parts of the store. “We are here for the dissemination of information,” Moyer says. “Borders determines what you want to read. We do not distribute major labels.”

Kelly Innes, 32, agrees that the mood at Big Idea compared to larger bookstores is completely different. A new resident of Bloomfield, Innes believes the computer transforms the area into an information center.

“There are people hanging out and having interactions, unlike at Borders, where people are on laptops with their headphones in and zoned out into their computers,” Innes says. “It seems very welcoming. I mean the whole space, but especially [the computer]. It’s turned into an information shop. You can access whatever information you want online.”

The Structure of the Big Idea

Although Moyer is driven and highly opinionated, he realizes that everyone at the Big Idea is not as extreme. “When you talk to me, I am not the collective ‘Big Idea’... We don’t have a political stance at the store,” he says. “Not everyone is as politically opinionated as I am.”

The store, according to Moyer, is non-linear and non-hierarchical. The store does not have a manager, only volunteer-employees. Even Moyer’s position as volunteer coordinator could be taken over if another person desired it. Each week the volunteers meet to discuss new topics and the direction of the store. Any decisions must be agreed upon by all of the members.

“We require true consensus to come to any decision,” Moyer says. “Any collective member can stop an idea.” Although this would be nearly impossible in a corporate organization, Moyer says it is easy at the Big Idea because they are like-minded individuals.

Reading Material

Another reason Innes shops at The Big Idea is its off-beat selection. The store never purchases from major book distributors and usually buys from independent distributors such as AK Press and Microcosm Publishing.

“There’s less stuff than a box chain bookstore, but its stuff that you wouldn’t find elsewhere. It makes it interesting in a different way than what a used bookstore would offer,” Innes says.

On top of buying from independent distributors, the bookstore buys material from local artists and writers. Ona said the majority of the zines, or self-published periodicals, are from local writers. “We try to support local writers who write radical stuff. We try to make sure that we support local artists because it’s hard being an artist,” Ona says.

The store’s radical nature and quaint size garner respect from customers, but respect doesn’t translate into big profits, the support of their volunteer-based employees. No one receives a salary and the shifts are chosen by the volunteers.

“No one is tied into a schedule. That’s the beauty of it. They feel strongly about it and make a commitment,” Toccket says.

Discussion Groups

On top of working with Food Not Bombs and Book ‘Em, the bookstore occasionally holds discussion groups. The store offers free reading materials for any interested attendees. The next discussion will be about Anarcho-Syndicalism, a form of social anarchism related to the labor movement.

Although Moyer is well-read on similar topics, he says he still benefits from attending the discussion groups.

“It’s refreshing for me to get someone else’s view on something I have known about for 15 years,” he says.

If the discussion group is small, it is simply held in the bookstore. Local coffee shops serve as a meeting point when more than eight people attend. Even though the shop is small and accommodating for large groups, Moyer doesn’t mind.

“It’s what we can maintain. I guess we could move into a bigger space with more traffic but the rent would be more,” Moyer says. “I don’t want us to not stock something that we want because of the rent.”

Although the store houses radical ideas, some of the volunteers simply love books and enjoy promoting passion. Stickers and posters are clustered across the walls and surfaces of the store. Though there are many, Moyer points to a favorite.

Stuck to the metal cabinet is a sticker: “Read a f---ing book.”
Box Heart lends a hand to new artists

by

TAYLOR SERVEDIO

Amid the constant buzz of Italian bakeries and barber shops lies a small art gallery run by a unique woman named Nicole Capozzi.

Nicole opened Box Heart Gallery with her husband, Josh, 10 years ago. Despite holding fine art degrees, the couple sold real estate, among other non-art related jobs, for a few years after college. They were getting by financially, but they never felt satisfied; they were waiting for something more.

In 2000, Nicole stopped waiting. “One day, I said if we’re going to start, we might as well start doing something that we love,” she says. That year, Bloomfield Artworks closed, leaving a vacant space right on the main street of Bloomfield.

After six months of keeping an eye on the bare spot, Nicole and Josh decided they’d buy the former gallery and start their own.

From the sidewalk, Box Heart is hard to miss. Bold red, yellow and black colors hover over the door, reading “Box Heart” in an attractive, funky font. Subtitled on either side of the door are the words “Fine Art.” To justify that statement, there are two glass displays exhibiting various fine art pieces. Once inside, art is everywhere, guiding the eyes through all three rooms of the gallery. Indie music pulses in the background. The gallery’s atmosphere is calm yet eccentric, allowing one to explore and analyze each piece.

Nicole views Box Heart as an opportunity to gain some fame. “Once we say, ‘we’d love to have you,’ the ball is in their court to make the most of it.”

The gallery’s atmosphere is calm yet eccentric, allowing one to explore and analyze each piece.

Expensive art is fine to look at, but it doesn’t always sell, especially with the country pulling out of a recession.

we love,” she says. That year, Bloomfield Artworks closed, leaving a vacant space right on the main street of Bloomfield. After six months of keeping an eye on the bare spot, Nicole and Josh decided they’d buy the former gallery and start their own.

From the sidewalk, Box Heart is hard to miss. Bold red, yellow and black colors hover over the door, reading “Box Heart” in an attractive, funky font. Subtitled on either side of the door are the words “Fine Art.” To justify that statement, there are two glass displays exhibiting various fine art pieces. Once inside, art is everywhere, guiding the eyes through all three rooms of the gallery. Indie music pulses in the background. The gallery’s atmosphere is calm yet eccentric, allowing one to explore and analyze each piece.

Nicole views Box Heart as an opportunity to deliver a message to the public through their work. “We don’t have to feel passionate about what the artist is saying with their work, but it usually turns out that way,” she says.

After an extensive application process, including presentations and interviews, Nicole and Josh choose an artist to exhibit his or her work in the gallery for one month. There are eight exhibitions per year, leaving four months to do special displays, like the holiday exhibit they used in November.

Nicole says the monthly exhibitions give artists of the community the opportunity to gain some fame. “Once we say, ‘we’d love to have you,’ the ball is in their court to make the most of it.”

The work of local, national and even international artists has been on display at Box Heart.

They allow the artists to choose the value of their pieces, most of which are pretty pricey. Expensive art is fine to look at, but Nicole says it doesn’t always sell, especially with the country pulling out of a recession. “With any small business, it’s definitely a challenge and a struggle,” she says.

Nicole and Josh started the business with little to no money. After two years of saving, receiving loans and getting help from her parents, Nicole racked up enough cash to open Box Heart. But it was never smooth sailing for the couple in their decade-plus of running the business. “At that time, I had everything on the line,” she says. “Even now, everything I work for is at risk every day.”

As young people in their thirties, Nicole and Josh know that being able to do something that they love, regardless of the risk, is a “miracle.” But as Nicole gets older, she wonders if the struggle will bother her more or less. She says it’s hard to say whether she’ll still be this satisfied ten years from now.

“The fact that a couple bad months at the gallery could mean that everything we have - including the business, our car, our house - keeps us from living a normal life,” she says. They’ve decided not to start a family; they can’t promise that their child will always have food on the table. They don’t take vacations because they must tend to the gallery at all times. But while they’re just getting by with all of this hard work, they are still very happy.

“I definitely wake up every morning and feel so grateful that I can come and do this,” Nicole says. She and her husband aren’t trying to make Box Heart the richest, most powerful art gallery in the world, or even in Pittsburgh. They’re just trying to do what they love every day.
“With every struggle comes a sense of accomplishment,” Nicole says, “and that’s the biggest reward we get from this—feeling accomplished.”

Each day, Nicole checks the many emails sent in from artists, as well as people interested in visiting the gallery or buying a piece.

She answers the telephone. She watches people walk in and walk out with nothing in their hands. She has seen Bloomfield residents steal from the gallery, and come back to steal some more. Sometimes she lets them because they’re probably just trying to get by, too.

She’s happy to view anyone’s work and feels privileged and satisfied each time she chooses an artist. She’s aware that her life may always be a constant financial struggle, but that doesn’t stop her from smiling. She’s doing what she loves, with the person she loves.

Maione taught at Duquesne from 1977-87 and was one of six original founders that created the Duquesne Guitar Camp in the summer of ’86.

John Maione, an Italian Bloomfield native who has aided the community since he first attended Immaculate Conception school as a youngster, is the reason for the rockin’ worship.

I thank Bloomfield for that,” Maione says. The folk group is still a popular entity, shared by both parishes in the Bloomfield area.

Maione’s involvement in the community is clear. After mass, he walks up to Father Joe Dinello, the Pastor of Immaculate Conception, and receives a hug and much praise for his performance.

“How wonderful job today,” compliments the pastor. Maione thanks him humbly before offering to take pictures of the baptism party on the altar. A former player on the Bloomfield baseball team Maione coached is the happy father of the newly baptized child. “I taught him when he was this big,” Maione says, motioning a few feet above the floor. That child now stands at

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**Strumming on Heaven’s door**

by

KATHERINE PLANCE

When walking into a church, you might expect the sound of an organ blasting a hymn. In the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Bloomfield, though, an acoustic guitar provides the background music for a baptism.

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church was established to care for the spiritual welfare of Italian Americans in the Bloomfield area. The parish has been around for more than a century and Bloomfield has noticed the influence the parishioners have on the community. Maione is an example of that influence. It all began at age 19 when he started a folk group at St. Joseph’s.

“It’s where I met my wife of 11 years.”

Photo By Kate Dillon

A particularly colorful piece casts its wide-eyed gaze across the interior of Box Heart Gallery.
six-foot-one, towering over his old coach.

Maione coached many softball and baseball teams before moving out of the Bloomfield area, including the Catholic Youth Organization team and Bloomfield Catholic.

He also points out that his 8th grade teacher at Immaculate Conception, Sister Jean Cook, is the current principal at the school. He waves to the principal before continuing his story. “She taught me so much, and look at her now.”

She might say the same about Maione, who has always been musically inclined. Maione received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Pittsburgh and his certification in music technology at Duquesne University. Maione taught at Duquesne from 1977-1987 and was one of the six original founders that created the Duquesne Guitar Camp in the summer of ‘86.

Maione keeps the guitar close to his heart, leading the Winchester Thurston Guitar Ensemble during the school year and the Duquesne Guitar Camp every summer.

Maione now teaches performing arts at the Winchester Thurston School. He specializes in classes like music theory and conducts the middle school orchestra.

“I teach an elective, The History of Rock. It’s one of my favorites,” he says. The class syllabus begins with a section titled Beatles Anthology Notes. “I get to teach the music that I followed growing up. It’s a great thing.”

Maione plays his acoustic guitar at every 6:30 p.m. mass at St. Joseph’s parish and has done so for the past 15 years. He subs at the 11:30 a.m. mass at Immaculate Conception when the organist is unable to play.

The parishioners seem excited once Maione strums the first chord of a church hymn. A man in the first row whispers to his wife, “I love when he surprises us and shows up like this. He keeps me awake.” The wife nudges him after his response, but then smiles as Maione begins to sing.

Before packing up, Maione is approached by a woman impressed with his guitar play. “Excuse me, do you have a day job?” she asks. Maione laughs before replying that he is a teacher and asking what she needs. “Well, I need you to play a funeral,” the woman says. Maione looks surprised before responding, “When is it? I’ll see if I can.”

She responds cryptically: “Well I don’t know yet. It’s going to be mine.”
The sun has set behind the many warehouses, decades-old houses and shops small and large that line both sides of the heavily trafficked Penn Avenue in Bloomfield. Tonight, very few cars fill the street. Instead, gallery-goers of all kinds crisscross the lanes of traffic to visit each of the many galleries open to the public for First Friday celebrations. Patches of light from the inside of the galleries spill onto the sidewalk as the shadows of pedestrians dance on the cement squares.

First Fridays are a unique occasion for the Bloomfield community. On the first Friday of each month, the galleries and businesses clustered along Penn Avenue open their doors to the public for the evening. Most gallery owners use this event as the opening for new exhibits in their establishments.

The street, though, is not solely brightened by rectangular blocks of light. The Irma Freeman Center for Imagination, an art gallery located on the 5000-block of Penn Avenue, reflects the colors of the street from its tall façade. Its mirrors and green and blue tiles are accented by two large blue doors and two windows framed by bottles of all sizes and colors set into the wall.

The Irma Freeman Center is unique in that it features not only work of new local artists, but also the work of its namesake. Irma Freeman, a German-born Pittsburgh artist, lives on through her work displayed on the white walls of the gallery. Her collections of portraits, landscapes, city views and still-lifes are showcased in 20-piece sets on a rotating basis throughout the year.

The clientele of the Irma Freeman Center for Imagination is as eclectic as its exterior. Tonight two sisters, no older than eight years old, hop around on the mosaic-tiled floor of the front gallery. The lights dangling from the overhead fixtures reflect off the tiny mirrors scattered among the tiles. In the center of the floor, where the girls are dancing, is the Earth. On the outskirts of the floor lie the Sun, Saturn and the moon. The moon features both the light and dark sides, a tribute to the

The Irma Freeman Center for Imagination offers a simple layout, an eclectic collection of artwork and even some chairs where visitors can sit back and take in the view.
Pink Floyd album, according to Brett Boye, director of operations and president of the board for the Irma Freeman Center.

