A CONFLUENCE OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Artwork proposed by
Joseph Mannino
for the North Shore Riverfront Park
February 19, 2002
OVERVIEW

The project installation consists of twenty-one pigmented concrete benches with encircling mosaic inlay highlighting the more-than-seventy neighborhoods of Pittsburgh; one tri-level drinking fountain with encircling mosaic inlay setting out the names of Pittsburgh’s three rivers; and two bicycle racks with vertical mosaic inlay designating the North Shore Riverfront Park.

Durable utilitarian objects are hand-crafted to humanize and make more personal the large-scale exterior park site by introducing a focus on materials, details, color and tradition.

The project envisions Pittsburgh - both conceptually and visually -- as a mosaic of separate, but interconnecting, neighborhoods which are gathered back to the rivers at the North Shore Riverfront Park site. As stated by the Riverlife Task Force: “The rivers are repositories of a vast and varied range of hopes and expectations and uses. But where they come together, and where the future lies, is as a center of community life.” The project will symbolically bring all of Pittsburgh back to the rivers, as those rivers help fuel the resurgence and growth of Pittsburgh’s many communities.
The central element of the project is twenty-one cast concrete benches with mosaic inlay, which feature the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. The benches will be pigmented cast concrete that resembles stone. The pigmentation of the concrete will enable the benches to stand out in their surroundings, while providing a rich ground for the mosaic. Their linear shape will be rounded at the edges, echoing the shape of bollards or tie-offs for boats. The mosaic lettering, in a variety of brightly-colored combinations, will add brilliant color to the environment, much as it does in New York City subway stations. The names of the communities will be displayed so that they read like an LED sign around the perimeters of the benches. This marriage of an ancient technique with a contemporary motif is meant to tie in to the notion of the continuum of Pittsburgh’s history: its past, its present and its future. The use of mosaic adds a durable, hand-crafted element to what might otherwise be an impersonal environment.

The twenty-one benches could easily fit on the Esplanade, either bordering the trees or along the decorative fence. I recommend, however, that they be dispersed throughout the area to add a unifying element to the Park. In particular, I would locate some of the benches along the river walkway at the base of the grassy areas. This sitting is desirable both because it provides a choice location for viewing the expanse of the rivers, and because it provides an ideal spot for parents to supervise children who might be playing along the river walk.

The benches should be relatively maintenance-free. They are unicast (similar to the bollards that have already been placed along the riverfront) and will be set with stainless steel pins and epoxy. The concrete is pigmented throughout, so it should not show wear. The mosaic tiles are hardened porcelain which are recommended for exterior application in any climate. They will be attached with an adhesive that has been modified for additional strength. In the unlikely event that a mosaic surface is damaged at some point in the future, it can be repaired easily by a tile-setter.

There are two additional elements to the project installation. Each will mirror the pigmented concrete forms and mosaic inlay lettering of the benches. They are included to add a unity of theme to the furnishings of the Park. While all of these furnishings serve utilitarian purposes, they can nonetheless embody the vision which inspires the Park, i.e. to reconnect Pittsburgh’s disparate communities with each other and with the rivers at the juncture of the park’s newly-developed public space.

The first additional element is a tri-level drinking fountain to be sited at the Esplanade. It will feature three separate heights for drinking: adults, children and wheelchair-accessible. Each fountain will display the name of one of Pittsburgh’s three rivers, and will be aligned directionally with the appropriate river. The second additional element consists of two bicycle racks, whose siting will be determined in collaboration with the landscape architects. These racks will be supported by concrete posts that will feature mosaic inlay spelling out "North Shore Riverfront Park" and "Three Rivers Heritage Trail," suggesting the connection between the new park and the growing recreational area defined as the heritage of Pittsburgh’s three rivers.

By including benches, fountains and bicycle racks within its ambit, the project will encompass and connect a full range of activities supported by the Park: its benches will allow contemplation, repose and a gathering together; its fountains will provide refreshment; and its bicycle racks will encourage and support sporting and recreational activities in the Park and along the Three Rivers Heritage Trail. While resting on its benches, visitors to the Park will have the opportunity to consider the physical and metaphorical boundaries of the Park and of the city, while contemplating Pittsburgh’s history and its relationship to the Allegheny, the Monongahela and the Ohio rivers.
Stefan Lorant writes in his classic history of Pittsburgh that "[t]he historical significance of Pittsburgh was determined, from the beginning, by geography. Whoever commanded the Forks of the Ohio commanded the great interior of the continent." (Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City, p. 9). After the founding of Pittsburgh, strategically located at the confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers, the rivers continued to control the development of the city. As the population grew up along the riverbanks, the city prospered because its rivers provided a route from the east coast of the new United States through to the frontiers. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Pittsburgh grew into a prominent manufacturing town. The rivers remained essential to Pittsburgh's flourishing, as they provided transportation for the goods produced and refined here.

It is only in recent years, as Pittsburgh's steel industry declined and Pittsburgh developed a new economy centered on technology, health care and education, that the rivers stopped being essential to Pittsburgh's flowering, as they provided transportation for the goods produced and refined here.

