

The Bridges of Allegheny County: Lower Level conference rooms in Human Services Building change names

If you frequently visit or work in the Human Services Building, you may be noticing new signage on the front awning, in the lobby and across from the elevators. These changes represent the first phase of updating all DHS locations.

Replacing the old signage presented an opportunity to rename the three conference rooms located on the lower level. After great deliberation, the names of three area bridges were chosen: Liberty, Homestead Grays and Rachel Carson.

Heinz becomes Liberty

The largest conference room, formerly the Heinz Conference Room, will take the name Liberty after the bridge that was built between 1925 and 1928 to provide a link to the South suburbs of Pittsburgh.

The bridge was designed by the Allegheny County Department of Public Works Design Engineer George S. Richardson. At its opening on March 27, 1928, the bridge was the largest, highest and most expensive bridge built in Allegheny County.

The bridge linked Pittsburgh's downtown with the Liberty Tunnels which were built through Mt. Washington in 1924.

The name Liberty, for both tunnel and bridge, most certainly reflects the swell of patriotism felt following the Allied victory in World War I. The 2,663-foot bridge had a significant impact on the development of Pittsburgh's metropolitan area by facilitating one of the first "automobile suburbs" nation wide.

The grand opening celebration featured a five-mile-long procession of cars, bands and floats representing organizations from every borough and township in the South Hills as well as county and civic leaders.

The parade began in Castle Shannon, entered Pittsburgh over the Smithfield Street Bridge, wound through the city and ended by crossing the Liberty Bridge heading back toward the South Hills.

Simmons becomes Homestead Grays

The medium-sized conference room will take the name Homestead Grays after the bridge that honors the professional baseball team that played in the Negro Leagues between 1912 and 1950.

Formerly the Homestead Hi-Level Bridge, the 3,000-foot bridge that connects Homestead with Squirrel Hill over the Monongahela River was renamed in honor of the Grays in July of 2002.

The Homestead Grays grew out of an earlier industrial, steelworkers team, the Germantown Blue Ribbons, which fielded some of the best sand-lot teams in the area.

Between membership in short-lived leagues and operating as an independent club, the Homestead Grays kept their winning team together to capture nine consecutive (a total of 10) Negro National League Championships and three Negro League World Series.

From the late 1930s through the 1940s, the Grays split play of their home games between Forbes Field in Oakland and Griffith Field in Washington, D.C. Team members include Baseball Hall of Famers Josh Gibson, considered the "Babe Ruth of the Negro League" and pitcher Joe "Smokey" Williams.

Stackhouse becomes Rachel Carson

The small conference room will take the name Rachel Carson after the bridge that honors the prolific naturalist, ecologist and Pittsburgh native.

Formerly the Ninth Street Bridge, the span was re-dedicated on Earth Day, April 22, 2006 after successful lobbying efforts by the president of Chatham College.

Carson was born in 1907, 18 miles north of Pittsburgh in Springdale Borough on the Allegheny River. She studied Biology at Chatham College, specialized in marine biology as a student at Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory and received her MA in Zoology from Johns Hopkins University.

While her early writing focused almost exclusively on marine subjects, each document stressed the interrelatedness of humans with their environment and warned of the dangers of indiscriminate misuse.

With the onslaught of synthetic, chemical pesticides following World War II, Carson redirected her focus and changed the sensibilities of the nation with her cornerstone work, *Silent Spring*. Centennial birthday celebrations to honor Carson are planned around the nation for May 27, 2007.