Across the room, a college-aged couple view a portrait of a dark-haired woman sitting in front of a window, another piece of Irma Freeman’s “Beyond Realism: Later Portraits” collection. Next to them an elderly woman leans on her cane.

Irma Freeman’s collection of work boasts over 500 paintings and sketches, most of which she completed during a 20-year span before her death in 1993 at age 91. Her works are mainly impressionistic pieces of the city and everyday life. The entire collection, including pieces from her younger years, bridges many decades and genres of the twentieth century.

The leads the way through a narrow doorway on the left side of the gallery to an even larger space. The white walls of this gallery are lined with black and white photographs, a collection of pieces titled “A Retrospective: Photographs by Brian Cummings.”

Dozens of people mingle on the floor. To the right, at the bottom of a small ramp, lies a folding table decked out with snacks and drinks. In the center sits a white sheet cake. “Happy 1st Anniversary, Irma Freeman Center!” it reads in blue icing.

A young woman with dreadlocks and two children in tow approaches a thin, dark haired woman in a long, vibrant colored skirt.

“Happy birthday, Irma Freeman Center,” exhales the dreadlocked woman after a warm embrace. “Congratulations, Shelia.”

Shelia Ali, the curator of the Irma Freeman Center for Imagination and granddaughter of the artist, chose this location as home to the center because of her long work history within Bloomfield and Garfield.

“I’ve always been an East Ender,” she laughs. “I’m happy to be a part of the arts community here. It’s definitely going places.”

Ali and partner Brett Boye opened the Irma Freeman Center a year ago. The gallery attracts a varied following – college students, families and the elderly all turn out each First Friday.

“I like to come out and check out what my friends are up to,” says Diana Fisher, a Irma Freeman Center regular from Polish Hill. “I know some of the people in the photos tonight.”

While they do have their regular attendees, the Irma Freeman Center’s unique blend of past and present art cultivates interest in new people with every passing month.

“I tend to see new faces every time,” says Ali. “It’s pretty consistently growing and continuing to build bridges with the community.

Those bridges are at the heart of the Center’s mission. According to Ali, they strive to enrich the local community as well as make the world a better place. They use “green” materials, such as solar panels, to minimize their footprint on the environment while maximizing their imprint on the community.

“We try to have classes for kids and adults,” says Boye. “We do mosaic classes, figure drawing, and yoga classes.”

Though the center has only been open for a year, Ali and Boye have a positive outlook for the future.

“We’re still figuring it out as we go, but we’re pretty psyched,” said Boye.
Christine Bethea searches around for a media packet in the middle of her one-floor studio space on Penn Avenue. No other person could make this scattered space look so organized and appealing. She finds the packet, but not until after rustling through other papers and notebooks placed on a table sitting under a painting hung on the wall.

ARTica, her Bloomfield gallery, holds an eclectic mix of antiques, collectibles, and art projects from local artists.

“Let me see this is the ultimate kind of gallery,” Bethea says as she scurries around the tables of sculptures, lamps and dinnerware. “I wish I had more space.”

In 2007, her dream of starting a gallery first came to fruition. Her new neighbor told her, “A gallery’s the easiest thing in the world to create. You just need four walls and a floor.” Bethea takes advantage of her four walls and floor, hanging traditional pieces like painted canvas and displaying mixed media sculptures. But sprinkled throughout the gallery on tables are small collectibles and dinner plates, things you would never find in most studios.

Opening ARTica has given Bethea the chance to share not only her art, but also the best work that others have to offer. As a fellow artist and friend for more than 10 years, former Bloomfield resident Laverne Kemp has traveled to antique shows with Bethea. Kemp says that the hustling shop-keeper is concerned with more than just her collectibles and art.

“She’s more interested in helping other artists rather than helping herself,” Kemp says. “She’s always thinking about other artists.”

Her studio gives her the ability to help young artists that are springing up all over her neighborhood.

“People that say that we don’t have culture and we don’t have art are just being jaded,” Bethea says.
Across the street from Bethea, Laura McLaughlin owns a gallery and bookstore, and she has seen firsthand how Bloomfield can draw in artists.

"It's part of what [the community] is doing, trying to get artists here," McLaughlin says. "She's one of many. They're really trying to have the artists live in the community."

This was a major factor in realizing her dream.

"It was attractive, you know, I don't know anybody that was that actively looking for artists, and wanting them to come. Nobody wants artists!" Bethea jokes.

In fact, Bethea's parents tried to convince her at an early age to enter any career but art.

"My father convinced me I would starve. He wanted me to have a practical job. I never wanted to do anything practical," Bethea recalls as she continues to walk around her studio, saying that she wrote advertising copy for now-defunct retail stores Kaufmann's and Gimbels. As she walks and talks, her phone rings.

"Hm, Mom and Dad," she says, squashing the ignore button.

Bethea's interest in art expands far beyond her simple studio in Bloomfield's art district. She has joined the Pittsburgh Area Arts Initiative to cultivate Bloomfield as an art center for not only the city, but also the nation.

People just sort of walk through and enjoy the vibe and it's really just a wonderful format," Bethea says. "One of the things that excited me was the fact that we were doing this and no one else was doing it at the time. We were the first art crawl in the entire city of Pittsburgh."

The first Unblurred started in 1998, long before Bethea moved into her studio. But the self-described innovator asked the Bloomfield community to theme April's Unblurred event.

"We took this Unblurred and put it on steroids," Bethea says with a smile. "I asked all the galleries to do something that was either technology-related or green-related."

The event, called the Geek Art/Green Innovators Festival, brought together artists and entrepreneurs and challenged participants to create something both aesthetically and environmentally appealing. Projects included a wind-powered flower that could produce enough energy to run a laptop.

Bethea was attracted to Bloomfield for the already-emerging art culture.

People that say that we don't have culture and we don't have art are just being jaded. Some people don't want us to have art and don't want us to have culture because they want to be the arbiters of what that is," Bethea says. "I've heard people say, 'I don't want to buy Pittsburgh art unless it's been to New York,' you can't do anything with those kinds of people."

In an effort to bring more art culture to Pittsburgh, Bloomfield has opened up its galleries every first Friday of the month for Unblurred. The monthly art crawl gives art-seekers the opportunity to walk along Penn Avenue, taking in the many art galleries that line the street. Bethea has encouraged restaurants to stay open later to take advantage of the adventurous art-seekers.

"It's a windmill, but it looks artsy," Bethea says, laughing.

Bethea plans to hold another green-themed festival this spring. She will continue to offer Pittsburgh artists opportunities, most importantly keeping her gallery open in order to give fledgling artists their first space. She says she's been fortunate to have the opportunity she's had.

"There have been the peaks and valleys of getting to the point where you can really do things the way you want to do them and people will let you do that. All those stars have to line up that way, and that's one of those things I found at Friendship," Bethea says with the joy of a woman who's achieved her dream. "I've been so blessed by this community."
Above: Sculptor James Simon and a partner put the finishing touches on a monument to slain Pittsburgh police officers Paul J. Sciullo II, Stephen J. Mayhle and Eric G. Kelly.

Right corner: A piece of whimsical graffiti is splashed across the concrete underneath the Bloomfield Bridge.

Photos by Kate Dillon and Dave Golebiewski
Top: This woman soaring by with kitchen implements is possibly the most eye-catching mural in Bloomfield.

Bottom left: A sign denotes the entrance to the Officer Paul J. Scullio II Memorial Field.

Bottom right: A scoop of gelato is served at Grasso Roberto.
Belly dancer outfit? Sultan sabre? We have it

by

CHRISTINA FOX

Ask “Miss Emelie” to make you a costume and what emerges from her sewing machine, flowing with sequins and just the right amount of taffeta, is perfection.

“I’ve been sewing since I was five,” Emelie Abmayr, 74, owner of Abmayr Costume Service says, touching her hands to her face. “I would make costumes for all my children.” Abmayr’s passion for sewing grew and developed into a life-altering journey.

Liberty Avenue has been the home of Abmayr Costume Service for 25 years. Perfectly positioned between a tanning salon, a hair studio, and a plethora of family-owned Italian restaurants, Abmayr Costume Service stands out from the more traditional retail venues.

25 years later, Emelie has about 7,000 costumes in her dense jungle of a store.

Potential costume buyers, costume renters and curious visitors are greeted by hand-painted Disney characters on the front windows of the shop. Inside, the store’s numerous shelves are overflowing with many costume ideas. In the front of the shop, a glass case is filled with bits and pieces of new costumes in the making.

One of Abmayr’s more loyal costumers glowingly says, “Miss Emelie is amazing. She will make anything you want. I’ve been coming to her for years. I’ve won every costume contest I have ever been in.”

Abmayr had made a belly dancer costume for the woman and a sultan for her husband a few years ago for Halloween; apparently, they were a huge hit.

After working for no pay for a commercial theater in the mid ’70s, then for the Margo Loveless Puppet Theater, she then moved on to work for Pittsburgh Public Theater for six seasons, traveling with the company. She made and provided costumes and alterations while doing shows on the road. However, after a severe back injury forced her to stop touring, she opened her costume shop on Bloomfield’s Liberty Avenue.

“I was doing work for the theater, getting ready for our trip to Germany,” she says. “I was at a Ponderosa and slipped and fell on dishwater.”

The fall badly injured her back, leaving Abmayr with multiple braces. “I had a back brace, neck brace, a leg brace, and two arm braces,” she says. The Pittsburgh Opera Theater found a replacement and Abmayr was left with nothing to do.

“I called my friend in New York and asked to borrow some of his costumes [to open a costume shop],” Abmayr says. Her friend complied and gave her a few pieces of his collection.

On her 50th birthday, Abmayr opened her shop on Liberty Avenue to the public, but it took some time to get started in the business.

“All my kids helped me out at one time or another,” she says.

25 years later, Emelie has about 7,000 costumes in her dense jungle of a store and 10,000 in a warehouse in another neighborhood. “I made about half,” Abmayr says.

She purchased the remaining costumes from her friend when he began closing his inventory. “I have two or three of the same costumes [now], in
Abmayr’s brilliant costume ideas develop from a number of places: “I watch T.V. or read books for ideas, but some of the best ideas come from coloring books,” she says, raising an eye-brow. From time to time she will be inspired by something she read in the newspaper or a magazine, or even her own subconscious.

“Sometimes, I will have a dream and I’ll wake up with an idea,” she says.

With such rich and varied sources of inspiration, Abmayr has gathered an abundance of clippings, from which she created an inventory of pictures for costumes. At first glance, her store may seem like a cluttered fantasy world with all the masks, feather boas, headpieces, and a cornucopia of other props, but Abmayr’s costumes water-fall throughout the entire shop.

Abmayr has offered her costumes to the blind and to children in wheel-chairs. She has also managed to design and create a collection of costumes for more than 50 school plays over the last few years ago,” she says, smiling. A later Brentwood High School play, Psycho Beach Party, was her least favorite.

“The schools wanted to save money so they cut the budget. The kids were prancing around on stage in bathing suits,” she says. “There was very little creativity with this one.”

Abmayr’s business began to dwindle after September 11th, when schools changed their rules and insisted that children were not allowed to wear certain costumes.

“No masks, devils, or ghosts. Over the head and hooded things are history. All little kids want blood coming out of their mouths, you know. Anything evil is not real popular, as it used to be,” Abmayr chuckles, shaking her head.

She explains religious issues that also slightly altered her business: “No anti-religious costumes. Not even an Easter bunny.”

However, even in hard times, Abmayr Costume Service is still able to provide costumes. “I sell some stuff, but it is mostly rental,” Abmayr says; the shop has a no-return policy.

Abmayr takes great pride in her designs and is very careful to whom she lends them. Her prices range anywhere from $25 to $1,000 and her rental period is usually only 24 hours.

“Sometimes I bend the rules for plays and such,” she says.

But she is not always lenient. During Halloween, Abmayr allowed a rental period of 24 hours only; the longer the costume is out, the higher probability it has of getting ruined.

Her costume shop is her masterpiece, a symphony of clashing colors, fabrics and textures spilling out onto the floor. But there is a method to her madness in this store that is filled to the brim with make-believe.

“I know where everything is,” she says earnestly, eyes roaming over the boxes piled with props.
In my earlier years, I spent days hungry, I spent weeks hungry. I don’t want anyone else to have to do that,” says Rosalyn Dukes, the owner of Mama Ros’s Sandwich Shop in Bloomfield.

Ros has made it her personal mission to feed the hungry people of Bloomfield. The small, one-room shop located on Liberty Avenue has space enough for two tables and a lunch counter and a motto of “peace, love and a full belly.”

Behind the counter lies the kitchen area, which features a grill and a single coffee pot. Here, Ros and another girl prepare meals for everyone who walks in the door, and on a bustling Sunday afternoon, there is barely a seat to be had.