While developing this proposal, I did substantial research into the history of Pittsburgh. I placed particular emphasis on the importance of the rivers, and on the history and significance of Pittsburgh's many discrete and vital neighborhoods. As one travels through the United States, the uniqueness of Pittsburgh's many neighborhoods becomes clear. While many cities have deteriorated in favor of their suburbs and exurbs, Pittsburgh has retained its strong, distinctive, ethnically-flavored character. It remains a multifaceted, enduring city because of the strength of its many separate, yet interconnected, communities. In developing the project, I read Lorant's book about Pittsburgh, as well as works about Pittsburgh's bridges and its buildings. I reviewed county records regarding the territorial growth of the city through the years. Compendia such as Neighborhood Atlas, 1977; Pittsburgh Neighborhoods (1980 & 1983 editions); Choosing a Neighborhood; as well as records of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, were very informative. I then investigated the developing Three Rivers Heritage Trail. I contacted Bally Design after discovering that they had handled creation and installation of the signage on the Trail. Through Bally, I was put in touch with Brendan Wiant, who created the signage, and with Robert Gangewere, editor of Carnegie Magazine and representative of Friends of the Riverfront, who provided valuable information regarding the Trail's interpretive signage. The Three Rivers Heritage Trail represents an exciting expansion of recreational activities along the rivers, and it will intersect the North Shore Riverfront Park. It seemed important, therefore, to link the two in the project - suggesting the interconnection among the newly-developed venues for protecting and enjoying Pittsburgh's natural beauty - while protecting the internal consistency of the Trail's existing signage.

While not part of this initial proposal, forging a specific link between Pittsburgh's more-than-seventy neighborhoods and the North Shore Riverfront Park creates the possibility of future projects that can reinforce a dynamic link to those communities. For instance, with the help of middle-school teachers and administrators, students might be encouraged to write essays about their communities, with the best essays exhibited in PNC Park or Heinz Field. Similarly, a photo contest could be conducted - perhaps with the involvement of a group such as the Pittsburgh Filmmakers' - to create an exhibition. Through endeavors such as these, individuals within the communities will be drawn personally into a relationship with the North Shore Riverfront Park, and with the city and the rivers that it embraces. Public art, in the best sense of the term, engages its public, and such projects can support and deepen this engagement.
Perspective of River Walk
P L A N S  F O R  W O R K

The preparation and preliminary mosaic work will be done in my studio. This work will be done by myself and by assistants whom I will closely supervise.

The unicast concrete pieces, which I have designed, will be made by CastCon Stone, Inc. in Cranberry Township, PA. This company has already been commissioned to produce the benches for Pittsburgh’s new convention center. I have been in contact with the president of CastCon, who has agreed to allow me (and an assistant) to apply the mosaic tile to the concrete pieces in CastCon’s factory.

The pieces will be delivered and placed at the North Shore Riverfront Park by CastCon. The pieces will be installed by the Joseph B. Fay Company, which is presently working on the Park.

T I M E L I N E

Completion of the project will take approximately seven months:

April 2002
Development of printed layouts and stencils
Production of one thousand-plus porcelain letters (continue for two months)
Construction of mosaic trays (one week)
Formwork for concrete casting (six to eight weeks)

May 2002
Begin laying out four hundred feet of mosaic (four months)

June 2002
Begin production of 28 concrete pieces (four to six weeks)

July 2002
Begin cementing mosaic onto concrete pieces

The above processes will continue through September 2002

October 2002
Pieces moved to North Shore Riverfront Park (two days)
Anchor pieces (one week)
Plumb fountain (one half-day)
A CONFLUENCE OF NEIGHBORHOODS

ALLEGHENY • ALLENTOWN • ARLINGTON • BANKSVILLE • BEDFORD DWELLINGS BEECHVIEW • BELTZHOOVER • BLOOMFIELD • BLUFF • BON AIR • BRIGHTON HEIGHTS BROOKLINE • CARRICK • CALIFORNIA KIRKBRIDE • CARNEGIE • CHARTIERS CITY • CHATEAU • CRAWFORD-ROBERTS • DUQUESNE HEIGHTS • EAST HILLS • EAST LIBERTY • ELLIOT • ESPLEN • FAIRYWOOD • FINEVIEW • FRIENDSHIP • GARFIELD GLEN HAZEL • GOLDEN TRIANGLE • GREENFIELD • HAYS • HAZELWOOD • HIGHLAND PARK • HILL DISTRICT • HOMENWOOD • KNOXVILLE • LARIMER • LAWRENCEVILLE • LINCOLN-LEMINGTON-BELMAR • MANCHESTER • MARSHALL-SHADELAND • MORRINSIDE • MT. OLIVER • MT. WASHINGTON • NEW HOMESTEAD • NORTH SHORE • NORTHSIDE • NORTHVIEW HEIGHTS • OAKLAND • OAKWOOD • OVERBROOK • PERRY • POINT BREEZE • POLISH HILL • REGENT SQUARE • RIGEMONT • SAINT CLAIR • SHADYSIDE • SHERADEN • SOUTH SHORE • SOUTH SIDE • SPRING GARDEN • SPRING HILL-CITY VIEW • SQUIRELL HILL • STANTON HEIGHTS • STRIP DISTRICT • SUMMER HILL • SWISSHELM PARK • TERRACE VILLAGE • TROY HILL • WEST END • WESTWOOD • WINDGAP