



Fayette County Cultural Trust

139 West Crawford Avenue
Connellsville, Pennsylvania 15425
www.fayettetrust.org

Neighborhood Partnership Program



**Creating and expanding
businesses in Connellsville!**

The Fayette County Cultural Trust was formed in 2006 to improve the quality of life in the area through the promotion of the cultural, artistic, heritage and natural assets of the county to revitalize communities and further economic development.

The Fayette County Cultural Trust was fortunate enough to be selected by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development to participate in their Strengthening Communities Partnership. In 2013, the Trust applied for and was accepted into the program that was designed to assist communities with a plan for improvement to receive technical assistance towards applying to the Neighborhood Partnership Program. In 2014, the Trust was awarded \$200,000 in the first of six years as part of this initiative. The partnership included funding from UPMC Health Plan, Somerset Trust Company and TriState Capital Bank. These investments were further supported with a separate commitment of \$100,000 from FirstEnergy Foundation over a four year period.



UPMC
HEALTH
PLAN



Somerset
Trust COMPANY
Member FDIC



FirstEnergy
Foundation



TRISTATE
CAPITAL

Since 2006 programming has included public art projects, historic walking tour, the Connellsville Canteen (a newly constructed “train station” featuring World War II memorabilia, 48 seat theater and a 25’ x 50’ HO Scale model railroad), Downtown Connellsville (main street styled initiative, currently in the 7th year), plus many festivals (Art on the Yough, National Train Days, Mum Festival, It’s a Connellsville Christmas) and community programs (Farmers Market, Rural Arts Collaborative, small business training courses and Lunch and Learn series in partnership with the Small Business Administration). These projects have included collaboration with the area universities including Penn State Fayette, Seton Hill and California University of PA. The City of Connellsville has continued to see improvement over the past 10 years, but it has accelerated in the past two years.



The combination of tourism, economic development, marketing, recreational improvements and strategic infrastructure improvements creates an environment that has and continues to enhance the economy and provide new jobs and growth. Funding allowed the Cultural Trust to expand its capacity by hiring full time staff. This funding has also benefited a number of other organizations and agencies including: the Connellsville Redevelopment Authority, Wesley Health Center, Connellsville Area Community Ministries, and the Carnegie Free Library. By providing funding to these agencies has allowed for the continued sustained and/or expanded capacity to deliver programs and services and continued economic development efforts.

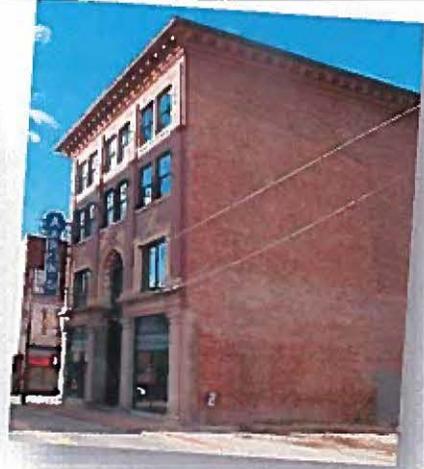
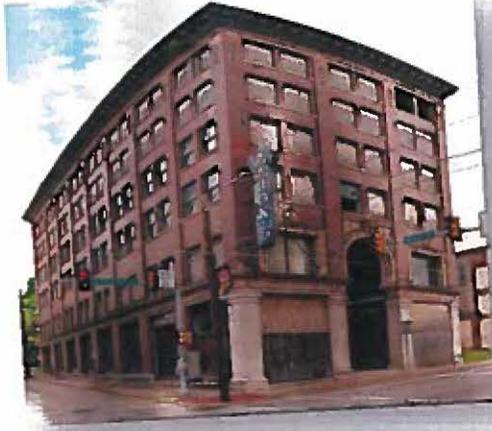
 **Circles** Connellsville Area
Thriving Families, Thriving Communities



Carnegie
Carnegie



A local entrepreneur purchased and restored a 1906 furniture store (Aaron's) into an event and conference center. He most recently has purchased two additional deteriorated buildings and a vacant lot to construct a new restaurant and office complex.



The Great Allegheny Passage, which passes directly through the City of Connellsville, has fueled economic development opportunities. A brand new 54 room Cobblestone Hotel is under construction along the Youghiogheny River front. The Connellsville Redevelopment Authority facilitated this private/public partnership with a variety of sources of funding to aid in making this project move forward. The Authority directly provided in excess of \$250,000 in private funding including acquisition, demolition, design and legal assistance. Local art is being designed to enhance the look and feel of the property. Several restaurants have opened and expanded in the downtown.