“No matter how many people come in, there’s always enough,” Ros, or “Mama,” as her employees and customers call her, says. “My mother always used to somehow stretch whatever food we had to feed everyone who came. She always said, ‘Oh, we’ll just throw another potato in the pot.’ So that’s what we do.”

“Ros is a really awesome person. Since I got here she has probably given me $200 of food because I was homeless and had no job when I got back into town,” says Nikki Pack, a 23-year-old employee of the sandwich shop.

Ros, who moved to Pittsburgh from western Maryland in 1987, has owned the shop for six years. She worked for the previous owners of the shop for two and a half years, and when they decided they “weren’t having fun,” they handed the shop over to Dukes.

“When I got it, there was $70 in the bank account,” Ros laughs. “Now I’m so far in the hole that I can’t leave. And I love it here.”
A father and son share burgers and conversation at one table while two college-aged girls color their placemats over a cup of coffee. The lunch counter is full of people munching on sandwiches and sipping on their coffees as Queen plays on a small stereo behind the counter. Brightly colored spray painted flowers and peace signs are splashed amid the signs and photographs that decorate the pale yellow walls. The signs mainly feature uplifting and humorous sayings, but one in particular stands out among them all—a handmade sign advertising “Mama Ros’s 9th Annual Free Thanksgiving Dinner.”

“We had a couple little old guys and this tough little old Polish lady who came in all the time and wanted nothing to do with their families for the holidays,” Ros says, of the first Thanksgiving meal she cooked nine years ago. “I decided to make a turkey, mashed potatoes and vegetables to feed them. Then more and more people came out.”

This year, Ros prepared 11 20-pound turkeys for Thanksgiving Day patrons, as well as for the meals they deliver to the elderly in the area who would normally receive their dinner from the local Meals-On-Wheels program. Each meal is entirely free to whoever wants it.

“Each year it gets a little bigger,” Ros says. “There’s always something that occurs that day that reminds me while I do it.”

Whenever Ros is asked about the Thanksgiving meal, she tells her favorite story about a man who wandered into the shop a couple Thanksgivings ago for a cup of coffee. He was well-dressed and in his mid-fifties. She assumed he was coming from visiting someone at the nearby hospital, but she didn’t want to pry. After sitting at the counter for a while, sipping his coffee as everyone around him ate their meal, he finally accepted Ros’ offer for a bite to eat. When he finished, he couldn’t believe he didn’t owe anything for his meal.

“After he left, I went to clean up and found $13 underneath his plate,” Ros says. Thirteen, she explains, is her lucky number.

Ros describes her shop as “the orphanage,” a place where all are welcome and no one leaves hungry.

No one is turned away and, more often than not, customers who are down on their luck end up behind the counter with a job. Pack, who began coming to the shop with her sister for breakfast, would end up spending the entire day drinking coffee and helping out before actually becoming an official employee in October. Sonya Begay, another employee of Mama Ros’s Sandwich Shop, tells a similar story.

“All my friends already came here,” the 25-year-old Bloomfield resident said. “Now Mama can’t get rid of me.”

“These little heathens,” Ros says, motioning to Begay and Pack, “they’ve become my family.”

As everyone is telling stories and cleaning up for the evening, Ros sits down at the counter to listen. During a rare moment of silence, she takes a breath before she speaks.

“You know the best part about being here?” she asks no one in particular. “The best part about here is there’s never a shortage of hugs and love.”

The Liberty Avenue shop has space enough for two tables, a lunch counter and a motto: peace, love and a full belly.
A father and his young son walk into the barbershop and sit down. The barber motions the boy over, and the boy climbs up and wiggles himself high into the barber chair. The barber asks the father, “What are we gonna do today?”

The father smiles and says, “He likes the spikey one.”

“The spikey one,” the boy repeats.

The sound of scissors clipping and the razors buzzing can be found right in the heart of Bloomfield at Dan Cercone’s Barber Shop. The late Dan Cercone opened his barbershop on Liberty Avenue in 1931, and it is still very much in business today.

Dan’s grandson, Dennis Scullion, currently operates and owns the barber shop. His son David will soon join him to help carry on the family tradition.

The original spinning barbershop pole gives away the shop’s age. The barber pole still continues to swirl on the exterior of the shop, presenting Bloomfield with its red, blue, and white stripes proudly.

Dennis’ mother, Janet Cercone Scullion, stops by the family business once in a while to help out. When she does come in, “she brings cookies for the kids,” Dennis says with a smile.

“My mom usually comes in on Saturdays,” Dennis says, motioning to the small desk toward the back of the shop. “She does whatever bookkeeping I don’t do.”

The shop still contains the original dozen waiting chairs lined against the wall. As for the barber chairs, they are the second edition. “We got these in the ’50s,” Dennis says.

“We remodeled two years ago, same chairs, same table over there,” he says, pointing toward a rickety small table in the far corner.

Dennis says that the family previously lived in the back of the shop when it opened.

“My mom grew up here. They lived back there,” he says while gesturing toward a lone door on the back wall of the shop, “then moved upstairs and later a block away. The shop wasn’t this big initially. It went to about right there, at the end of that mirror,” Dennis says, pointing toward the last barber chair.

Beyond the entrance, trophies line the shelves all the way around the shop. Dennis says that they are mostly bowling and bocce trophies, as well as awards his grandfather earned over the years. Dan participated in hair competitions, “back in the day,” Dennis says. He was named Barber of the Year in 1967 after winning a worldwide competition.

Dennis still holds on to the memory of his grandfather, acknowledging that barbers like Dan are hard to find today.

“All the old-timers died off,” he says. “A barbershop just closed in Lawrenceville and we got all his costumers. There is no one to replace the ‘old-timers’ when they die.”

Dennis says that his grandfather opened the shop in the beginning of the depression and was able to stay afloat.

“He had to get a deferment from the war department [to keep the shop open].” The deferment only allowed Dan to open his shop at nighttime.

Dan clipped and buzzed mostly solo for 61 years, occasionally working with an assistant. He loved every minute of it, Dennis recalls.

When Dan began to get sick, Janet got Dennis involved. “My mom asked me if I could manage a career change,” he says. Dennis was previously involved in the military and worked construction jobs.

“I was 28 when I started,” says Dennis, now in his late forties. “I had a personal trainer [who] would come into the shop...
and teach me."

When he accepted the opportunity to take over the shop, Dennis struggled for a time to make ends meet. Married with three small children, Dennis had to go nine months without a paycheck while he was in training.

"I'm glad I did it," he says as he surveys his beloved shop.

Having established himself in the barbershop world, Dennis counts as his customers as they pour in to his shop from all over the city.

A man named Patrick, who has been coming to Cercone's for 30 years, remains a very loyal customer. "I always enjoy the haircuts," he says.

Dennis says he enjoys Patrick's company and considers him a favorite customer. "Yeah, Patrick here, [is one of the favorites] except when he wears that Penn State sweatshirt," Dennis jokes as the sound of the razor hums along.

Happiness surrounds Cercone's shop. Dennis adds a comfortable atmosphere to the shop as music plays quietly in the background.

Over the years, Dan Cercone's Barber-shop has made quite a name for itself. However, Dennis said being the main barber entails many long hours spent at the shop.

"I put in 58 hours every week and I hardly get time off," he proclaims.

Long hours may be tough, Dennis says, but he also says there is upside to his job. "You learn a lot, that's for sure. It's an education."

Dennis says that "the conversation with the customers" is his favorite part of the job.

"I do love my job, that's easy because coming to work every day, I meet many different people. Everyone that sits in my chair is different. There are always some characters that come in and out, many walks of life," he says.

The shop is as vibrant and welcoming as ever, serving as a community hub. "When something happens, people come here and expect to find out what is going on. We get phone calls too," Dennis says.

Dan Cercone's is like the watering hole of Bloomfield. Most everyone knows where the shop is, and those who do feel comfortable enough to come in and shoot the breeze.

Times have changed. However, Dan Cercone's Barbershop remains a staple in the Bloomfield community.

"We were just voted the best barbershop in Pittsburgh!" Dennis says.
Troll down Liberty Avenue, and, oddly, one of the first things you’ll see in Bloomfield’s “Little Italy” is “The Polish Party House.” The Bloomfield Bridge Tavern, celebrating its 25th year in business, is a bastion of Polish pride. But there’s more to the place than the red-and-white flag on the building’s side or the gold-crowned, spread-winged Polish crest-of-arms eagle that watches over the parking lot. Part concert house, part culinary sensation and part circus, the tavern is where the community comes to gather and let loose.

Tonight, the Almost Astronauts are rocking the house. Silhouetted by the stage lights and standing between a hand-carved wooden Indian and a grizzly bear, lead singer Jeremy Gray wants to send the scrunching, standing-room-only crowd into hyper drive. “This song’s called ‘Whiskey’,” he says. “Please have some.”

A pair of bearded, flannel-wearing twenty-somethings take the suggestion to heart, clinking glasses, downing shots and high-fiving. Full of rocket fuel, they hop around to the indie rock group and perfect their moonwalks. One small step for man, one giant headache in the morning.

Every night across the bar, waiting to be heard…

Other, calmer patrons are in their own universe. At the bar, pendant lights hang down from the crimson red ceiling, producing pockets of light amid the darkness in which friends and family, ranging from AARP-eligible to “can I see your ID” age, share stories and hearty laughs.

Don’t get too salty with the language, though – a no swearing sign reminds people to keep it PG, and no less an authority than Pope John Paul II watches from a gold-framed photo just to the left of the bar. If you offend others’ ears, don’t be surprised if someone kindly asks you not to let your doopa hit you on the way out the door.

“We have a really eclectic mix of people here,” said bartender Sheila Evans, who has worked at the Bloomfield Bridge Tavern for 22 years. “A lot of characters. It’s an attitude-free place where everyone feels comfortable.”

The tunes offer something for everyone. A digital juke box hangs on the wall across from the bar, flashing swirls of blue and red giving way to orange and green, the colors reflecting off the mirrors behind the bar and creating a kaleidoscope effect. The Doors. Santana. Stevie Wonder. Sam Cooke. You name it, and it’s just a click away.

Live entertainment is just as varied. Tuesday is acoustic open mic night. “Fuzz!” Wednesdays offer drum and bass, DJs and dancing. On Fridays and Saturdays, come in to hear a band play anything from polka to punk rock.

“I really like coming in to experience the music that comes into the place,” said Tim Ruff, a singer and songwriter attending Carnegie Mellon University. “You get some ‘oldies but goodies’ and some young newbies every time. It’s a surprise every time.”

The award-winning grub, made from scratch, serenades the taste buds – there’s a dish for people of all different palates. In addition to standard fare like pizza, wings and fries, the tav-
ern’s menu includes traditional Polish items.

“Red” and “White” Polish Platters have pierogies, kielbasa, haluski (cabbage noodles) and kluski (noodles and cottage cheese) piled high and protruding over the edge of the plate, a tiny polish flag toothpick planted in the middle of the mouth-watering mound. Golabki jam packs beef and rice into cabbage, drenching it in a sea of tomato sauce. Feeling especially brave? Try the czarnina, or duck blood soup.

“The food is fantastic,” said Joseph Stammerjohn, guitar player for A Prior I, a rock band that recently performed at the Bloomfield Bridge Tavern. “Their pierogies are some of the best I’ve had.” Ruff raves about the cuisine, too. “The ‘Red Platter’ and some of their other main dishes are spectacular,” he said. The tavern is the people’s choice for Polish chow, winning a 2009 Pittsburgh Magazine reader’s poll for the best Polish restaurant in Pittsburgh.

 Appropriately enough, the story of the Bloomfield Bridge Tavern begins with kielbasa. Stan “Sluggo” Frankowski worked at an Armour meat packing plant until the early 1980s, when the plant shuttered its doors. Frankowski, a union leader, teamed with city activist and current state Sen. Jim Ferlo to present Pittsburgh City Council with a plan that would have allowed union members to buy and operate the plant. But the plan wasn’t all that Stan cooked up to entice City Council. “He made a giant paper mache kielbasa, and they marched it all the way down Liberty Avenue,” said son Carl Frankowski, who has co-owned the Bloomfield Bridge Tavern along with his brother Steve since Stan passed away in 2005.

 When City Council didn’t bite, Stan made a career change. He attended some entrepreneurship classes at Carnegie Mellon University and, at the urging of sons Steve and Scott, bought a nuisance bar that would become the Bloomfield Bridge Tavern. The Frankowski’s fixed the place up, and Steve and Scott moved into the second-story apartment above the tavern. Stan hired relatives and set out to give the tavern a festive family atmosphere.

 Wild contests, wacky celebrations and even weddings ensued. Stan started crowning a “King and Queen Pierogie” each year, with nobility bestowed upon those who could pack the most pierogies into their bellies. To the winners went the spoils (and indigestion). “The king won a snow rake, and the queen won a fur coat,” said Carl Frankowski.

