

# CAMOC MUSEUMS OF CITIES REVIEW

## 100% Brisbane at Museum of Brisbane

CHRISTOPHER SALTER / PETER DENHAM / PHIL MANNING\*



100% Brisbane exhibition. Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane. © Bryan Crawford for Museum of Brisbane.

With a history spanning 190 years, Brisbane is a city of its own creation. The city today has undeniable positive momentum and energy; it is a city with a growing confidence and awareness. As the museum of the city,

Museum of Brisbane felt it was timely to investigate who Brisbaners are as a community – a snapshot of not just who lives here but how we think and feel about ourselves, our city, and our place in the world.

\* Peter Denham, Director of Museum of Brisbane  
 Christopher Salter, Museum of Brisbane Deputy Director (current Acting Director)  
 Phil Manning, Curator at The Museum of Brisbane and Curator of 100% Brisbane.

We are living in a time of unprecedented global urbanisation. It is estimated that by 2050, 80% of the world's population will live in cities and that in ▶

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# Building a Cultural Campus for Children

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Pittsburgh is a mid-sized city in Pennsylvania that sits at the confluence of three rivers, its history so indelibly defined by the steel industry it was once called “hell with the lid off.” After the deindustrialization of the U.S. in the 1980s, the city has emerged in the last 20 years as a leader in areas such as higher education, technology, robotics and medicine.

Pittsburgh’s North Side was once known as Allegheny City, a thriving, prosperous area that was home to industries as far-reaching as iron, glass, rope, flour, oil, wool and leather through the first half of the twentieth century. After World War II, the area suffered a significant decline due to the postwar expansion of highways and suburbs, uprooting many North Side residents and spurring others to move.<sup>1</sup> Allegheny Commons, the central crossroads of the North Side, once boasted a central market, town hall, park and

the Carnegie Library of Allegheny, one of the first Free Libraries created by industrialist Andrew Carnegie. But in the redevelopment of the 1960s, many buildings were torn down, replaced by a shopping mall, parking garage and apartment buildings. This \$60 million answer to suburbia blocked direct access to North Side neighborhoods from downtown Pittsburgh. Business in the area started to slump and when the steel industry collapsed in the 1970s and 1980s, the North Side and the entire city of Pittsburgh fell into decline.<sup>2</sup>

Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh opened its doors in 1983, in the basement of the historic Old Post Office Building located at the heart of the North Side’s redeveloped center. Its founding was spurred by the Junior League of Pittsburgh and a number of civic-minded foundations that saw the value in supporting cultural infrastructure as the city’s industrial identity struggled.

Support for an interactive, family-centric institution was strong and the Children’s Museum soon grew, expanding into its entire building in 1985. By 1998, the Museum saw more than 100,000 visitors each year ▶

<sup>1</sup> “Final Report: Northside Pittsburgh”, Bob Carlin, November 5, 1993, pages 31–35, [www.riversofsteel.com/\\_uploads/files/northside-final-report.pdf](http://www.riversofsteel.com/_uploads/files/northside-final-report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> “Pittsburgh: Economy, Major Industries and Commercial Activity”, [www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-Northeast/Pittsburgh-Economy.html](http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-Northeast/Pittsburgh-Economy.html)

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*Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh occupies two historic buildings of Italian Renaissance and Art Deco architecture, with a connecting building faced by a wind sculpture by artist Ned Kahn. ©Albert Vecerka/Esto, Koning Eizenberg Architecture, Perkins Eastman Architects*



## MUSEUMS AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION



*The Museum Lab will be located in the former Carnegie Library of Allegheny, which opened in 1889. © Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh (left). Kayaking on urban Lake Elizabeth on the North Side was a popular Charm Bracelet project. © Annie O’Neill; Buhl Community Park looking towards the Children’s Museum. On the left is the mist sculpture Cloud Arbor by artist Ned Kahn. © Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh (right top & bottom).*

and was exceeding capacity, despite the North Side being challenged by poverty and urban decay. Rather than relocate, the Museum committed to its location and the needs of other local child-based organizations by creating a plan to not only expand, but transform the former city center into a cultural campus for children and families.

### **Growing a New Museum Model**

We launched the Museum’s \$29 million expansion project in 2000 committed to these key points: creating new exhibits based on our guiding philosophy of Play with Real Stuff; fostering design excellence; building in a green and sustainable manner; and sharing space with other child-based organizations. As the project joined our current building and the vacant Buhl Planetarium building next door with a third, contemporary building, the Museum worked with the City of Pittsburgh Historic Review Commission and the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation to ensure preservation of the two historic structures.