New Business
Chrissy's Creations

**GRAND
OPENING**



**COBBLESTONE
HOTEL & SUITES**

Sheetz has purchased and cleared 4 blighted properties and is currently constructing a new 7,500 square foot building and will install all new facilities. Fox's Pizza has purchased a 3 story building in downtown and has begun the restoration project for their corporate offices.



Several long neglected and blighted properties are being cleared and being marketed for new investment.

Small businesses continue to grow and expand. The partnership with Seton Hill University has provided business planning and educational opportunities for local entrepreneurs. This initiative is expected to expand to help established businesses take the next steps as they plan to grow their enterprises.

Using the Main Street model, Downtown Connellsville, a program of the Cultural Trust has provided funding for façade improvements and has created festivals and special events to promote the community. Additional activities include business retention and attraction, active engagement with merchants and beautification. Public realm improvements including new planters, benches and trash receptacles have been added to the streetscape of the city. The improved public space provides a more business friendly atmosphere where people want to gather.

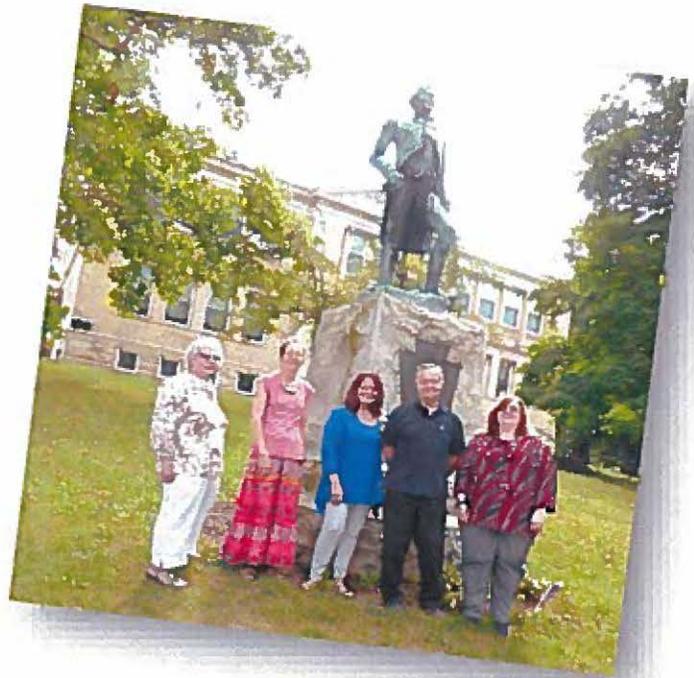
Several parks and playgrounds have been renovated and brought up to the most current safety standards.

Along with NPP funding has come additional Foundation support and investment. Pittsburgh area foundations including Richard King Mellon, Hillman, McKenna, Allegheny, Benedum and others have helped to further the work that both the Redevelopment Authority and Trust have been doing. This has included a blight remediation initiative, historic preservation work and social impact investment.

The Trust through the philanthropic efforts of a local business man now operates the Connellsville Canteen. A recent grant from the Allegheny Foundation will allow for a culinary arts training program to be part of this initiative. The Canteen also features lectures and programs to the community including a Lunch and Learn series, a Meet the Artist series, an Ambassador program provided in the spring features 10 sessions with speakers highlighting various sites and topics of interest to locals and visitors alike, an ongoing partnership with the National Catholic Holocaust Center at Seton Hill University has provided for educational lectures by Dr. Tim Crain.



A new initiative is the restoration of the Colonel Crawford Statue at the Carnegie Library. The statue was created 100 years ago and through a partnership will be restored next year.



Tourism is also an important part of the work that the Trust has been doing. While the Canteen is now a tourist stop and information center, the need to further explore and understand the needs of the area led to a Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategy, funded through the Benedum Foundation, we now are seeking funding to implement the strategy.



**New Downtown
Benches & Flower Planters**



**Blighted Property
Removal**

A White House initiative, Local Food/Local Places, through the Appalachian Regional Commission, awarded a technical assistance grant to the Redevelopment Authority in 2015, the only community in Pennsylvania to receive the recognition that year. The grant provided technical assistance to develop a plan to enhance the local economy through the use of local foods. A \$20,000 grant will help to grow the Farmer's Market in Connellsville



The arts have been integral to the work that has been done in the community. In 2008, as part of Pittsburgh 250, public art was installed along the Great Allegheny Passage at the gateways to the community. These pieces have been added to throughout the years. The Trust had started ArtWorks Connellsville in 2010 and operated a gallery with local and regional artists for 6 years when the opportunity to turn it over to a for profit enterprise arose. Now a new business, the Appalachian Creativity Center, has been able to expand the hours and offerings in a truly entrepreneurial way. The Rural Arts Collaborative (with support from the Benedum Foundation, Community Foundation of Fayette County and Chevron) allows for after school art classes to enrich the lives of children who would not have had the opportunity to participate in these activities otherwise. These classes include theatrical arts, visual arts, musical lessons and more. This program recently received funding to continue for another two years.