 He also began rau- cous Dyngus Day parties, celebrating the end of Lenten season. Also called “Wet Monday,” Dyngus Day is a Polish tradition in which boys dump buckets of water on girls the day after Easter to show they like them.

 “We modernize the tradition,” said Carl Frankowski, who has kept Dyngus Day festivities going at the tavern. For a cover charge, patrons get a squirt gun full of water and free reign to douse and be doused.

 “As soon as you step in the door and everyone sees dry folks, they get you pretty good,” said Carolyn Ivanusic, who has participated in many Dyngus Days. “The rest of the night is spent chasing each other around with squirt guns and dancing around to the live polka band. There’s always a smartass with goggles.”

 Some of those Dyngus Day dousings might have led to wedded bliss. Several ceremonies have been held right in the tavern, including one between a Yugoslavian couple which former Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy presided over.

 The Bloomfield Bridge Tavern has had to overcome obstacles since Stan’s passing, including a fire in October of 2008 that busted windows and caused extensive water damage to the bar. “It
took us two and a half months to get back on our feet,” said Carl Frankowski. “I’m still trying to work out the kinks.”

But through the tough times, the tavern remains a community hub. It’s a place where life’s greatest hits are shared.

“I love being able to sit outside around a big table and talk for hours, and there are always awesome people and great conversations,” said Ivanusic.

From returning lost dogs who strolled up to her table, hoping for a taste of a Polish Platter, to watching friends perform on open mic night, Ivanusic’s experiences at the tavern have made “The Polish Party House” feel like home.

“At this point, we’re on a first-name basis with the BBT crew,” she said. “It will always be our spot.”

The Almost Astronauts, Gray defy gravity with side-to-side jumps and the base player swaying and kicking like the amp was connected to him instead of his guitar, jam on.

And in the photograph from you can’t remember when...that you kept by the door...

Carl Frankowski, sitting at the building’s entrance under a framed picture of a smiling Stan placed across from John Paul II, looks around the tavern. He intends to keep the music going for a long time. “We hope to be here another 25 years.”

Del’s: a legacy of food, family and love

by REBECCA FERRARO

For the last 60 years, Del’s Bar and Ristorante DelPizzo has been one of the landmarks of Bloomfield. Perhaps just as well-known as the restaurant itself are the people behind it: the owners and third generation of DelPizzos, siblings John and Marianne.

The DelPizzos are, admittedly, different as night and day, and still struggle with a little bit of sibling rivalry.

“If we agree on anything, it’s a miracle,” John says. “We very rarely start off in the same place, but we get there.”

“We have a great respect for each other,” Marianne says. “Usually I give in to not have a fight. In the Italian home, the girl always gives in, because he’s the man of the house. That’s the way I was raised—you give in to the man.”

For the most part, though, the siblings manage to compromise.

“When I was 10 years old, my dad made me come to work,” Marianne says. “I do it for the love of it, because it was my father’s.”

“In 30 years of us working together, I can count on one hand the bad fights we’ve had. We never go home mad,” she adds with a laugh.

Their restaurant has been a strong facet of Pittsburgh’s Little Italy since the DelPizzos’ grandfather founded it in 1949. Their grandfather brought pizza to Pittsburgh through the restaurant when he came here in 1908, and everybody adored their father. For John, who graduated from Duquesne University with a business degree in 1982, Del’s was the only option on the table. For Marianne, however, there were other plans.

“Here’s what happened,” Marianne says in her boisterous voice. “I go to college. My father drank all his life. I didn’t know any better. The Italian man in the Italian family did what
he wanted to do. My mother put up with it; I put up with it. My father dies senior year of college, and my mother says to me, ‘I need you to help me with the restaurant.’ Marianne graduated from Duquesne University on May 1, 1975, and went to work at Del’s the very next day. She’s been there the last 35 years.

“Thirty-five years ago, I made a lot of money,” Marianne says. “Now I’m lucky I’m getting a piece of pie.” While Marianne had plans to be a teacher, John didn’t even consider another job.

“I knew where I was going—I was going here,” John says, serious and quiet in comparison to his sister. “There wasn’t a choice. You didn’t think about doing anything else.”

John didn’t start out as an owner, or anything near to it. “We’re not one of those families where you’re 12 years old and start working 18 hours a day,” he says.

Marianne remembers it differently. With a seven-year gap between the siblings, it was almost as if Marianne and John grew up in two separate households.

“When I was 10 years old, my dad made me come to work,” Marianne says. “I do it for the love of it, because it was my father’s. I’m here because I love the restaurant, not the money.”

The DelPizzos are widely recognized because of spending their lives at the restaurant. They more or less grew up in and around the restaurant and Bloomfield, especially Marianne. Marianne prides herself on developing a rapport with her customers. She’s the face of the restaurant, and John is behind the scenes. To Marianne, everybody is a ‘honey’ or a ‘sweetheart’ as she bustles about the restaurant.

“There’s customers that I’ll see you and be like, ‘I knew you when you were running around,’” she said. “I played in the alley behind Del’s, or I played in Del’s, because that’s what you did.

Bloomfield is not a bad area, but it’s not getting any better.

People remember me being a bus girl, a dish girl, a server. My father’d say, ‘you open up pop bottles,’” and he’d give me $10 for that,” she says.

The DelPizzo siblings grew up in Penn Hills and lived there until they were teenagers. In spite of not growing up in the area, they foster a fondness for Bloomfield.

“We didn’t grow up here but I spent a good part of my adult life here, so I want to see it keep going. This is the kind of the only neighborhood like this here; you can still walk up and down the streets. That’s what’s special to me,” John says. “If people see me walking down the street, now I’m 50 years old, people see me and know who I am.”

Marianne, who had seven more years in Bloomfield, has more childhood memories than her brother.

“My God, we used to work hard and go up the street and have a drink—I was 21 then. The first marathon that was ever in Bloomfield. I’d go down the street to the playground. The masses were beautiful and long and in Latin,” she says wistfully, lost in thought.

Marianne has seen many changes
the neighborhood has gone through, some not necessarily for the better.

“Bloomfield was very special, and is, but I just hope it can hang on a little longer. Once these old people die, it’s done. The people that are old stayed, but their kids grew up and went away, and that’s why Bloomfield’s not going to be the same. There’s no more ethnicity,” she said. For a woman who grew up in an ethnic Italian household, this is a sad prospect.

“There’s drugs and alcohol—it’s too close to crime now,” she said, which leaves her frightened and disheartened.

“Tonight, I’ll make somebody walk me to my car. Bloomfield is not a bad area, but it’s not getting any better.”

In spite of this, neither of the DelPizzos could imagine doing anything else. With no one to pass the business on to, retirement is a faraway thought for John and Marianne.

“I haven’t thought about that,” John says. “Places like this here, you don’t retire one day. It takes years. We need to stay busy,” he said. “They come to Del’s for Del’s. They want Italian.”

“[Del’s] will finish with me and my brother,” Marianne adds.

While John is happy with what he does, he wouldn’t force it on his children to uphold the family business, or even work there part-time.

“This is what I do,” he states, plain and simple. “We wanted them to get an education first, and if they needed Del’s, they could’ve used Del’s.”

John has four children, one aged 35, twin daughters, 24, and a 22-year-old. Marianne has two children, a daughter, 26, and a son, 18.

“It’s a difficult business;” John says. “We have an interfamilial rule: you either went to school or you went to work.”

Marianne has a stronger opinion against this. “I won’t let them—they’re not allowed. The way the economy is, this atmosphere is not healthy. It’s not the way it was when I grew up. I want my children to have a better life,” she says.

Like most parents, Marianne wants her children to explore every opportunity life presents.

“I have no regrets for what I did,” she says. “We all want better for our children. Even if they make less money than me, they’re going to be happy.”

The DelPizzos share the generosity instilled in them by their father. He was the person who gave away food and money and toys, the one who would bring people into his home on Christmas Eve so that they had somewhere to go.

“As long as I’m alive and I own Del’s, everybody will eat,” Marianne says. “My father was so well-known and well-loved. People still talk about him now, and that’s very precious to me.”

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**Pasta meets ice cream at Grasso Roberto**

by

**Joe Lombardo**

Thinking Bloomfield means thinking Italian cuisine. A hot plate of spaghetti is a popular choice. But at Grasso Roberto, they’re making spaghetti like no one else in the community ever has.

That’s because their spaghetti isn’t pasta at all—it’s ice cream.

When Grasso Roberto owner Dana Acton first came to Bloomfield, she sold classic frozen treats like Italian Ice and gelato. But a few years ago, she switched to selling a classic Italian dinner in dessert form.

From a distance the image on the window outside the shop looks like a regular plate of spaghetti. A closer look, however, shows vanilla gelato squeezed into noodle-shaped strands

Several icy scoops of gelato are dished out and offered at Grasso Roberto.
The ‘pasta’ is ladled with strawberry topping and two round meatball-disguised brownies are on the side.

they read it, they’ll come in.”

Dana counts on people’s curiosity to spark sales of her other items.

“It brings them in to look at the other products, so that’s the draw and our advantage,” she says. “Once they’re in, I think they’ll enjoy. We have some quality products.”

Dana realizes Bloomfield is an ideal location for this unique dessert.

“It’s a perfect fit for this community,” she says. “Everyone wants spaghetti if they’re in Little Italy, and we’re an ice cream shop, so we blended it together well.”

Dana graduated from Pitt with a degree in chemistry. Although she worked for Halliburton for 15 years, she has recently taken her laboratory skills to the creamery.

Two of her newest creations are a high-protein gelato and a high-energy Italian ice.

Dana has combined her passion for creation with her love for dogs to spawn her soy-based Dog Gelato. “Most dogs love the consistency,” she says.

In the mornings, while Dana sets up shop for the day, her puppy Arli plays the role of store greeter.

The energetic little beagle hops around the shop anticipating the arrival of some morning regulars.

Dana, laughing, admits, “She even brings in customers.”

The soy-based gelato is so good that Quiet Storm, a vegetarian and vegan café on Penn Avenue, buys it to use in their milkshakes.

Dana hopes she can continue to sell her products to businesses and stores. She’s working with East Stone co-ops to get her product on store shelves.

“Giant Eagle is who we really want to get in with,” she says.

Dana’s recent attempt to put her product on store shelves has come from the lack of walk-in customers. With the rising age of the Bloomfield community, the streets aren’t as bustling as they used to be.

“We’re losing a lot of walking business,” she says. “So I want to spread out as much as I can.”

Grasso Roberto also sells breakfast and panini. The prior shop owner began to sell hot food and cater occasionally, so when Dana bought the shop, she kept it the same.

They have good food, but Dana admits, “[We’re] a sweets shop. Coffee and sweets.”

In the colder months, Dana relies solely on her coffee and hot food sales, waiting until mid-April to begin making Italian ice again.

“Gelato we do year-round, but wait for the weather to break to do ice,” she says.

Grasso Roberto is located right next door to Donatelli’s Italian Food Center. Donatelli’s is over 75 years old, and Dana figures they must be doing something right. Considering Donatelli’s longevity, it’s hard not to steal a few tricks.

“So I time things with them,” she says. “When they pull their chairs in for the winter, I pull my chairs in for the winter.”

Dana even confesses to mimicking their marketing style. Dana’s hand-written “Homemade Soup” sign closely resembles the produce signs from the Italian store next door.

She used to write her specials on a framed-chalkboard, but has learned that simplicity and tradition are tools for success in Bloomfield.

“It’s because that’s what the community is familiar with,” she says.

Dana is assisted in the shop by her daughter Madi and mother Marlene. At first, Madi dreaded the notion of her mom owning a shop. However, the idea has grown on her. Madi is even considering becoming a business owner herself some day.

They have some additional help, but the three ladies run most of the day-to-day activities in the shop. When you’re in a community like Bloomfield, family goes a long way.
When you first walk through the doors of Bloomfield’s Crazy Mocha, it seems like an average coffee shop—until you notice that about one-third of the building is lined with shelves crammed full of DVDs. This, you will undoubtedly notice, is not the typical java joint. With closer inspection you’ll find that it’s not only a Crazy Mocha but also an independent DVD rental store. More specifically, it’s one running under the enigmatic name The Dreaming Ant.

The combination of a coffee shop and DVD store, which boasts the motto “DVDs a little off center,” is unusual yet somehow charming.

“It’s definitely a nexus of activity. There’s so much around that covers a lot of different sections of life. It’s a funny parade of people,” employee Andrew McKeon says.

There’s a diverse mix of people visiting The Dreaming Ant, from students hunched over laptops and seasoned movie buffs browsing the selection to the trombone player at the table just outside. It’s hard to distinguish Crazy Mocha customers from Dreaming Ant customers, as most are both. If you’re sitting sipping on a coffee, it’s hard to fight the urge to explore the shelves.

The Dreaming Ant could be described as a DVD boutique. Filled with “high quality and obscure” films, it’s a film lover’s haven. No matter how obscure or familiar the desired genre it’s likely to be found here, not excluding mainstream blockbusters and new releases, from the French drama “Amour de Femme” to DreamWorks’ “How to Train Your Dragon.”

