



Pittsburgh Cultural Trust History

The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust has overseen one of Pittsburgh's most historic transformations: the cultural and economic revitalization of a 14 block arts, entertainment, and residential neighborhood in downtown Pittsburgh called the Cultural District. Once a neglected red light district, the Cultural District now thrives as a vibrant center for culture, art, food, and community that welcomes visitors of all backgrounds, ages, and identities. A unique catalytic force that has brought together foundations, corporations, government agencies, and thousands of private citizens, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust stands as a national model of urban redevelopment through the arts.

The renaissance of the downtown Cultural District can be traced back to the vision of H.J. "Jack" Heinz II and his "band of dreamers." In the 1980s, Pittsburgh faced changes endured by many rust belt cities: declining industry, a shrinking urban population, and an evolving economy. As Pittsburgh struggled to create an identity beyond steel, the local Pittsburgher Heinz developed a two-pronged vision that would transform downtown Pittsburgh: the arts could serve as a catalyst for economic, commercial, and residential development, while enriching the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Committed to building a home for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Heinz saw promise in the grand but aging Heinz Hall, a movie house once regarded as the most magnificent theater between New York and Chicago. After the renovated and re-named Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts opened its doors in 1971, *The New York Times* noted, "With Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh has definitely taken a major stride forward in its attention to the performing arts, and in so doing has provided an example that other cities might well study while searching for solutions to some of their urban arts problems." In addition to the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, four more of the city's major performing arts groups took up residence in Heinz Hall: the Pittsburgh Opera, the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera (CLO), the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, and the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony.

Heinz Hall's success in bringing high-quality performing arts to downtown Pittsburgh helped drive the development of the surrounding neighborhood to create a safe, inviting, and inclusive space for cultural and economic prosperity: the downtown Cultural District. Growth continued for Pittsburgh's Cultural District with the beginning of a \$150-million development project that encompassed buying Stanley Theater and simultaneously constructing two twenty-five story office towers as a commercial venture. This dramatic gesture introduced new ways for the arts, private philanthropy, business, and government to work together.

The commercial investments of the office building would be recaptured, funding Heinz's establishment of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust in 1984. Carol Brown was named the non-profit organization's first president. Over the next

15 years, she drove partnerships with public and private organizations and garnered the support of foundations, corporations, and individuals. Brown's leadership encompassed the renovation of the Benedum Center, the opening of the Byham and Harris Theaters, the building of the O'Rielly Theater, the opening of the Wood Street Galleries, the creation of Katz Plaza, the development of Allegheny Riverfront Park, and numerous public art projects – undertakings that strengthened the Trust's efforts to integrate the arts into Downtown Pittsburgh's urban landscape. Brendan Lemon of *The New York Times* praised Brown's leadership in urban redevelopment, "To describe Pittsburgh's unconventional, un-Disneyfied remodeling of its Cultural District...is to explore how theater can help transform urban identity."

Carol Brown retired in 2000 and was succeeded by J. Kevin McMahan. McMahan, a beloved figure in the community, has helped the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust realize its vision of a Cultural District that enriches the region's vibrancy and prosperity. Committed to downtown Pittsburgh as an economically prosperous cultural center where the arts can flourish, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust presents programming that is diverse, balanced, and of the highest quality; cultivates the local arts scene; invests in strategic community partnerships and long-term cost saving collaborations; provides a welcoming platform for people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests to explore the arts; and creates a critical path for real estate development in the Cultural District.

In a turbulent, post-industrial period, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust paved the way for the way for an authentic destination complete with theaters, public art, a riverfront park, plazas, galleries, historic buildings, and a bustling culinary scene. The Trust continues to unite public and private interests in pursuit of mutually supportive cultural and economic development objectives, with emphasis on the creation and fostering of a downtown Cultural District serving the Pittsburgh region. A major force in the city for re-imagination and activation, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust stands as an internationally recognized model of how collaboration can reinvent a city with authenticity, innovation and creativity. It is thanks to the commitment and leadership of many organizations and individuals that the Pittsburgh's Cultural District has grown and thrived over the last three decades, including the late H.J Heinz II and the Heinz Endowments, elected officials, government and public funders, individual donors, artists and architects, corporate executives, arts administrators and organizations, restaurant owners, economists, artisans, and thousands more.