



## Pittsburgh: A walk around town

By Marcia Duncan Lowry

*Enjoy sightseeing in Pittsburgh during the conference*

Okay, *yunz*, after you *redd up* that hotel room, it's time to explore the *tabn*." What? That is *Pittsburghese* (not an official foreign language) for an invitation to tidy up your accommodations and don your sensible shoes for a stroll around town. Barring any language barrier, ACRL's 7th National Conference in Pittsburgh this spring is a great opportunity to explore some of the 'Burgh's interesting districts and neighborhoods. Whether your interest is shopping, bar hopping, or bebopping—this article will introduce you to a few areas within easy access of the Convention Center.

### "Dahntahn" Pittsburgh

*Dahntahn* Pittsburgh is "user friendly." Practically everything is in walking distance of the Convention Center, and the "T," the city's light rail, is free within the city loop. Rimming Mellon Square, four blocks from the Center, are the big bucks shopping experiences—Saks, Brooks Brothers, Sharper Image, among others. Slightly farther east are Fifth Avenue Place, PPG Place, and One Oxford Center. These are high-rise complexes consisting of specialty shops, national chain stores, food courts, and some very nice restaurants. Market Square, adjacent to PPG Place, is the old market center of the city and offers several taverns and restaurants. Heinz Hall, home to the Pittsburgh Symphony, and the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts are both in the heart of the city, just minutes from the Convention Center.

### On the Strip

Turning away from *dabntahn* and heading east on Penn Avenue, it is a brief half-mile walk to the Strip District. *The Strip*, as locals know it, has undergone many changes in the city's history. Literally a strip along the Allegheny River, it was once the site of mills and warehouses, later becoming a neighborhood for newly arrived immigrants. The Strip today is a mile-long mixed bag of shops, restaurants, wholesale food distributors, and trendy nightclubs. To quote a native, "It's alive. It's crazy. It's not hoity-toity. Anyone can come to the Strip and find something." This is the place to sample Pittsburgh's ethnic diversity. The business storefronts spell this out clearly—Labad's Middle Eastern Foods, Benkovitz Seafood, Stamooli's Brothers Grocery, Presteorge Fine Foods, Schwartz Bagels, and the list goes on.

The Strip can serve as a quick break between meetings or a couple of hours of adventure. The place is always busy, but Saturday is a virtual festival. Stop in at the Pennsylvania Macaroni Company (founded in 1902) and sample over 120 kinds of cheese, or dip into the 24-bucket olive bar. Presteorge, noted for its fine roasted coffee since 1942, will also boggle your mind with its selection of exotic freshly made pastas. "*Jeetjel?*"—translation "Did you eat yet?" If not, stand in line with the locals at Benkovitz's or Wholey's seafood take out for an oversized fried fish sandwich, but get there early. Or sample some shrimp fried rice and satay from one of the Cambodian street vendors.

The Strip is much more than a food fest. At Penn Pottery peruse handcrafted items by Pittsburgh potters; drop in at the Butler's Secret or

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Wholey's upstairs for a fine selection of cookery and china (each ethnic market also specializes in appropriate kitchen ware—woks, pasta machines, etc). Explore Alafia African Cultural Exchange, Jungle City: A Different Kind of Plant Store, or Dreadnought Wines, Ltd.

Nighttime at the Strip offers an equal array of choices. The Boardwalk is a floating entertainment complex on the Allegheny River. It includes Donzi's, a Euro-style nightclub playing the latest New York-type dance music, and Crewser's offers music outdoors during fair weather (April?—we'll see!), but food and drink indoors year round. Situated in former warehouse buildings on Smallman Street are the Metropol and the Rosebud. Industrial dancing and live music for the avant garde describe the Metropol; the Rosebud is much more eclectic, hosting music with a softer edge in a coffee-house ambiance. For a different beat, try Mullaney's Harp and Fiddle Irish Pub offering Irish music and Celtic dancing.