“We actually have more movies than the Blockbuster around the corner,” said proprietor Dean Brant.

The vast amount of movies crammed into a small space may seem overwhelming at first glance but look again and you’ll notice every area is specifically classified by genre or director. Genres range from “Pittsburgh,” including movies like “Angels in the Outfield,” to “puppets,” with “Dante’s Inferno” falling into the category, and everything in between.

The Dreaming Ant is self-described as “Pittsburgh’s premiere source for renting and buying alternative, non-hit driven home entertainment specializing in International, American independent, gay & lesbian, documentary, music and adult DVDs,” and many agree. Pittsburgh Magazine voted The Dreaming Ant the best independent DVD rental store of 2010.

The movie selection isn’t its only appealing feature. The dynamic of the store and the coffee shop creates an aura entirely its own: Crazy Mocha’s laid-back, relaxing atmosphere (despite its name) meshes well with the friendly, eclectic vibe of the DVD rental store tucked in the back.

“It’s a nice synergy with the coffee shop,” McKeon says. “The coffee shop adds a social order.” The mingle of “coffee talk” and movie discussions integrate like coffee and donuts: an enjoyable treat.

One might wonder how this pairing came to be, and the answer lies with
The exterior of Bloomfield specialty store Grocieria Italiana draws customers with its striped awnings and patio furniture, giving the feel of an old front porch. A neon pink sign greets customers at the door, boldly proclaiming, “Try our tiramisu—it’s the best!”

Huge families and plentiful food have always been emblematic of Italians, and Bloomfield’s Grocieria Italiana is no exception. But people stop by the Groceria for the friendly atmosphere as much as the food.

“Everyone that works here is part of the family,” says Jim Luvara, the store manager. “We make them part of the family.”

Sneakers squeak on the green linoleum floor reminiscent of a grade school cafeteria, as customers approach the counter to order food that is made fresh daily: pasta salads, breads, and even a robust fourteen different types of ravioli.

“We make everything from scratch here. People know us for our ravioli—they’ve made it all over the U.S., even the Kentucky Derby,” Jim says proudly.

A regular walks up to the counter and peers inside. “Just seeing what’s here today,” he says to Jim. “I’ll be back later,” he adds, and strolls outside.

“I know everyone,” Jim says with a laugh.

In addition to the deli counters of food, there are shelves upon shelves...
of everything Italian, from pastas and olive oil to pizza sauce and pizzelles. Wicker baskets loaded with individual bags of pine nuts are placed alongside spices, anise, and parmesan cheese.

Jim’s mother, Rose Marie Rossi, has been the Groceria Italiana’s owner for 12 years. The store, which has always had an Italian flavor, has been here for 48 years.

“As a kid we used to come here from the South Hills to buy all of our Italian products,” Jim says. Now it’s in his family, keeping with the tradition of the local Italian market.

As the morning wears on, customers continue filing in and out of the store. Jim bustles around, calling out, “Can someone get the register?” as he makes small talk with the customers.

Outside of the store, three elderly gentlemen sit on the patio furniture.

John J. Collinger, 77, is the owner of the building that houses both the Groceria Italiana and the Pleasure Bar, which faces Liberty Avenue.

Jack, as he is known to friends, sits huddled into his sweatshirt, his watch around a bottle of water, as he talks to John Salvatore and Bill Russell. The three gentlemen are as much a part of the store as the pizzelles and ravioli, and contribute to the feeling Jim Luvara aims to project from his Groceria: a big Italian family.

Salvatore, 75, grew up in Bloomfield and visits the store three times a week. “We’ve known each other since we were this big,” he says, gesturing with his hand to a height of about four feet. “I come to hang out and see the people,” he adds, sipping his coffee from under the brim of his Iowa baseball cap.

Russell, 75, sits decked out in Notre Dame gear, finishing his doughnut. He yells across the street to a girl leaving her house, “You graduate yet?” and laughs.

Collinger, thinking his friends aren’t listening, leans in and says, “Put down that I’m the better looking one.”

The three friends meet up often to sit outside and swap stories, as well as to do their grocery shopping.

“I read the paper, do different things,” Collinger says.

“Makes sure he gets the rent,” Russell interjects. “I come because it’s something to do.”

“Yeah, to agitate us!” Collinger fires back.

The trio contributes to the family feel that exudes from the Groceria as strongly as the scent of fresh baked bread and homemade sauces. Customers coming to the Groceria Italiana know Collinger, Salvatore, and Russell from sitting outside and talking to them.

Angie Garzarelli, 32, is the woman that Russell yelled to earlier. She has lived across the street for about three years and does most of her shopping at the Groceria.

Angie works nights. “I’ve honestly stopped in for pepperoni rolls for dinner. You can smell it from the street,” Angie says. “I come in at 8:30 in the morning and eat one.”

Another older man shuffles up. “Very nice store,” he says. “Good food, nice personality. Is Rose Marie going to read this? Tell her I love her.” He smiles.

“Everybody calls me Caesar,” says the man named Julius Poiucci with a grin as he walks over to talk to Salvatore.

Fresh Italian food, friendly ownership and frequent store side banter ensure that even if you’ve only been there for a short period of time, you’re sure to leave the Groceria Italiana feeling like a member of the family.
Two middle-aged Italian men sit along Liberty Avenue on a breezy, cloudless Saturday afternoon. They’re at Antonelli’s, one of the many pizza shops found in Bloomfield, which is known as the “Little Italy” of Pittsburgh. Five months ago, they would have been in Cump’s Pizza. Two years ago, they would have been in a vacant building. Six years ago, a car repair shop.

In its 30 years of life, this building has seen toxic and edible oil spills, scraps of rubber, dough, exhaust pipes, sauce and cheese. It has played many roles for many different kinds of businessmen, and it is now a pizza shop for the second time during its existence. And today, when business is stagnant on this deserted block of Main Street, save for the many cars parked along the narrow two-way street, all that matters is how many times Big Ben will get sacked before he passes the ball.

“It doesn’t matter,” says Nick Sciulli, who was previously the owner of Cump’s Pizza Shop. “Ben wins it for us every time. He’s comin’ back, and comin’ strong. It’s up to the offensive line to keep him safe.”

“How don’t it matter? He can’t throw the ball, then that’s it. We’re done. The Steelers ain’t never seeing no seventh ring on the finger,” argues Marty Rosenfield, current owner of Antonelli’s Pizza.

Aside from their views on the Steelers’ quarterback, though, they’ve got a lot in common. Beside the fact that both Sciulli and Rosenfield have been owners of the same small building offering the same business, they also individually own auto shops just down the road, in opposite directions of each other. After a small, heated discussion, Sciulli lets Rosenfield get back to business, which at the moment consists of cleaning the abundance of dirty dishes lying around the kitchen area.

The kitchen area is also where food is served, and about a foot away, people can eat and play games. Basically, all pizza shop essentials are crammed into one rectangular room. The kitchen is visibly cluttered with pots, pans, sauce and spices. The view may not be much, but the aroma of fresh basil, garlic, tomatoes and dough is enough to make you want to order a large cheese pizza — to go, please. The one-room pizza shop offers seating for two and only two; any other tables would block the walkway to the back yard. There’s barely enough space to fit the supersized main fridge, let alone a regular fridge for soft drinks, and mini-fridge for water.

In the front corner of the shop, a Go-Fer pinball machine stands unplugged to “save electricity.” Along the opposite wall, there’s a 10-foot-long rectangular sign that reads: “ANTONELLI’S: PIZZA & SUBS.” The phone number is underneath, but unreadable because a giant cabinet stands in its way. Next to the cabinet is a touch-screen monitor flashing an R-rated game for customers to play while waiting for their orders.

Business is slow right now at Antonelli’s, which Rosenfield blames on his lack of advertising. “It’d be way up there if people knew about it,” he says. But he won’t spend money on ads, because “if people want some good pizza and subs they’ll find me, somehow.”

The place is most known for its homemade sauce. Rosenfield says he’s spent years trying to perfect it, as Antonelli’s is his second pizza shop. With fresh, fat tomatoes, garlic cloves, extra virgin olive oil and spices that he “won’t give away,” Rosenfield says he’s got “the most unique, honest pizza sauce in town.”
He buys his dough and cheese pre-made but keeps them fresh, tossing anything over a day old into the supersized garbage bin next to the oven. “If it sits, it goes. I’d rather lose a couple dollars than give away something moldy.”

With a combination of the freshness, sauce and service, Antonelli’s has never received a negative customer review. Customers don’t need to empty their pockets in order to walk out of Antonelli’s with enough food to feed a family of twelve. No items on the one-sided menu are over $14, and the minimum is a slice of pizza for a buck fifty.

That slice topples over the sides of a paper plate and barely fits in a small to-go box due to its enormity. Other options include the “biggest hoagies in town” reaching 24 inches long.

“Sometimes a big family comes in and gets a 12-inch, and other times a big guy comes in and gets a 24. Best part is, he’ll come back the next day for another one.”

6-inch subs are also available for a whopping $3.95, along with salads, calzones, pepperoni rolls and lunch specials.

Once customers order, they can either fight over the table in the seating, gaming and kitchen area, or take a stroll to the back, where they’ll find a fenced-in picnic area outside. Tree branches covered in leaves and red flowers hang over the grassy yard, and various sets of tables and chairs are scattered around in no particular order.

Rosenfield says anyone who visits Antonelli’s will revel in the delicious flavors of his food and will walk out the door with complete satisfaction. “I mean, really, how could you resist the best homemade Italian pizza sauce in town?”

All pizza shop essentials are crammed into one rectangular room.

A pizza from Antonelli’s is pulled fresh from the oven.
Bloomfield is split in two, straight down its main thoroughfare, Liberty Avenue. Unlike most Pittsburgh neighborhoods, the community is represented by two members of City Council – Patrick Dowd (District 7) in the north and Bill Peduto (District 8) in the south.

Dowd, a former high school teacher, says Pittsburgh’s “Little Italy” is now experiencing a kind of renaissance – an influx of young people that’s bringing vibrancy to the area. “Bloomfield is so popular because it’s a nexus of many different neighborhoods,” says Dowd. “There’s a nice niche emerging there.”

Dowd notes Bloomfield is the only city neighborhood where a foreign language is nearly as common as English – that is, of course, Italian. As a Councilman, Dowd tries to connect with constituents at the “Council-to-Go” meetings he holds in Bloomfield coffee bars and churches.

Large-scale job cuts at nearby West Penn Hospital are probably the most pressing concern to the residents of Bloomfield right now, says Dowd. West Penn Allegheny Health System President Christopher Olivia announced in June 2010 the hospital would consolidate services and shed up to 1,500 jobs. In October, that estimate was reduced to a final cut of 400 jobs; an additional 220 resigned, and 275 more will take other jobs within the company for a total of nearly 900 hospital employees leaving the Bloomfield area in one way or another. The emergency room of the hospital is closing as part of the consolidation, while outpatient services and outpatient surgery will remain in the facility.

Dowd says the hospital has been an integral part of the economy and character of Bloomfield for a long time, and the job losses don’t bode well for the neighborhood. “One cut is too many,” says Dowd. “What about the culture of that hospital?”

The District 7 Councilman says many of his constituents are also talking negatively about Marcellus Shale natural gas drilling. “I voted for the [citywide drilling] ban because that’s what my constituents wanted,” says Dowd. “[But] I doubt Marcellus Shale drilling will be seen in Bloomfield,” says Dowd.

Dowd says like most other places around the city, Bloomfield residents are also angry about Pittsburgh’s underfunded pension system and the parking issues surrounding it. To avoid a state takeover of the pension, the city must fund its retirement benefits system to 50%, which means coming up with about $250 million before year’s end. Bloomfield is also on the list for scheduled increases in parking fines.

Dowd says another major issue facing Pittsburgh neighborhoods is vacant housing. “But vacant housing is not the same [in Bloomfield] as it is in other neighborhoods, because it’s such a tight-knit community,” says Dowd.

Dowd, who also represents Lawrenceville and East Liberty, says when the current Council districts were created in the 1980s, they were designed to be of roughly the same size and population. The “at-large” districts of old meant that Council members could come from anywhere in the city, which Dowd says was causing some imbalance. “It was hard to achieve equity without cutting up some [neighborhoods],” says Dowd. Bloomfield was one place to get split in the new reckoning of nine Council districts.

But Dowd says Bloomfield’s division doesn’t usually create conflict or confusion; rather, he says it helps the community get what it needs. “[Peduto] and I work well on constituent issues, even if we disagree on Downtown issues,” says Dowd.

He says one of his favorite Bloomfield activities is walking around the farmers’ market. “That’s the great thing about Bloomfield: people coming together around food,” he says with a laugh. He says he can’t choose a favorite restaurant in the neighborhood – “because I’ll get in trouble” – but Dowd says that’s secondary to his constituents. “It’s not the restaurants and it’s not the business district; it’s the people.”
Bloomfield has a pulse that Karla Owens understands. As a part of the Bloomfield Development Corporation, Owens knows the make-up of the neighborhood.

