

feedback

Our last issue of *h* provided an in-depth look at the Breathe Project air quality initiative, which the Endowments launched a year ago, and highlighted the 50th anniversary of “Silent Spring,” the landmark book by the late conservationist and western Pennsylvania native Rachel Carson. The magazine also profiled the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and its role in reshaping Pittsburgh over the decades.



Community Affairs

Successful economic development requires that you offer a good place to live as well as a competitive place to work. Christine O’Toole’s story “Community Affairs” shows how the Allegheny Conference on Community Development has contributed to that goal. It was the creative force in the establishment of the Allegheny Regional Asset District in 1993, which is dedicated to sustaining and improving the quality of life in our region.

Playing its historic role of bringing private and public sectors to the table, the Allegheny Conference raised the funds and educated the public and elected officials on the benefits of a dedicated revenue stream to make sure that our libraries, regional parks, and cultural and civic facilities remained the fabric of our community. As executive director of the Regional Asset District, I appreciate that the conference’s success has resulted in \$1.3 billion in investment in those assets as well as a like amount in funds to county and municipal governments to lower the dependence on property tax. RAD was a win–win for our area, and the conference’s dedication to the concept is the main reason it exists at all.

One important clarification: While the conference budget has grown over the years, the figure quoted in Chris O’Toole’s sidebar article, “Other City Leadership Groups Share Pittsburgh’s Goals,” is the consolidated budget of several important economic development and research agencies brought under the conference umbrella. This shared service arrangement is efficient and a model for other regional organizations.

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Green Legacy

Thank you for the “Green Legacy” article by Natalie Bell, which I enjoyed reading. As manager of the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, I’ve noticed that a positive

outcome from the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Carson’s book “Silent Spring” has been the outpouring of articles, reflections, remembrances and calls to action. Tellingly, events are advertised on Facebook, reflections and remembrances are blogged, texting connects activists, and YouTube is swimming with video interpretations. Just as communication changed with the advent of popular television, which accompanied the “Silent Spring” era, mobile browsing, web chatting, targeted advertising, customized reading and personalized music now feed omnipresent handheld devices.

Carson’s writing success stemmed from her accessibility. Bell cites Carson’s fresh subject, public science and her allegorical style. Bell also documents some of the reduced pesticide success stemming from the messages in “Silent Spring.” Others have noted the almost universal good from her message on the interconnectivity of all living things and their link to the earth. When Carson wrote, the subject matter was familiar, if unexplored, and the message well-crafted. The book rose on the national stage, in part due to the swelling tide of mass communication and an unprecedented connectedness to the world around us. Defenders and condemners made their case to a large-scale audience. In 1962, television was just becoming an omnipresent influence; today, a digital platform is the popular choice for news and entertainment for Americans. If computers were responsible for shrinking our world, then mobile technology takes the next step and connects us constantly, erasing geographic boundaries.

Texting surpassed phone communication five years ago. The shorthand style found in texts is the subject of derision, but the same arguments were probably made when contemporary style replaced traditional writing. Effective writing is transparent. It strives to convey meaning to an intended public, a goal that the texting upheaval meets, just as Carson’s idiomatic style spoke to the 1960s

audience. Absent, however, is a Caronesque communicator. Perhaps at Carson’s alma mater, Chatham University, informed awareness can influence another student to write about today’s pending environmental crises with the world as her audience.

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Air Time

I read with interest Jeff Fraser’s article “Air Time,” on efforts to improve Pittsburgh’s air quality through the Breathe Project initiative. Leaders in the regional community impressed me when we compared their efforts with those to clean Houston’s air, without sacrificing economic growth, during the six years I served as Houston’s mayor. Pittsburgh, like Houston, is proud of its industrial past and also has had to overcome stereotypes about its air quality. Leaders in the business community, nonprofits and the public sector worked together to achieve measurable improvements in air quality, based on good science.

Pittsburgh has so much to offer: hard-working people, mountains, fall foliage, and a sense of community built on history and traditions. In the long run, its economic development, like Houston’s, depends on the willingness of entrepreneurs, executives and skilled workers to move there. Most Americans want their loved ones to breathe clean air. I have been in the energy business, and I know that responsible companies can meet air quality standards using best practices. Hats off to civic leaders who understand that, in modern America, most jobs will move to where a skilled workforce wants to live, and not vice versa!

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