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Complete Issue Index
Home Building
Renewable Energy
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Do-It-Yourself
Natural Health
Homesteading
Food and Cooking

Mother's Forums

Green Homes

Event Calendar

Directories

Carpenters' Directory
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Writers' Guidelines

Company Links

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Issue # 193 - August/September 2002

Greener Pastures:

Where sustainable ways are gaining ground

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

I am a younser, a colloquial tag for a Pittsburgh native. My family's three generations have witnessed three different Plitzburgs: Its meteoric rise as an Industrial steel brute, its dramatic downfall and now Its rebirth as a town known for intellectual industry and newly green neighborhoods.

In a city once so polluted and smoky streetlights had to be lit during the day, it's hard for some people to imagine a verdant Pittsburgh. But in the last few decades, the iron City has morphed into more of an ecological metropolis.

Looking down onto the Golden Triangle from Mount Washington, formerly dubbed Coal Hill, a growing number of green neighborhoods, high-performance green buildings and extensive riverfront development is sprouting up. Other burgeoning green businesses are beginning to grow. The East End Food Co-op, a natural and whole foods grocery with an award-winning vegetarian cafe, enjoys a brisk business. More than 32 neighborhood farmer's markets are open during the growing season. Community-supported agriculture programs are cropping up around the city's edges. Businesspeople Like David Shiller, proprietor of the green retail store E House in Southside, and Lou Tamler of Construction junction, a used building materials supply center have found the city receptive to their eco-entrepreneurial spirit. Pittsburgh's active, online green-mapping system (www.greenpittsburgh.net) keeps track of Pittsburgh's green scene. (See "Mapping a Greener Future," June/July 2002.)

Like most of the thousands of immigrants who followed the smoke trail to Pittsburgh in the late 1800s, my grandparents settled in ethnic neighborhoods nestled into the steep hillsides and valleys shaped by Pittsburgh's three rivers: the Ohio, Allegheny and Monongahela. These folks were the blue-collar workforce, an indispensable part of the industrial force that powered Pittsburgh.

In the late 1800s, partially because of the Civil War and the appetite for goods needed to expand the nation, Pittsburgh erupted into an industrial giant. Rich deposits of coal and timber, petroleum, clay and other natural resources fueled this revolution.

But as early as 1862, Pittsburgh also had earned the infamous reputation of being "the blackest, dirtiest, grimmest city in the United States," says author J. Earnest Wright. By day, as biographer James Parton writes, Pittsburgh was "smoke, smoke everywhere smoke." By night, he wrote, the Iron City was "hell with the lid taken off."

The mills dominated the riverbanks, and became even larger and more extensive. Like the rivers, Pittsburgh's industrial might ebbed and flowed as it was called upon to provide for two world wars. Many Pittsburghers still say World War II was won on the banks of the Monongahela. But industry was waging its own war on the environment. At times, the temperature of the Monongahela topped 120 degrees. The rivers became lifeless sewers. Pollution was everywhere, in just about every form.

Between 1946 and 1969, civic agencies began work to improve the city and plan for its future. Redevelopment included the creation of Point State Park at the confluence of the rivers, and the restoration of buildings *in the heart of downtown, known as the Golden Triangle. By the end of its first renaissance, the city and region had one of the nation's first smoke-control laws and a strategy for flood management, positioning Pittsburgh as one of the most environmentally progressive industrial cities.

In the 1980s, as the economics of steel production worsened and pressures from foreign competitors began to increase, the Iron City's steel foundation started to buckle. One hundred thousand jobs were lost, and community leaders were faced with a new set of challenges as families throughout the region left to find employment elsewhere. Pittsburgh once again needed to align its economic and environmental goals. Civic groups began coordinating with development agencies for cleanup and

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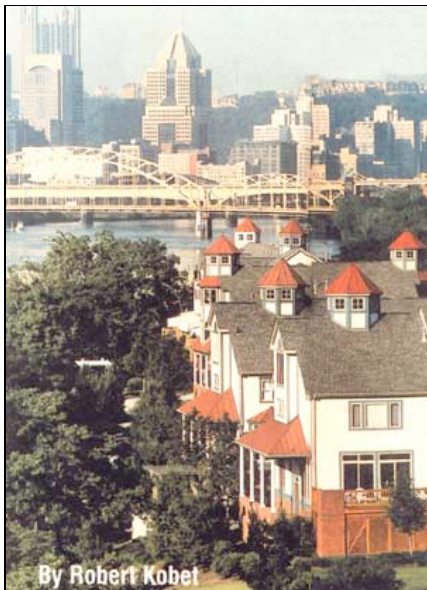
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brownfield reclamation. The City of Pittsburgh worked closely with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to enact legislation for remediation and liability issues associated with previously contaminated sites. Several of these sites now host some of Pittsburgh's premier green buildings.