“I guess you could say I feel the heartbeat of the neighborhood,” Owens says. “I think it’s hard for people to come in and feel that.”

Feeling Bloomfield’s rhythm is one of the 47-year-old’s many job requirements as executive director of the BDC. The BDC, located within the Bloomfield neighborhood, helps residents with issues such as demographic changes, neighborhood events and business closings.

Changes come to Bloomfield

One of the main goals for Owens, as a part of BDC, is to inform the neighborhood about changing demographics. Currently, Bloomfield’s population is half young professionals and half older residents, she says.

“Bloomfield has traditionally been known as an older community, but the past attitudes are problematic for needed change,” she says.

Some of the restaurants in the neighborhood continue to offer the same items as they did in previous year, although their clientele has changed. Owens says their unwillingness to switch business practices is hurting their bottom lines.

“How do we match our businesses with our demographics?” Owens asks.

“There is a different group in town and we have to get our businesses to change with that.”

Even though other business owners are unwilling to evolve, Owens understands its importance. As a co-owner of Bloomfield Jewelry for 15 years, she says the market changes and so should the businesses. In previous years, gold was cheaper and more popular than it is today. Due to the decrease in gold’s popularity, she says she would offer it less. This willingness to change is an attitude Owens hopes will transfer to the community.

Advances within Bloomfield such as wireless cafes, bike lanes and increased recycling areas are difficult for the elderly residents to accept, Owens says.

“Accepting that and changing that is a challenge for us. The people here, who are rooted in their generations, sometimes [are] a weakness and a challenger,” Owens says. “If you said to an 80-year-old person, ‘we are going to reduce the carbon footprint,’ they are like, ‘What?’”

The impact of West Penn’s closing

Although there is a generational gap with new advances, the majority of the community opposes the closing of the Western Pennsylvania Hospital emergency room, part of a move by the West Penn Allegheny Health System to save money and consolidate services at Allegheny General Hospital. More than 350 employees at the Bloomfield hospital were laid off, and local businesses are nervous that they’ll end up in the red with fewer staff members, patients and families needing coffee, cannoli or a cold one. The ER treated its last patient on December 31, 2010.
Owens says the main issue of the closing is coming to terms with reality. “I never thought we would be talking about West Penn closing. Is this the beginning of the end?” she questions.

Even though the decision is final, Owens says the impact on Bloomfield can be decreased if West Penn remains transparent about the decisions with community residents.

“The community feels that they built this hospital and that we’re being sacrificed for AGH [Allegheny General Hospital] to make AGH the flagship,” Owens says. “They are very bitter about that. People are going to have to make adjustments, there’s no doubt about it.”

Owens’ neighborhood loyalty

During her years at Bloomfield Jewelry, which she co-owned with her husband, Owens met her current business associate, Terry Aiello. Aiello, the 55-year-old Main Street manager of BDC, used to be one of Owens’ jewelry customers. She says her past work has positively influenced her goals for helping the community.

The jewelry store had a great reputation and Owens’ dedication ensured the neighborhood’s trust, Aiello says. Years after becoming friends with Owens and proving her dedication to the neighborhood, Aiello was offered the job at BDC.

“I think the reason Karla thought I was a good idea was because I already knew the business owners and they would be more likely to listen to someone they already knew,” Aiello says.

In 2007, Owens closed the jewelry business and took over her current position with BDC. Her office on Gross Street is located one block from the popular Liberty Avenue and allows her to visit community business owners. When the position at BDC opened up, the decision was easy for her.

“You have to pound the pavement and be in and out of the businesses,” Owens says. “I had a leg up on that because I knew what I did as a business person to succeed it this neighborhood.”

During her 15 years in the jewelry business, she would help the community, even during her off hours. On frequent trips to the bank, people would hand her jewelry to fix. She would take the jewelry without question and head back to the shop to begin working again.

“That’s what you need: you need that connection with the community,” Owens says.

Living in Bloomfield is not required as part of her job, but it is important to have a strong presence with the people.

Ben Foreman, the 76-year-old president of BDC, believes Owens’ position suits her.

“She was the perfect fit to move in as the executive director of Bloomfield Development Corporation,” he says. “She works 24/7 because she has a love for the community.”

Foreman says Owens’ impact on the community is widespread due to her ability to understand the neighborhood.

“Karla has really come up through the ranks because she was a business manager; therefore she’s got a pulse on the community.”

‘Seeds of Hope’ sprout at Pacific and Friendship Avenues

by Chad Houck

The century-old church stands tall and majestic on a plot of land at the corner of Pacific and Friendship Avenues. Inside, the scene is much different. Months ago, six inches of water covered the basement floor and the rotted floorboards on the second level were deemed unsafe and removed. This building is the future home of Seeds of Hope, and it couldn’t be a better fit.

Seeds of Hope, a faith-based outreach program sponsored by Earthen Vessels Outreach (EVO), uses multiple neighborhood programs to provide meals, supplemental education, and hope to the urban youth of the local neighborhoods of Bloomfield. Where some see a problem, EVO sees potential.

Ryan England, a member of EVO’s staff explains that Seeds of Hope provides an after-school program for children to continue what the school has started but cannot finish.

“We focus on things they don’t focus on in school because there they are focused on what are on the standardized tests,” England says. “Our educational programs get good results but with classrooms we can do a lot better.”

The program might benefit from federal funding but cannot obtain it in their current building, Evaline Lutheran Church, located only a block away from their future home. The classroom space at the church is cramped, and renovating it would cost too much.

“Why should we invest $50,000 in a building we don’t even own?” England asks. “It’s not ideal.”
Because the programs could use the federal money, the leaders of EVO decided that a new home was a necessity.

In the summer of 2007, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ran an article called “Can This Building Be Saved?” outlining the $125,000 asking price and the history of the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bloomfield. Built in 1894 and used until 1961, the church stood mostly unused for about 40 years. A Pentecostal church bought the building in 2001 and stayed until 2005, when they left the building abandoned once again. The church quickly fell into disrepair and became an inviting home for squatters and looters.

“When we got here, there were homeless people squatting [in the basement],” England says as he walks on the temporary floorboards of the old sanctuary, looking up. “The roof was a mess, you could see the stars.”

The church’s ornate woodwork has been weathered away and the stained glass windows are gone, replaced with plywood. England says that after the Pentecostal congregation abandoned the place, looters moved in and stole anything of value.

“The copper was stolen from the basement,” England says. “The water was running for 3 to 6 weeks.”

The church’s sale was not a simple process. England says EVO had offered to buy the church once before but was denied.

“The building was set to be demolished three separate times, but the financing fell through,” England explains, saying developers were interested in placing townhouses on the current property.

EVO finally completed the sale in September of 2007, buying the property for a more realistic $68,000 considering the shape of the building and the future renovations it would require.

Those renovations will take months and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. But a smiling England envisions EVO’s new building, which will be named Pacific Sanctuary.

Benefitting from thousands of volunteer hours from hundreds of helpers, the new building is being prepared to provide the best services to the youth of Bloomfield. The basement of Pacific Sanctuary will include six classrooms, a large multipurpose room, and a full kitchen. The second-floor sanctuary

Seeds of Hope is a faith-based outreach program that enriches the lives of Bloomfield children in need.
will house a cross made with the original woodwork from the building.

Seeds of Hope’s benevolent beginnings date back to the summer of 2002, when a six-week program offered to the community attracted 40 kids.

As an extension of the summer program, Seeds of Hope offered after school support to the same children of the neighborhoods. The program helps to build upon what students already learn in school and is state-funded as part of No Child Left Behind’s Supplemental Education Services. Using volunteers and staff with teaching experience, the program utilizes a 15-station computer lab.

Pacific Sanctuary will feature 10 classrooms geared toward improving the after school help, allowing EVO to receive more funding. Along with supplementing scholastic education, the after-school program provides job and life-skills lessons, like when England took 14 boys to the grocery store for the very first time.

England recalls a little boy whose older brother would tell him, “He don’t deserve nice stuff, he’s too dumb to appreciate it.”

“He struggled with self-esteem, not a learning disability,” England says. “It took six to eight weeks for him to stop acting out and then another six to eight weeks to start to learn.”

England said when the child, a third grader, finally learned to read, he ran around the room shouting, “I learned to read, I learned to read!”

On a typical Tuesday or Thursday evening, kids gather together to eat, fellowship, and have small groups as part of the faith-based outreach. England stresses that the faith-based teachings and guidance are something the kids won’t find at school.

“We can bring faith into it,” England says. “Success and social values don’t have any meaning to these kids, but ‘it’s what God wants’ resonates with them.”

The gatherings usually begin with fellowship and dinner. Funded federally as an at-risk meal provider, EVO serves over 12,000 meals a year.

“We feed every kid that comes through the door,” England says.

Destiny, a 6th grader who has been coming for one year, enjoys the meals.

“The food’s pretty good,” she says through a gap-toothed smile. “It’s tasty, home-cooked and fresh.”

Tuesday nights are for middle school to high school girls and features creative arts or dance. Thursday nights are for the boys, who enjoy basketball and fellowship.

“We’ve learned at this age it’s better to keep them separate,” a volunteer jokes during a Tuesday night gathering.

Many of those who help out on these nights volunteer, but some receive work study aid. Shannon Finley, a senior at the University of Pittsburgh, volunteered her first year and received work study each year after that.

“I wanted to live off campus and find something to do,” Finley says.

West Penn layoffs shake residents and business owners

by Joe Lombardo

West Penn Hospital laid off over 350 employees, but the cuts will affect more than just the workers.

Paddy Cake Bakery Manager Susie O’Leary knows they will probably lose clients.

“We’ve been selling to people from West Penn for 29 years and without them, it’s just going to be quieter,” Susie says. “We are going to take some form of a loss. To what magnitude, we aren’t yet sure.”

Silky’s Pub is down the street from the hospital and has already noticed a drop in business.

“Fridays during happy hour, this place used to be full of nurses in scrubs and all, probably because of payday,” says Billy Franceini, a bartender at Silky’s for eight years. “But I guess there hasn’t been much to celebrate lately.”

Lombardozzi’s Restaurant, right across the street from the hospital, is a prime candidate to greet and seat fewer people. Bartender Jeff Galus thinks midday business will suffer without West Penn employees crowding the Bloomfield streets.

“Lunch is where we see the most business from actual hospital employees,” Galus says. “Nurses and doctors come over and grab something to eat, and that number will probably decrease.”

Galus understands where most of Lombardozzi’s customers come from. “If we lose business, it’s not going to be the employees themselves, so much as the people that go there,” he says. “It’s the families and friends of the patients that come over and have dinner, or get take-out for someone in the hospital.”

Susie knows that Paddy Cake’s birthday cakes will continue to attract people from all over Pittsburgh, but the hospital consistently brought customers.

‘They used us like pawns,’ says Dawn Mahaffey, a West Penn nurse. ‘Very qualified nurses weren’t getting jobs at other branches.’

by Joe Lombardo

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Dawn Mahaffey, a West Penn nurse, says that very qualified nurses weren’t getting jobs at other branches. She says that the hospital consistently brought customers.
“Nurses and doctors were always in here buying treats during lunch,” Susie says. She will miss the people more than their business, however.

“Family members are constantly in here buying treats,” she adds, “Not for themselves, but for their loved ones in the hospital.”

The President of the Bloomfield Citizens Council, Janet Cerceone Scullion, says the hospital and the community have a special relationship. “West Penn is not just a business in the neighborhood, West Penn Hospital is a part of Bloomfield and the family of Bloomfield,” she says.

Scullion, who also writes and publishes Spirit of Bloomfield, understands what it will take to keep the neighborhood blossoming.

What we need to do as a community is support the five specialties they are still offering, give them all the support we can and hit the ground running with a reuse committee, so we get somebody in those empty spaces as fast as possible so we can save some of those jobs.”

Those five specialties are obstetrics, a neonatal intensive care unit, a burn unit, outpatient surgeries and inpatient rehab services.

She adds, “It’s like the Titanic over there, everybody is jumping ship because there is zero job security.”

The hospital’s emergency room closed on December 31, 2010. Along with the ER and most inpatient services, the hospital will no longer house oncology, neurosciences, orthopedics and cardiovascular care.

Many nurses anticipated working at Allegheny General Hospital and remaining in WPAHS, but interviews at AGH became hard to set up and phone calls were hardly returned.

“They used us like pawns,” says Dawn Mahaffey, a registered nurse at West Penn for 16 years. “Very qualified nurses weren’t getting jobs at other WPAHS branches.”

Even in the cases where nurses were already accepted for a job at AGH, they would get called back explaining there was a financial mistake made and they’ll receive less money with their new job.

“They’ve done that to two people that I know of,” Mahaffey says.

That would make AGH the hospital’s iceberg.

