

# Pittsburgh is still a steel town:

## BUILD ON IT

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Ania Dulata/Post-Gazette

### Build on Pittsburgh's real steel image

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### Forum: Pittsburgh is still a steel town: Build on it

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Steel made Pittsburgh world famous with an epic history that chronicles building America's railroads, bridges, skyscrapers and battleships for over a century. Yet Pittsburgh has treated its steel heritage with ambivalence in these years after steel, mostly due to the pollution and layoffs of workers the industry caused. Today, though it is well known that most local steel mills have closed and the city is environmentally clean, people beyond the region still identify Pittsburgh with steel.

Whether it is due to seeing the "Pittsburgh Steelers" on TV or remembering this captivating chapter of American history, steel will be the starting point for any new Pittsburgh "brand identity."

The current effort to redefine Pittsburgh's national image is inevitably a question of how best to build on its steel image.

Pittsburgh needs a clear, strategic vision with specific strategic actions that draws on its core strengths to move the city competitively into the 21st century and enables its business community to create and maintain jobs in the region. Over the last 20 years, Pittsburgh has been transitioning into service and high-tech industries, but demographic trends indicate that more needs to be done to attract new people to the region, which now competes directly with other national business centers for investment dollars and human talent.

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Pittsburgh must clearly differentiate itself from other high-tech and service centers in the national and international marketplace. The enduring heroic and hardworking image of steel-era Pittsburgh affords a natural foundation for the high-tech and service community to build on. Only a vision that integrates both tradition and innovation will unlock Pittsburgh's enormous potential as an agile leader in the information age.

Pittsburgh's noted leadership roundtable, The Allegheny Conference, has for over three decades looked to develop an appropriate vision for the new Pittsburgh. The launching of "Dynamic Pittsburgh" in 1971, the first national marketing campaign, featured Pittsburgh's many impressive assets with little mention of steel, setting a now-familiar direction. In 1984, "A Strategy for Growth," a two-year planning initiative with nine committees of leaders, proposed a comprehensive plan of action that concluded with a recognition of Pittsburgh's image problem; among its many recommendations were ideas such as taking better advantage of the rivers to improve lifestyle amenities.

Then in 1993, the "White Paper," with some grim statistics, characterized the region as "adrift," showing that for Pittsburgh to abandon manufacturing was shortsighted because new sectors had "failed to replace it as the engine of growth and prosperity." It cited fragmentation and overlapping, unfocused agendas in local government and civic structures, and called for a "new shared vision for the future" that would capture the imagination and inventiveness of people in all sectors.

The following year, more than 5,000 members of the community came together with the Working Together Consortium and built a broad consensus of the region's assets and objectives, but again did not deliver a concise vision. Now that the tech bubble has burst, and the economy has slowed, Pittsburgh is once again facing its elusive poststeel image with the Image Gap initiative.

Although Pittsburgh has resources of national importance to draw on, its challenge is to use them effectively together with its nationally recognized steel image. Three key initiatives would create a unified strategic vision to unlock Pittsburgh's potential:

1) *In defining its new identity, Pittsburgh needs to embrace the Rivers of Steel initiative as part of a strategic vision that honors the integration of steel and high-tech.*

Pittsburgh can distinguish itself from other high-tech centers by building on its enduring legacy as a symbol of American industrial strength. Pittsburgh's most notable assets, including the Carnegie Museums and Carnegie Mellon University, have come from its prosperous steel heritage. Carnegie Libraries across the country have given Pittsburgh's philanthropies a national identity by making knowledge accessible to all Americans. Pittsburgh's legacy of innovation lives on with an active research and development community that continues to attract a strong share of funding.

However, Pittsburgh's greatest contribution to the nation may be its proud work ethic and other core values on which all this achievement stands. Working smart might have replaced the ethic of working hard, yet taking pride in "a job well done" still captures Pittsburgh's spirit and the potential to inspire the American work force far into the future.

The Rivers of Steel initiative will create a National Park Steel Heritage Center at the Carrie Furnaces, formerly part of the Homestead Works, where Carnegie first assembled numerous innovations in steel making. Carnegie's larger-than-life story lies at the heart of the vast steel operations that made Pittsburgh world famous. Because this is not simply a local story, but one of national significance, the center will have the stature and mission of a national institution. By featuring Pittsburgh's history of innovation and core American values, the Steel Heritage Center will be a valuable asset to Pittsburgh's strategic vision for the future.

2) *Pittsburgh can build on its broad expertise and core work values to create a skill development forum to address the coming national shortage of skilled workers.*

As the baby boomers retire in coming years, the United States will face a severe shortage of skilled workers. Few places are as capable to address this national challenge as Pittsburgh. Why does this industrial center now boast the nation's premier university in computer science? Because for over a century, heavy industry diversified into a broad array of related industries, a process that unites steel and computers in the same historical continuum. Its framework of industrial sectors is so well diversified, that Pittsburgh not too many years ago had the third largest number of corporate headquarters nationally.

Though much has changed in these transitional years after steel, Pittsburgh now has over 150,000 workers in advanced manufacturing. Otherwise known as "the computerized factory floor," this emerging field integrates age-old manufacturing with computerization, automation and robotics. Pittsburgh's promising high-tech future is already in action with this integrated workforce.

In the Clusters of Innovation initiative, a joint team from the Harvard Business School and the Washington-based Council on Competitiveness recently studied Pittsburgh's industrial sectors in a national context and called for creating "institutes for collaboration." A strategy that fosters cooperation and alliances, over more adversarial labor and management relations, better suits the globally connected information based economy. While such an institute would serve regional interests, Pittsburgh could use its broad expertise and national symbolism to serve the nation's need for skilled workers by creating a forum that supports a productive American workforce. Its program for skill development would cover the spectrum of industries from advanced manufacturing to high-tech and services and by integrating the old and the new, Pittsburgh will help bridge the "digital divide."

3) *An "Expanded Golden Triangle" connecting Pittsburgh, New York City and Washington would conceptually strengthen Pittsburgh's position nationally.*

To more effectively engage the world beyond the region, the image of an "Expanded Golden Triangle" visually locates Pittsburgh in relation to the nation's centers of business and government and thereby defines its position nationally. This triangle image also communicates Pittsburgh's vital national role as a leader in cyber security and as a key hub in the nation's information infrastructure.



The Image Gap initiative has a critical opportunity not to choose between steel or high-tech, but to show why both steel and high-tech are important and vitally interrelated. Pittsburgh can lead the nation to bridge the digital divide if it embraces a strategic vision that integrates tradition with innovation.

To do so would make Pittsburgh an important place to do business, but to think that Pittsburgh can achieve this strong alignment without embracing its steel heritage will only confuse the rest of us.