

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19,



SARAH JACOBSON
AROUND PITTSBURG

Town aesthetic draws on history

IF YOU'VE BEEN around Pittsburgh for the past few weeks, then you've probably observed some of the festivities.

For a community of our size we've had an awful lot going on around town — much more than many other communities can boast. There have been parades, decorating contests, a benefit car show, concerts, a tree-lighting event, Santa visits, the Victorian Holiday Fair and more. The point is, there are a lot of folks in town who work really hard to make sure that this is a great place to live.

A recent visit to City Hall reminded me that the effort to bring good things to Pittsburgh residents isn't just a holiday endeavor; it's present all year-round. It took nothing more than stepping into the lobby of City Hall to prompt this awareness. If you want a little dose of civic pride, stop in. First of all, the building is beautiful. With impressive architecture, glass and fountains, it feels more like a museum or gallery than someplace you would go to pay a water bill or pick up an application for a building permit.

You can't go into the lobby without noticing the bright and colorful tapestries. Each floor has a different tapestry mural, created by artist Helen Webber. Every mural tells a different story, but all depict the history and culture of our city, demonstrated through the fabric images and poetry. Walk up each flight of stairs and spend a few minutes taking in the details on these works of art that capture the passion and life's work of our founders. There are also painted murals behind the bank of elevators that are worth noticing. These are also designed by Webber, and painted by Doug Rich and Susan McVeigh.

Next, go outside and take a few minutes to walk around the benches located in front of the building. There you'll find curved benches that contain bronze sculptures by nationally known artist Ronald McDowell. The bronze medallions and plaques create a timeline of Pittsburgh, beginning with land acquisitions in 1772 and continuing through history. Each medallion shows a historic event that is significant to our community and its development. The

benches and murals would make a wonderful destination for residents who would like to gain a sense of civic pride and learn a little more about this place we call home.

While there is a concentration of artwork to admire at City Hall, it is not the exclusive home of creative works that pay homage to our culture and history. We have a wealth of local artists, and their work has been incorporated into many areas around the city.

Railroad Avenue is home to two amazing statues created by local artist Frank Vitale. At the end of Railroad Avenue stands The Fisherman, a work that honors the Italian fishing community of early Pittsburgh.

A little farther down Railroad is another example of Vitale's work, The Steelworker. Created in 1993, this statue depicts another of the city's employers of the early 1900s, the Pittsburgh Steel Plant. Providing steel for the San Francisco Bay

Bridge, Hoover Dam and both World Wars earned Pittsburgh the reputation as the "Steel City of the West."

Heritage Plaza on Fourth Street is another location for artwork depicting local history. There is both a mural by Francis Palermo and a fountain sculpture, "Our Lady of Pittsburgh," by Jason Greigo. The plaza is a peaceful place to stop, and these two works provide a visual treat.

For anyone looking for a little something interesting to show to their children, pointing out the artwork here will provide a wealth of lessons. Not only can we teach a little history, but we can also show the importance and value of art as a communication tool. The other important lesson we can all come away with is how lucky we are to live in a community where our local officials value our history, culture and heritage enough to weave it into the public places we all have access to.

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