“That was a huge mistake, we should have never rescued them, it was our downfall,” Mahaffey says. “While AGH was thriving, we were tightening our belts, and anything we did well or profited from was systematically transferred to AGH.”

With West Penn closing, Mahaffey thinks AGH will suffer.

“The problem won’t be solved and AGH will eventually go down and they won’t have anyone else to blame,” she says. “AGH is directly responsible for making West Penn look like they don’t make any money.”

Scullion knows Bloomfield has to stay positive, but she has seen the effects that the job cuts have had on the Bloomfield people.

“They [West Penn] have entire families up there,” she says. “They have the control and the power to wipe out entire families in this neighborhood. They’re a huge employer of the Bloomfield community.”
Harry Greb was many things to his fans. Although he died in 1926, the "Pittsburgh Windmill" remains a revered name in the boxing lore.

Greb fought over 300 times during his highly accomplished career. And while he traveled across the country, his roots reside in Bloomfield. During his childhood he lived with his family at 138 N. Millvale Ave. Although he initially worked in a manufacturing plant, his interest in boxing increased after visits to local boxing gyms. No longer content to just watch, Greb started fighting. People took notice.

The middleweight boxing champion was only 5-foot-8 and weighed between 160-170 pounds. While he lacked a large body, he would fight boxers in higher weight classes, sometimes over 30 pounds heavier than Greb.

Besides his small yet strong frame, Greb was tenacious. While today’s famous boxers fight a few times a year, Greb would fight 20-30 times, says boxing writer Edward F. Schuyler Jr., who covered the AP's boxing beat for 40 years.

“He was one of the greatest fighters who ever lived. No question about it,” Schuyler says.

“When you say fighter, Harry Greb’s name comes up. He fought for money, but he fought for the job of it. He was a fighter.”

Greb dished out punishment, but he took plenty of shots, too. Unbeknownst to the press or his opponents, he continued to fight for five years after becoming blind in his right eye.

Boxing has evolved significantly since Greb last fought. Schuyler says this would have been difficult for Greb.

“He could fight in any era but the way boxing is conducted now, I don’t know if he could have handled all that,” Schuyler says.

Although the business aspect of the current boxing field might have caused difficulty for Greb, his legendary stamina would have given him a puncher’s chance.

He could have fought anyone in his weight class today and then fought two other boxers right afterwards, Schuyler says.

While accomplished, Greb’s career was short-lived. In October of 1926, he went into the hospital for eye surgery and never woke up from the anesthetic. Just as his life began in Pittsburgh, it ended there as well. Greb is buried at Calvary Cemetery in Pittsburgh.

Schuyler says he wasn’t alive during Greb’s career, but his legendary status has continued after his death.

“He is one of the most legendary boxers that boxing produced.”

Although boxing has survived without Greb, his impact on the business continues.

“Twenty to 30 years from now the guys that are fighting now will be forgotten, but not Harry Greb,” Schuyler says.
When the original Bloomfield Bridge opened on November 19, 1914, the *Pittsburgh Sun* gushed that it was “the longest, the highest and one of the most expensive structures of the kind that has ever been erected in the city.”

The 2,100 foot structure, spanning the steep ravine between Bloomfield and Herron Hill (now Polish Hill), was christened with a raucous parade featuring floats, marching bands and military servicemen. A daring couple - against the wishes of local clergy and despite heavy police presence - became Mr. and Mrs. George Webb on the bridge that day when a minister performed their vows.

The bridge’s opening was another sign of Pittsburgh’s commitment to industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

“The year 1914 was a period of great growth for Pittsburgh,” says Duquesne University history professor Perry Blatz. Pittsburgh then ranked in the top ten among United States cities in population, but currently ranks in the sixties.

While Bloomfield now has a large Italian population, many German and Irish immigrants settled there first. “Immigrants had come from Europe...new infrastructure like the Bloomfield Bridge made it easier to get around town. There were a great many manufacturing facilities in the city, especially along the rivers,” Blatz says. According to Janet Cercone Scullion, author of “Images of America: Bloomfield,” at least 20 factories employed the Bloomfield community in every field from metals to bricks to bread and beer.

Those crossing the bridge on their way to work might have caught a glimpse of fame. The Bloomfield Citizen’s Council says that Hollywood actor Gene Kelly was dancing for nickels on nearby Lorigan Street before he appeared in *Singin’ in the Rain*. Johnny Unitas is bronzed in Canton as an NFL legend, but before that, the local kid cut by the Steelers earned $6 a game playing semi-pro ball at Dean’s...
Field (later renamed to honor fallen police officer and Bloomfield native Paul Sciullo) under the bridge, leading the Bloomfield Rams to the 1955 Steel Bowl Conference Championship.

Yet those memories are all that remain of the first Bloomfield Bridge, which closed in 1978 and was reduced to rubble two years later.

The reasons for the bridge's demolition, as well as the nine year wait between the first bridge's closing and the second's grand opening, sound quite familiar to present-day Pittsburghers -- decaying infrastructure, cost overruns and political wrangling.

The original Bloomfield Bridge was closed for repairs in 1948, 1958, and every year from 1968 to 1971. In 1972, drivers again had to find another way into Oakland and beyond when major repairs closed the bridge for three months.

While the bill for the bridge ballooned, it didn't become any sturdier. In 1978, city inspectors discovered rusty, twisted support beams and crumbling concrete. The bridge closed in May, and by the summer, officials decided it had taken its last commuter into Polish Hill.

According to Perry Bush, author of “A Neighborhood, a Hollow and the Bloomfield Bridge: The Relationship Between Community and Infrastructure,” repeated repairs to the Bloomfield Bridge cost nearly $2.5 million.

“The Bloomfield Bridge does point out the substantial expense of renewing and repairing infrastructure and maintaining the infrastructure that previous generations saw as progress,” Blatz says. “It’s a burden that remains in the ‘City of Bridges.’

In August 2010, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that 29 percent of bridges in the five-county Pittsburgh area are structurally deficient. The national average is around 12 percent.

Bureaucratic bickering delayed construction of a replacement Bloomfield Bridge until 1982, and the project ground to a halt when federal funding was temporarily cut off after toxic waste was found at the construction site. The bridge finally opened in 1987 at a cost of nearly $33 million.

Despite the construction headaches, Bloomfield was ready to party. A parachutist landed on the bridge. Pittsburgh Mayor Richard Caliguiri smashed a bottle of beer off the structure to kick off a parade. And, in homage to the Webbs, another couple said "I do" on the span linking Little Italy and Polish Hill.

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Memories are all that remain of the first Bloomfield Bridge, which closed in 1978 and was reduced to rubble two years later.

Reform mayor shaped modern Pittsburgh

by Chad Houck

David L. Lawrence, a four-term mayor of the city of Pittsburgh and a one-term governor of Pennsylvania, was born and raised in Bloomfield. Lawrence is responsible for helping to make Pittsburgh, originally a largely Republican area, into a Democratic hotbed.

During the war years, Lawrence held multiple positions in government and was elected mayor of Pittsburgh in 1945 where he served until 1959, a stretch of four terms. During Lawrence's reign as mayor, he implemented an urban renewal plan to clean up Pittsburgh, which at the time was dealing with a great deal of smog and pollution. He remains one of the first civic leaders to implement an urban renewal plan of this kind.

During Lawrence's mayoral years, he called for the creation of Point Park and the redevelopment of the Golden Triangle. Lawrence was instrumental in making sure that Point Park stayed mostly unchanged despite the two roadways that cross the area. He urged planners to make an effort to prevent the highways from destroying the park's scenic value.

In a speech at a conference on urban design in 1956 hosted by Harvard University, Lawrence said, “Gateway Center and Point Park, in their final development, will actually give us something unique in urban life—a greenbelt border for a central business district, a blending of office buildings, highways, bridges, fountains, gardens, trees, and water.”

Lawrence's plan, dubbed Renaissance I, allowed the city to remove its label of "hell with the lid taken off" and develop an urban environment that kept natural elements, while moving forward in an industrial world.

“I do not pore over blueprints. I have no personal theories of design. I don't read the architectural magazines,” Lawrence said in the speech. “I am only a very practical and prosaic mayor of a large city, which I love, and which I want to see become more serviceable to its region and more livable for its inhabitants.”

Lawrence served from 1959-63, again instituting environmental protection for Pennsylvania along with anti-discrimination legislation, fair housing laws, and historic preservation efforts.

The David L. Lawrence Convention Center along the Allegheny River is named after him, along with David Lawrence Hall on the University of Pittsburgh's campus.
Snubbed by Steelers, he became a champion

by Dan Hill

Underneath of the Bloomfield Bridge lies a small, unassuming sports park. Now named in honor of fallen police officer Paul Sciullo, the former Dean's Field was once home to football legend Johnny Unitas. When his football career reached its nadir, he spent a year playing semi-pro football for $6 a game with the Bloomfield Rams.

There's much more to his story than what took place in his year at Dean's Field, however. Johnny Unitas' climb to greatness was strewn with obstacles. Born in Pittsburgh on May 7, 1933, he picked up football while attending St. Justin's High School. When the team's quarterback broke his ankle, Unitas stepped in and played well enough to attract interest from colleges.

Unfortunately, his first school of choice, Notre Dame, didn't think that Unitas' scrawny six-foot-tall frame would hold up on the field and turned him down. Soon after, the University of Louisville picked him up and Unitas packed his bags for Kentucky.

His four-year career as a Louisville Cardinal was successful, to say the least. As a freshman, Unitas made his first start in the fifth game of the 1951 season against St. Bonaventure. Though the Cardinals lost 22-21, Unitas' talent still shined with 11 completed passes in a row and three touchdowns on the day. By the end of his college career, he had racked up 28 touchdowns and 3,179 passing yards.

Unitas' college statistics caught the eye of the Pittsburgh Steelers, who selected him in the ninth round of the 1955 draft. The team had four men trying to fill three quarterback slots, however, and Unitas was cut because Steelers coach Walt Kiesling didn't find him knowledgeable enough to quarterback a professional team.

Unitas had a family he needed to support, so he took on a construction job in Bloomfield. He played the role of "monkey man," so named because he had to climb the 125 foot shafts on pile drivers to apply lubrication. To stay involved in football, Unitas played in often abysmal conditions at Dean's Field for the Bloomfield Rams. The field was primarily dirt, and they had to sprinkle oil on the
Signed for $17,000 and put on the roster coming out of Pittsburgh. Unitas was active statistics and 18 seasons under his belt. He had 40,239 passing yards and 290 touchdowns. His 47 game touchdown pass streak still stands today. Unitas was enshrined into the Pro Football Hall of Fame July 28, 1979. In 2002, he suffered a fatal heart attack at age 79 in Timonium, Maryland. A Pennsylvania Historical Marker honoring “Johnny U” was dedicated in 2004.

Toxic train wreck caused Bloomfield evacuation

by Dan Walters

Some events are so frightening that the memories they create are indelibly etched into the minds of those unfortunate enough to have witnessed them. Such was the situation in Bloomfield on April 11, 1987.

When some of the tank cars began burning, a cloud of thick black smoke enveloped the neighborhood.

It was the day before Palm Sunday in Bloomfield, home to many of the city’s Italian Americans and the site of two traditionally ethnic Catholic churches. Like Christians throughout the world, Bloomfield residents were preparing for Holy Week and anticipating the end of their Lenten fast. Residents were already beginning to color eggs, fill Easter baskets, and prepare for the family gatherings that would take place on Easter Sunday after church services. At 12:29 PM, a head-on collision involving two Conrail freight trains derailed 34 railroad cars and the plans of everyone within 2.6 miles of the wreck.

The toppled cars spilled volatile chemicals and paper products onto the ground. When some of the tank cars began burning, a cloud of thick black smoke enveloped the neighborhood. Pittsburgh authorities ordered 22,000 residents in the vicinity to evacuate their homes when they discovered that one of the chemicals, phosphorus oxychloride, was leaking from one of the derailed tank cars. Phosphorus oxychloride vaporizes when it comes in contact with air and converts to acid in the lungs when inhaled.

The toxic fumes that spiraled skyward from the burning rail cars sent 14 people suffering from breathing problems to a local hospital. No one in the derailment was injured and the 14 victims were expected to recover without any long-term ill effects.

The churches in the area were empty that Palm Sunday morning in 1987 as city workers plugged the leak and removed the tanker car that carried the toxic chemical. After several hours of anxious uncertainty, Pittsburgh Public Safety Director Glenn Cannon announced that none of the chemicals being transported had ignited. Residents were permitted to return home late Sunday afternoon, almost 24 hours after the accident, when Mayor Richard Caliguri officially declared the emergency had ended.

The phosphorus oxychloride had been pumped from the train’s tank car into two tanker trucks. The toxic chemical was transported out of Bloomfield under police escort, sirens blaring and bullhorns advising people to stay clear of the convoy.

The fear was intense on that day for residents, city officials, Conrail management, and public safety workers.