The Fayette County Cultural Trust and Connellsville in particular have seen rapid growth through the support of the Neighborhood Partnership Program. All of the improvements have made the city a destination for recreation, education and celebration.

In order to continue these initiatives we ask that you will seriously consider raising the level of tax credits that are available to this program from \$18 million to \$25 million.



**Connellsville Public Art
Welcome Arch**



Connellsville's Annual Rib Festival



Good morning,

The Allegheny Conference on Community Development and its Affiliates – the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, the Pennsylvania Economy League of Greater Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance (collectively, the “Conference”) – work together to stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Founded in 1944, the Conference is one of the nation's leading economic and community development organizations, combining strong private sector leadership with commitment from public sector partners. Our strategic focus is creating a more competitive economic climate and marketing the Pittsburgh region for investment, job creation and talent. The Conference relies upon the Regional Investors Council – leaders of more than 300 companies and organizations – to provide time, talent and resources to advance our agenda. One of three key strategies within the Conference’s agenda is “Strengthening Communities” – a strategy designed to encourage sustainable prosperity for everyone in the region by bringing together partners to take a fresh look at places in the region that have languished, to identify and champion improvements to state laws and policies that hinder the success of these communities, and to work across boundaries to strengthen local government and re-establish economic vitality in our communities.

One component of this strategy is a program called the Strengthening Communities Partnership (SCP). Created in 2013, the purpose of the SCP is to target business investment and support into a set of struggling communities that are well positioned for positive change. Over the three years of the program, the Conference has identified seven community development organizations for support; they are: Economic Development South (in the neighborhoods of Knoxville and Mt. Oliver), the Fayette County Cultural Trust (in Connellsville), the McKees Rocks Community Development Corporation, Operation Better Block (in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh), Sharpsburg Neighborhood Organization, the Washington Citywide Development Corporation, and the Wilksburg Community Development Corporation. Through the SCP, Conference member companies have begun to partner with these organizations to support their work in their communities, and through the Neighborhood Assistance Program (and the Neighborhood Partnership Program in particular) have been providing roughly \$2.5 million per year in funding support across the seven communities. Through that work, the Allegheny Conference and our membership have come to appreciate the immense value of the Neighborhood Assistance Program and the organizations that it funds.

You don’t have to look far to see the value of dedicated community development organizations. Lawrenceville, where this hearing is taking place, was once known mostly for crime and blight, but now has a thriving business district and a stronger housing market. That change came in no small part as a result of the work done by the Lawrenceville Corporation and Lawrenceville United to carry out the revitalization plans of the community, and while their work is not yet done, the change you can see right outside this building is a testament to the value that this type of organization in a community. And the

same thing is happening in many of Pennsylvania's struggling communities, whether it's McKees Rocks, where the Community Development Corporation is helping to transform the main street business district and revitalize the historic Roxian Theater, or Sharpsburg, where the relatively new Sharpsburg Neighborhood Organization is addressing blight and helping residents formulate a community plan.

But these organizations, and dozens like them across Pennsylvania, wouldn't be able to exist without the Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP), and in particular, the Neighborhood Partnership Program, which gives businesses an 80% tax credit on their contributions to eligible community groups in return for a six year funding commitment of at least \$50,000 per year. This program simultaneously provides valuable operational and project funding for community groups, while also connecting them with business leaders who become more invested in the community and more directly connected to its revitalization. The fact is, NAP has a proven track record of improving communities and building sustainable tax bases for local governments and for Pennsylvania. It does this by engaging businesses and directly building the capacity of community development organizations to serve their neighborhoods, but it also helps communities leverage additional funding from both private and public sources, as all of the organizations represented here can attest.

Unfortunately, at \$18 million the NAP is among the smaller tax credit programs in Pennsylvania, and while many more communities and businesses are prepared to make use of this excellent program, the funding is not available to them. In fact, in the last 2-3 years, the applications for NAP tax credits (which have corporate commitments attached to them) have been at least double the available funding. For that reason, we believe it is critical to the ongoing revitalization of our communities that Pennsylvania increase the funding for the Neighborhood Assistance Program and we thank and commend our elected officials who have helped advance this issue through the legislation being discussed today.

Thank you,

Will Bernstein

Senior Policy Analyst and Strengthening Communities Partnership program manager
Allegheny Conference on Community Development