Once a blighted piece of land near the heart of Pittsburgh, Washington's Landing offers market-rate housing, offices, light industry, a rowing center and a public park. Pedestrian circulation is encouraged through attractive streetscaping and water access.

surroundings and character of its neighborhoods.

Today, sustainable development has moved to the forefront of Pittsburgh's third renaissance. With the highest dollar amount of foundation support per capita, Pittsburgh's philanthropic community is the driving force behind many bold initiatives. In 1994 the Heinz Endowments created an environmental grant-making program, which has given more than \$100 million to foster sustainable urban design, environmental enterprise, watershed protection and ecosystem restoration.

The Governor's Green Government Council strongly encourages the design of new buildings to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification criteria. The Departments of Environmental Protection and Conservation and Natural Resources make LEED certification a specific requirement for all their buildings, and the Commonwealth currently boasts five LEED certified buildings and 29 LEED registered buildings. And the state has just received re-certification, under the Forest Stewardship Council's sustainable forest guidelines, for all 2.1 million acres of its forestland, the largest certified forest tract in North America.

Most importantly, the greening of Pittsburgh is being championed by a number of grassroots organizations whose mission is the transition from an extraction-based economy to an amenities based economy, where the quality of life is defined once again by Pittsburgh's geography, the beauty of its

Conservation Consultants incorporated created Pittsburgh's first Green Neighborhood Initiative, a program intended to revitalize neighborhoods and provide affordable, energy-efficient housing. Housed in a renovated fire station, CCI's headquarters was selected as one of the American Institute of Architects' Top 10 Buildings in 1999. The building's renovations showcase four principles: energy efficiency, nontoxicity, incorporation of materials recycling and cost-effectiveness.

The Green Budding Alliance has become a major force in moving Pittsburgh toward sustainable design and development. The alliance steered the development of the new David L. Lawrence Convention Center expansion and the PNC Firstside Center, both of which are being recognized nationally and internationally for their contribution to sustainable design. The alliance has recently begun its most important and formidable undertaking: an effort to green Pittsburgh's municipal government buildings.

Beginning with the area comprising the new North Shore development of the Allegheny and Golden Triangles Point State Park, the Riverlife Task Force is focused on providing river access, developing an extensive bike and trail system, evaluating the highest and best use for the riverfronts, and cleaning up and protecting the river's watersheds.

My wife, Rebecca Loom, executive director of the Green Building Alliance, and I have witnessed Pittsburgh's sustainable rebirth in the last two decades. The slaughterhouse on Heirs Island where my grandfather worked is long gone, redeveloped into low rise office buildings, upscale housing and the Three Rivers Rowing Center. The cork factory where my mother worked as a teenager is slated for redevelopment into trendy loft apartments and offices.

Today, Pittsburgh enjoys clean air and clear skies. And the streetlights still burn brightly, but only at night.

The founder of Sustainaissance International, Robert Kobet consults on sustainable design and development projects around the world.

Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

Community

Total population	1,336,449
Persons per square mile	1,755.7
Urban population	1,282,069
Rural population	54,380
Farm population	586

Renewable Energy Potential

Solar
December: Very Poor (0-2 sun hrs/day)
June: Good (5-6 sun

Population	333	hrs/day)
Median age	39.6	Wind (at 33 feet)
High school graduates	79%	December: Excellent (12.5-
College graduates	22.6%	13.4 mph)
County crime index	178*	June: Poor (9.8-11.5 mph)

Economy

Median home value	\$57,100
Median household income	\$28,136
Per capita income	\$15,115
Cost of living index	94*
Unemployment Rate	4.82**

Local Newspapers

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,
(800) 228
6397; www.post-
gazette.com
Pittsburgh Tribune-Review,
(412) 320
7914; www.triblive.com

Climate

Average Winter Low/High	13/29°F
Average Summer	56/78°F
Low/High	44"
Average Precipitation	6
USDA Plant Hardiness	Zone

*All indexes measure from a state or national average of 100.
**Average rate from October 2001 to February 2002. Sources: U.S.
Census Bureau, 1990; realestate.yahoo.com/re/neighborhood

Nominate locations for future Greener Pastures articles. Share as much as you can about rural or urban places where sustainable living is gaining ground. Send your nominations to: Greener Pastures; c/o MOTHER EARTH NEWS; 1503 SW 42nd St.; Topeka, KS 666091265.

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