Robert Fuller, assistant chief of the City of Pittsburgh Emergency Medical Services Bureau, has over three decades of service in public safety positions. He has responded to crises on the city’s rivers and has taken part in hazardous materials rescues. At a Red Cross Awards banquet this year, Fuller said that the 1987 train wreck in Bloomfield was one of the most harrowing experiences of his career. “The potential for a terrible disaster was real and frightening to all of our responders,” he said. “Fortunately, the outcome was good.”

Since that fateful day, those who were involved in the event have become concerned about hazardous materials transport, and academics have weighed in on the issue as well. G. O. Rogers, B. L. Shumpert, and J. H. Sorensen surveyed residents of Bloomfield about the toxic train wreck and in 1990 published a report chronicling residents’ response to the event.

One of the evacuees from that day, Margaret Gentile, says “The city did a great job in getting people out of the area and cleaning up the mess, but I hope that nothing like this ever happens again. Next time we might not be so lucky.”
Bloomfield is Pittsburgh’s own little slice of Italy, and the neighborhood’s two bocce ball courts are as integral a part of that heritage as the restaurants, flags and family-owned grocery stores.

Bocce, an Italian game that dates back to the Roman Empire, involves strategy and luck akin to bowling. The game consists of rolling larger balls—or boccias—as close as possible to the smaller ball, the pallina (or jack), without hitting it. Two teams of two to four players alternately try to achieve this goal, and the first team to obtain 16 points wins. People play bocce anywhere from the beach to the grass, but to be true to the sport, it should be played on a stone-dust court.

The neighborhood’s two bocce courts are in the public play area, located near the Bloomfield Bridge. The sport is becoming increasingly popular, especially during community gatherings such as Bloomfield’s Little Italy Days.

For Jack DeLeonibus, founder of the Pittsburgh-based Bocce Mafia team, Bloomfield’s bocce courts stir up fond memories. “When I think of Bloomfield, it conjures up images of families getting together,” DeLeonibus said. “Bocce is a sport of skill and strategy that is best enjoyed and played among families and friends. Everyone can participate— it’s a game that crosses generational lines. It’s also a wonderful way to just bring people together. It pretty much epitomizes what Bloomfield, a place where I was born and raised, reminds me of.”

Bocce tournaments are popular particularly during neighborhood festivities, especially Bloomfield’s Little Italy Days. “Slots for teams fill up quickly,” DeLeonibus said. “It’s a great time—even if you’re just a spectator. Sure, the competition can be fierce at times. Some families take it so seriously that they now use measuring sticks or rulers to measure the distance to the pallino to accurately record the point!”

Bloomfield’s bocce courts were constructed in the early ’90s. Before then, families played together in their backyards after dinner or on weekends to unwind.

“To me, it just brought the community closer together. With the opening of two professional courts, leagues and more serious competition began to form,” DeLeonibus reflected. “Today, it’s difficult to get into these leagues because of the high level of interest among the residents.”

In spite of this, people still play in their backyards. The leagues are a large part of the neighborhood heritage now. Bloomfield is even home to a women’s league, which competes from May until late August.

DeLeonibus has developed quite a following for his league, Bocce Mafia, with everything from a detailed website to a Facebook page. He didn’t start the league to get friended on Facebook, though. “I started Bocce Mafia because of nostalgic reasons and also for the passion I have for this sport,” he said. “When I was a kid, I remember playing bocce at annual family reunions and other family gatherings. It’s always been a large part of my heritage and a part of Bloomfield that I will always cherish.”
Motherland: many immigrants from same village

by

ROBYN RUDISH-LANING

Though an ocean separates them, Castel di Sangro and Bloomfield are not so different. Founded around the year 1000 by the counts of Sangro, Castel di Sangro is a beautiful city rich with culture. It is located in the province of L’Aquila in Abruzzo, Italy. According to Carla Lucente, director of the International Relations department and honorary Italian consulate at Duquesne, Castel di Sangro is home to one of the most beautiful mountains in all of Italy. Monte Meta offers a panoramic view of Italy, including the Mediterranean Sea. Currently, it is home to about 6,000 people.

Bloomfield, Pittsburgh’s “Little Italy,” was founded by Italian immigrants who migrated mainly from Castel di Sangro in the early 20th century. When moving to America, these Italians chose to call Bloomfield home and quickly flourished.

In the 13th century, Castel di Sangro was the unfortunate victim of mass destruction by the army of the Pope. Over the centuries, the city has been caught in the midst of multiple battles. On May 13, 1815, the Battle of Castel di Sangro, a minor battle during the Neapolitan War, was fought between the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Naples. Castel di Sangro also suffered a great deal of damage as a result of battles during World War II.

According to Lucente, Castel di Sangro is also home to many shepherds in the mountains and valley where the city is located. It is also the birthplace of Teofilo Patini, a painter made famous for his depictions of the local shepherds and their herds. In addition to Patini, the Italian football team Castel di Sangro Calcio also calls this city home. The team made a name for itself in the mid-1990s by rising to the second highest league in Italian Calcio. They are also the subject of the book “The Miracle of Castel di Sangro” by Joe McGinniss, making its hometown proud.

Castel di Sangro has had its share of fame and has great deal of culture to share. Luckily for Pittsburgh, Bloomfield can serve as their own piece of the motherland.

Bloomfield’s college All-Star

by

MATT KASZNEL

Walter Raskowski’s life after college football didn’t involve big contracts, coaching jobs, broadcasting gigs or a bust in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

The only Hall of Fame he ever made was the one in Lawrence County. And the only jobs he ever held had to do with looking at other people’s teeth.

Born on January 19, 1915, in Bloomfield, Raskowski dropped out of high school when he was 16 to start working, according to his daughter Jo Ann Greisinger. But he returned to New Castle High School a few years later when “he found out that work was real hard,” Greisinger says.

After graduating, he received a football scholarship from the University of Pittsburgh, which Raskowski used to pay his way through dentistry school. The lineman’s three years of pigskin with the Panthers included three winning seasons, a national title in 1937 and three games with the 1939 College All-Star team. In those games, he played the New York Giants twice and the Washington Redskins, led by future Hall of Fame quarterback Sammy Baugh.

Despite the accolades, Greisinger says she and her sister didn’t hear much about Raskowski’s on-field accomplishments.
“We were two girls, though my sister is an avid football fan,” says Greisinger, 67. “My mother and father separated in the 50s, so even though he was still around, he didn’t talk too much about it. We have tons of stuff though, pictures from the era. He lived on.”

Raskowski married Mary Scuillo during college and moved into a home at 4743 Friendship Avenue in 1943, where Greisinger was born and still lives with her husband.

“This house has been our house since I was born,” Greisinger says. “I got married, and we just stayed here.”

The separation also occurred due to the couple’s different “priorities.”

“He taught at dentist school til 4:00, then at five he went to his office. We would see him maybe 9 or 9:30 if we were up because we were kids then,” Greisinger says. “Like I said, Italians can be very judgmental.”

Despite this, Greisinger held no ill will towards her father after the separation.

“He was my dad. That was, you took him for what he was,” Greisinger says. Raskowski died in August of 1971.

In Bloomfield’s Morrow Park, at the intersection of Baum Boulevard, Liberty Avenue and South Aiken Avenue, stands an 18-foot-tall limestone and bronze memorial built to commemorate the 5,000 men and women from Pittsburgh’s Eighth Ward who served in World War II.

The memorial was an expensive project with a $22,000 price tag. Mayor David L. Lawrence, who was also a resident of the Eighth ward, assembled a committee to raise the money needed to construct the memorial. The committee collected contributions and staged a benefit to raise money needed to fund the memorial. When funding for the memorial fell short, Juliano and his wife, Adeline, donated $5,300 to the project to help make the memorial possible. Juliano never got to see the completed memorial, however. He died sixteen months before it was unveiled on June 14, 1949, but his wife was present at the ceremony.

Vittor designed over 50 war memorials and sculptures throughout Western Pennsylvania. Originally from Mozzato, Italy, Vittor taught sculpture at Carnegie Institute of Technology and the Carnegie Museum and also founded Society of Sculptors in Pittsburgh.

“The legacy of famed sculptor Frank Vittor has reached into the 21st century, carrying with it the heart and soul of the Bloomfield residents who contributed the finances and ‘sweat equity’ that made the Eighth Ward Honor Roll a dream come true. The men and women who have served our country will never be forgotten,” said Bloomfield Citizens Council President Janet Cercone Scullion in a press release.

Along three sides of the memorial stand an airman, a sailor and a soldier. Navy serviceman George Caloger posed in uniform at Vittor’s request. Vittor was meticulous when sculpting the servicemen, especially Caloger. He included the 13 stars on Caloger’s belt and scarf, at the request of Juliano. Soldier Richard Renckly also posed in uniform for the memorial at the urging of Edward Staudt, who was the President of Pioneer Savings and Loan Bank.

The monument’s dedication ceremony took place after a parade on Flag Day on June 14, 1949. Hidden beneath heavy brown paper for a year prior, the memorial was finally unveiled by the Gold Star Mothers, women who had lost sons in battle.

Throughout the years, the sculpture became worn and moldy. In 2007, the city provided $20,000
The Ateleta Beneficial Society was founded on September 11, 1924, in Bloomfield by Italian immigrants from the town of Ateleta, Italy. Its founders wanted the society to become an important social center for Bloomfield's Italian American community.

“People arriving in Bloomfield really measured in hundreds per year, but of course, to a give a neighborhood a hundred more people in a year might seem like a lot to any neighborhood,” says Joe Rishel, a Duquesne University history professor.

According to Rishel, one of the reasons that so many Italians from Ateleta migrated to Bloomfield around the same time was “stem migration,” in which one person migrates to America and relatives soon follow suit.

“If this society functioned like most, it provided an operating function that found these people a place to live,” Rishel says. “Often times, these types of societies also helped find jobs for these individuals. The jobs were mostly public jobs, which a cousin or a second cousin could get them.”

Rishel says it was difficult for immigrants to obtain well-paying jobs because of the language barrier. “They would get by, by overhearing English from the other workers,” he says.

In the early 20th century, Italians immigrants were sometimes exploited by the padrone system. Labor brokers...
In Bloomfield, a lone Starbucks shop looks slightly out of place next to the numerous Italian restaurants and bakeries that anchor Liberty Avenue. This particular Starbucks, though, is more than it seems: it sits inside the remains of what was once a popular movie theater.

The Plaza Theatre, also known as the Metropolitan Movie Theatre, was built by Bloomfield resident JB Clark and opened in the fall of 1917 to an eager audience awaiting the arrival of one of the first cinemas in Pittsburgh. The theater flourished throughout the 20th century, and people would wait for hours to see movies like Hal Roach’s “Nobody’s Baby” and the wonderfully titled “Emperor’s Candlesticks,” starring William Powell. Kids flocked to the Plaza on Saturday mornings to watch cartoon shows.

From 1959 to 1961, the Plaza served as a temporary church and school. Immaculate Conception bought the building to use after its previous home was torn down and a new church was being constructed.

In 2003, the theater closed its doors for good due to a lack of sales and a tough economy.

In 2003, the theater closed its doors for good due to a lack of sales and a tough economy.

Pittsburgh developer Marcia Daktor bought the building and started making major renovations. The outer decor may still give memories of the theater’s past, but the inside now houses Starbucks Coffee and W.G. Grinders Restaurant.

would help find immigrants work in the United States, but they also expected a hefty cut of the laborer’s wages.

“This was a way of [padding] their own wallet. The pay back for finding a job for them,” Rishel says. “They expected a pay back.”

The immigrants usually came without money and were forced to live in rented quarters. “The male usually came first and then brought his wife and children over,” Rishel says. It was tough to find work under fair conditions during these times, so Ateleta’s founders wanted to help fellow immigrants get started in Bloomfield.

In the beginning, the members of the society were mostly males from Ateleta, whose descendants now make up the society today. However, women are just as involved in the society as men are. Over the years, the Ateleta Beneficial Society became one of Pittsburgh’s best known Italian organizations.

The society still waves an Italian flag as a symbol of the organization, and its remaining members meet every two months at Immaculate Conception (St. Joseph) Church on Liberty Avenue.
Bloomfield might be known for its Italian heritage, but Italy is not the only country that has influenced this little neighborhood. The Bloomfield Liedertafel Singing Society, located on 410 South Mathilda Street, has added German descent into the mix for over a century.

The Liedertafel Singing Society, founded in 1884, was established as a place for German-speaking immigrants to find friends and foster a love of music and choral singing. The German word “liedertafel” means “song table,” a place where sheet music is stored.

Now, with 15 to 25 active participants and a reputation for being a society for men to rehearse male song parts, the Bloomfield Liedertafel Singing Society is just another lively part of the neighborhood. The members usually meet and practice two days a week in the evening.

Last year marked the 125th anniversary year for the society. It was celebrated with an anniversary concert performed by the Societies of the Pittsburgh District Choruses, as well as visiting choruses from Ohio.

by Seth Laidlaw
[creating synergy across new media]