



The Polish Hill Voice

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9th Annual Polish Hill Arts Fest Huge Success

The 2016 Polish Hill Arts Fest was a major accomplishment for the neighborhood. This year, it was entirely planned and produced by a team of volunteers.

There were more than 30 local artists, including several from Polish Hill. The Immaculate Heart of Mary opened their doors for a new kids area in their sideyard where kids and parents got to make crafts and play games. Dreams of Hope

Queer Youth Arts Project set up an interactive station where people could make their own videos and art. The Carnegie Library and West Penn Rec Center set up tables with crafts, games and giveaways.

New food vendors this year, including Eastern European restaurant Apteka, Driftwood Ovens, Leona's Ice Cream

Sandwiches and Polish Hill's own Leona's were incredibly popular, selling out of most items.



A range of bands took the stage, including Come Holy Spirit, Eye Roll, Truth and Rites and the Love Letters. Not only did the festival pay for itself this year, but the PHCA was able to raise money for neighborhood projects through the raffle and t-shirt sales. Security estimated attendance to be about 6,000 people.

"The Arts Fest was a really amazing collaboration between artists, craftspeople, performers and local residents who volunteered countless hours to make it one of the most unique summer festivals in the city," said Aubrey Halliburton, Chair of the Planning Committee.

If you're interested in getting involved with next year's fest, contact Aubrey at: aubrey@phcapgh.org



City Steps Reflect Polish Hill's History

by Casey Mednis

On a bright and sunny day, I brought my husband and two children to Polish Hill for a walking tour of its legendary city steps. As any parent of young children can attest, my intentions in walking the steps were inspired both by historical inquiry as well as a desperate search for new ways for the kids to burn some pent up energy. When I first suggested it,

my six-year-old groaned, but then he and his three-year-old brother rallied with the excitement of attempting to climb all thirteen sets of steps in Polish Hill in one day.

We started with the steps at Downing and Hancock Streets before I realized that they were way too steep and we had to turn back. *(cont. on page 3)*

West Penn Gets New Gym Floor, BIG League Program

The West Penn Recreation Center's gymnasium will be closed through September to install a new hardwood floor with new colors and logo! The weight and cardio rooms will remain open during the installation.

The BIG League Sports Program headquarters is moving to the West Penn Rec Center under the direction of Michelle Aul, who started at West Penn earlier this year.

BIG League helps bring sports to children who may not have the resources to participate otherwise. It's a cooperative effort between Citiparks, Pirates Charities, and the Pittsburgh Penguins and has been called "the nation's largest and most comprehensive inner city youth sports program".

It began twenty-five years ago as an initiative of Mayor Tom Murphy and includes baseball, softball, hockey,

soccer, and special programs for teams. Michelle is excited to bring the program here and host more events and programs geared to the Polish Hill community. She says she grew up going to rec centers and considers them to be an integral part of any neighborhood as "a source of comfort and community".

Membership for the Rec Center is just \$5 every 30 days which includes the fitness center, weight room, and gym. Anyone who is interested in joining, using the space, or has suggestions can call the center at: (412)622-7353.



Green Spaces Brighten Up Polish Hill

by Valerie Testa

Have you ever wondered how all of our beautiful parks and gardens are maintained? By an amazing group of volunteers! People tend vacant lots next to their homes, plant community gardens and come together to take care of our green spaces. The PHCA supports this by applying for small grants to supply tools and plants and organizing neighborhood clean ups to pick up litter that manages to land in those same familiar spots.

The work wouldn't happen without some great partnerships and the time local residents dedicate. One example is the urban restoration project on Brereton Street. Tree Pittsburgh has

been an incredible ally in this project. They wanted to work with us because of our neighborhoods' commitment to urban restoration and vacant lot beautification. In fact, Polish Hill has one of their most successful re-forestation projects in the city! As a result of projects like this one we are not only creating beautiful and bountiful gardens and restoring forest edges, but also promoting biodiversity, traffic calming and a stronger community.

Volunteers are always welcome to participate in the PHCA's Green and Open Spaces Team. We can help give you the tools and training you need.

Get involved with the PHCA!