The expanded Children’s Museum opened in 2004 with interactive exhibits built by our staff and informed by research on how families learn in a museum setting. We worked directly with artists to incorporate innovative art works throughout the building. The building received silver LEED certification for green building practices and the Honor Award for Architecture from the American Institute of Architects, while the Museum received the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence and the National Preservation Honor Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Museum shares space with five partner organizations that work for or on behalf of children: the Saturday Light Brigade, a family radio program; the University of Pittsburgh Center for Learning in Out-of-School Environments (UPCLOSE); Reading is Fundamental Pittsburgh literacy program; Allies for Children, a child advocacy organization; and two pre-kindergarten/Head Start classrooms of Pittsburgh Public Schools. We consider the act of partnering one of the Museum’s core competencies, allowing us to ►

## MUSEUMS AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION

strengthen our mission by collaborating with others in education, the arts, social services and advocacy.

### **Reviving the City's Charms**

After expanding the Museum, we partnered with the City of Pittsburgh, the Andy Warhol Museum and the Northside Leadership Conference to create a new nonprofit that renovated a nearby vacant theater. The children's museum served as the lead fundraiser and the design and construction manager, and provided leadership, accounting services, and parking for the theater once it opened. The \$2.5 million project was completed in September 2006. Today, the New Hazlett Theater is a thriving cultural asset offering a variety of performances and community services, and an active participant in planning the future of Allegheny Commons.

This success furthered the idea that the North Side is full of cultural assets—"charms" dotting the community—that could link into a "bracelet" to enliven the area with a sense of creativity and connectedness. With the Children's Museum in a leadership role, the Charm Bracelet Project was launched in 2006 to inspire neighboring cultural institutions to collaborate on creative projects related to community life. More than 35 projects were funded, with large institutions such as the National Aviary, Carnegie Science Center and Andy Warhol Museum partnering with small ones such as Artists Image Resources, Venture Outdoors and Young Men and Women's African American Heritage Association. Through public art and performances, environmental stewardship, community events, book making, cross-generational interviews and outdoor recreation projects, a sense of local place making was renewed.

### **A New Meeting Place**

Concurrently in 2007, the Museum set its sights on reinvigorating a long-neglected city-owned park right outside the Museum's doors. Through discussions, tours and creative activities with residents, community groups and city officials, we learned of their desire to create a multiuse space that honors the site's history. The Museum raised more than \$6 million to rejuvenate the park and served as design and construction manager for the project. Completed in 2012, Buhl Community Park is now a vibrant, accessible place for the whole community to meet, lunch, make connections, even get married.

The Museum offers concerts and other programs and events in the park, such as Maker Faire Pittsburgh.

### **The Museum Lab**

To continue expanding the North Side cultural campus, the Museum is currently pursuing the renovation of the vacant, city-owned Carnegie Library of Allegheny that stands next to it. We have launched a campaign to raise \$16 million to transform this beautiful, yet neglected, historic building into The Museum Lab, a National Center for Excellence in Education.

The Museum Lab will be a multiuse facility where informal and formal educators will come together to test and study ideas to transform education. This endeavor will further the Museum's already proven success in leading collaborative learning efforts and creating replicable models in maker education – hands-on, open-ended experiences using old and new technologies. Manchester Academic Charter School, a North Side school, will relocate its grades 6-8 to the building and participate as an on-site learning cohort. Other educational partners in The Museum Lab include UPCLOSE, Saturday Light Brigade, Reading is Fundamental (RIF) and Allies for Children. The Lab will also provide training programs for formal and informal educators; offer public programs for all ages to learn skills such as design, construction and engineering; and serve as one of the educational centers for Pittsburgh's Remake Learning movement.

The first phase of The Museum Lab is on track for completion in 2018; when completed, the facility will be the latest development in creating the largest cultural campus for children and families in the United States.

Over the past decade and a half, the North Side has turned a corner and is now a thriving and desirable district. The hermetic mall at the center of Allegheny Commons has undergone a dramatic transformation, bustling with new technology companies and startups. Pittsburgh recently announced plans to revive the streets that once bisected Allegheny Commons and bring local traffic into, rather than around, many of its assets. The cultural campus for children, which may have been an audacious idea back in 2000, is now closer than ever to being realized. The Children's Museum is excited to be part of helping the North Side take a steady, positive trajectory toward a new prominence within the city of Pittsburgh, the region and the country.