### Station Square

*Yunz* ready for some more fun? Then jump on the "T" at Steel Plaza Station about four blocks from the Convention Center and head for the

*Souseside* (that's South Side). If you have more time, you can easily walk the approximate three quarters of a mile from the Convention Center across the Smithfield Bridge, which spans the Monongahela River. First stop is Station Square, a renovated freight house and train terminal dating from 1897. The combination of shops, restaurants, and night spots will put Station Square high on your fun list. Two specialty shops of particular local interest are the Landmarks Store and the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts. The Landmarks Store offers all the information you could want on the history of Pittsburgh, walking tours, and lots of friendly help. The Pittsburgh Center for the Arts is a gallery shop offering creations by local and regional artists.

Station Square is a popular spot for nightlife, as well. Got "dance fever"? Then head for Chauncey's, a large club that has lasted over a decade, maintaining its popularity by offering a variety of DJ music, including—yes—disco. Although the dress code is casual, "flashy" and "expensive" better describe reality. Jelly Rolls is a quite different scene, spotlighting dueling piano players and karaoke Wednesday through Saturday nights. These guys know every song you do and then some. After serious conference work, perhaps the Funny Bone Club is just the place to be. National acts perform Wednesday through Saturday, but make those reservations. Looking for a little more sophisticated experience? Try the Gandy Dancer Saloon in the old train station for piano music, oyster bar, brass, and dark wood elegance.

Before leaving the Station Square complex, treat yourself to a ride on the Monongahela Incline, a designated historic landmark. Day or night, the trip to the top of Mt. Washington on this cable railway will give you a picture-snapping vista of the 'Burgh (see the January cover of *C&RL News* for a view of the incline).

### On Carson Street

From Station Square a cab is in order for a brief mile ride east on Carson Street. This area of South Side, beginning at 10th Street, is historic old Birmingham. This was the site of glass factories soon after Pittsburgh was settled, and later iron and steel mills. Workers made their homes on the ascending hillsides, away from the industrial pollution. Carson was and is the main street of this neighborhood. The 13 blocks from 10th Street to the Birmingham Bridge are now being transformed by Generation X. For a walk



Photo credit: M. D. Lowry

**A view of the Strip east of downtown Pittsburgh, a mile-long mixed bag of shops, restaurants, wholesale distributors, and trendy nightclubs.**

on the eclectic side, this is it. Carson is rife with bars, restaurants, and shops selling used books, vintage clothing, antique furniture, and stained glass from old Pittsburgh homes. The Gertrude Stein Memorial Book Shop is at 10th and Carson (betcha didn't know this writer was born in Pittsburgh!). Two coffeehouses can provide the needed caffeine jolt: the funky little Beehive, and Arabica, more to yuppie taste.

After dark, Carson can be very crowded, especially on weekends with the twenty- and thirtysomething crowd. As by day, the offerings are quite diverse. Local lore states that Carson has more bars per block than any city in the U.S. In any case, if you don't like one, there are plenty more from which to choose. Mario's and the adjoining Blue Lou's are popular for food, drink, and talk. Nick's Fat City has a dance floor and offers music from classic pop to alternative. Margaritaville has, you guessed it, a wide selection of margaritas, live bands, and lots of Jimmy Buffet music. You might even bump into Pittsburgher Michael Keaton at Shootz Cafe & Billiards, which is described as "upscale." For a taste of local R&B and jazz bands, drop in at the Blue Note Cafe. The choice is all yours.

### The tonier part of "tahn"

A tonier part of *tabn* lies to the east in the neighborhoods of Squirrel Hill and Shadyside. Walnut Street in Shadyside is a 15-minute cab ride from the Convention Center and offers a selection of restaurants, upscale stores, and a little night music. Old familiars such as Banana Republic, Talbot's, The Gap, and Victoria's Secret line this popular shopping street along with local favorites.

The best spot for jazz on this side of the city (other than Foster's at the Holiday Inn in Oakland) is The Balcony. This restaurant, in addition to having very fine food, dishes up some very fine music. Walnut Street is a fun and busy neighborhood adventure both day and evening.

### A fun place to be

This is just a sampling of all Pittsburgh has to offer. When you start to plan your free time, grab a copy of *In Pittsburgh*, the weekly entertainment paper. Galleries, museums, clubs, bars, sports, opera, ballet, and theater post the offerings for the week. You might just find that you need to stay longer than the conference! After all, it is Pittsburgh with an "b"—a *beck* of a fun place to be. ■

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