Housing Committee

Interested in housing accessibility and community development issues in Polish Hill and beyond? Join the PHCA housing committee! To get on our contact list, email Laurel at: l.e.coniglio@gmail.com

Communications Committee

We need volunteers to help with the Polish Hill Voice newsletter, PHCA social media and other forms of member communication. To learn more, call the office or contact Kim at: kim.teplitzky@gmail.com

Green Team

Parkletts: Stewards for these little, wonderful spaces are always needed! It involves weeding, mulching, maintaining and watering new plants.

Knotweed Knockout: We meet once/month to maintain this urban restoration project started 4 years ago on Melwood Ave. Primarily, it's weed wacking knotweed to create plant diversity without herbicides. There is also a lovely planting of native perennials at the site.

Neighborhood cleanups: A fun way to wander around, clean up some litter, and meet neighbors! To help out, email: phca@phcapgh.org

PHCA Community Meetings

1st Tuesday of the month at 6:30pm in the West Penn Rec Center

City Steps Continued: "Stairwells Were Pittsburgh's First Organized Transportation System"

By the second set of steps, the boys were fully committed and gladly climbed and ran the rest of the way. They helped me read the map provided by Bob Regan's *Pittsburgh Steps: the Story of the City's Public Stairways*, which is available at the Carnegie Library.

The steps at Bigelow Blvd. and Harding Way, while inaccessible, were particularly fascinating to the intrepid explorers. We were able to draw comparisons between the exposed rebar and

the bones that make up our own skeleton (early biology and structural engineering lessons check and check!). We capped off our adventure at the Lili Café for a delicious brunch and brownies. The boys willingly glanced at the kale that came with our brunch while choosing to stick with their hard won brownies that I was too tired to refuse them. All considered the adventure a success and now we're inspired to climb and "discover" other sets of steps in the city, none as special as those in Polish Hill, of course.

Pittsburgh has the most sets of municipal steps in the country with 712 sets of stairs – the first built in the 1940's. While initially constructed as a means of transportation in response to Pittsburgh's hilly geography, they have become an institution. These stairwells were

Pittsburgh's first organized transportation system and are an important piece of Polish Hill's industrial history. The steps are a way for people to navigate Pittsburgh's hilly terrain in an enjoyable and approachable way.

Regan's book plots every set of steps in the city over a period of many years with input from residents as well as local authorities.

The book has detailed maps, photographs,

and a wealth of history. The author's palpable enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. He also offers walking tours of various neighborhoods including Polish Hill.

As with any infrastructure in an older city, maintenance has been an issue for the steps in Polish Hill. Neighborhood residents have petitioned the city to make critical repairs to several steps in Polish Hill. The steepest set of steps at Hancock and Dobson Streets are walkable, but in need of repair.

Unfortunately, in some cases the city has simply closed some steps instead of repairing them. The steps at Bigelow Blvd. and Harding Way are closed, but they are the only set allowing people to access steps directly from Bigelow Blvd. to Polish Hill. The condition of the steps is difficult to assess because of the sign

blocking the entrance, but the disintegrating concrete is obvious. People who rely on the steps for transportation cannot always find another route and some continue to use the steps despite their potentially unsafe conditions.

According to Guy Costa, the city's Chief Operations Officer, repairing the steps is costly, "You have to get equipment to the site and you have to pump concrete up hill." While Costa acknowledged the importance of the city steps, he said that other city expenses are more critical.

The Department of City Planning is in the process of conducting its first ever comprehensive data collection on all of Pittsburgh's city steps. They are seeking volunteers to provide information and insight regarding the condition and usage of individual stairwells. If you're interested in participating, you can sign-up at: <http://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/steps>

While the prospects for repair and maintenance are unclear, Polish Hill's enduring spirit of preservation and innovation will ensure the city steps will not be a forgotten relic of a changing city.



The PHCA's mission is to respect and preserve the sense of community in Polish Hill while promoting economic and housing development opportunities and improving the quality of life for our community.

Are you a PHCA Member?

Join or Renew Today!

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

_____ Voting Member
(Polish Hill Resident)

_____ Subscription Member
(Friend living outside the neighborhood)

Membership is just \$5, but additional donations are appreciated! Everything goes toward improving our neighborhood.

Total Membership & Donation Amount (please circle): \$5 \$15 \$30 \$50 \$125 Other:

Cut off and return to the PHCA office with cash or check payable to: *Polish Hill Civic Association*
All donations are tax deductible. All memberships expire at the end of the calendar year.