

Profiles of Success

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(First in a series.)

Rand McNally's recognition of Pittsburgh as the country's most livable city brought our changing metropolitan area to national attention. While the distinction is challenged by other reputable municipalities, certain factors appear indisputable: a relatively low crime rate, below average cost of living, renowned medical facilities, a progressive urban redevelopment plan, a variety of cultural activities and fine restaurant cuisine.

Underlying these criteria is one obscure premise -- human endeavor determines the trends of a given population. In every profession, there are men and women who strive to improve conditions in a city and in their fields of expertise. It is their individual efforts which, collectively, contributed to Pittsburgh's distinguished status.

Hard work, dedication and a personal sense of satisfaction have fostered a major restructuring of the city's economic foundation, productive corporate diversification and notable advancements in specific areas, such as medicine. Many times, however, the results have been more subtle, affecting small groups of people with specific interests and needs.

This special section, which highlights the backgrounds, responsibilities, and motivations of but a few, is a tribute to all Jewish individuals who have attained a prominent level in Pittsburgh's business community.

THE ARTS

Working with steel years ago was a lot of fun, reminisces internationally-renowned artist Aaronel deRoy Gruber. "Then I could go into the plant, throw materials into the furnace and bend it myself. I could do the welding and worked with the foreman."

Today, there is greater personal responsibility involved in welding, so the procedure is handled by a trained professional. In creating steel sculptures, Gruber does the model and leaves the more dangerous work to others.

Exemplifying a contemporary design in steel is *Steelcityscape*, the native Pittsburgher's prize-winning sculpture situated behind the Convention Center. Recipient of a Three Rivers Arts Festival-Western Pennsylvania Society of Sculptors award, the 18-foot collection of gray welded squares was fabricated by Kincaid Manufacturing Company and materials were paid for by Inland Steel.



AARONEL deROY GRUBER

Commenting on the labor and costs involved in working with steel, Gruber says, "It takes such a long time to do a sculpture and now the costs have gone up, so I don't do as many as I used to." The artist has replaced the expensive material with "stainless steel or, preferably, aluminum because it is lighter."

The focus of her present endeavors, however, is photography, a skill the tall, attractive woman refined after receiving an award for an exhibited picture four years ago. "I do what you would call creative photography, viz. combining images."

"The good thing about photography is one can go from nature and scenery to abstraction. It's all part of your creativity," Gruber explains.

The multi-talented woman recalls she started as a painter. As a child, Gruber drew people in a variety of fancy costumes; she pursued the interest at Carnegie Institute as a student of fashion art and illustrating and at the Traphagen School of Design. Marriage, however, altered her plans.

"In those days," explains Gruber, "you had to go to Paris to be a fashion designer, and we didn't have the money. I couldn't go to New York because my husband was here," and it wasn't common for women to have a career.

Until her first child was born, the aspiring artist presented fabric fashion shows for Eleanor Reamer at Kaufmann's. A move to Youngstown afforded Gruber the opportunity to study painting at the Butler Arts Institute; and upon returning to Pittsburgh, "I worked in the basement of our house, which was like a dungeon."

She took lessons from Samuel Rosenberg and painted on butcher paper, "learning the idea was more important than how you did it," and by the late 1960s, her efforts, both as a painter and sculptor, had been recognized by the artistic community.

In the mid-60s, Gruber, with an interest in acrylic resins, studied vacuum-forming, laminating and fabricating techniques at Rohm & Haas, the firm holding the Plexiglas patent. "I learned some of the little tricks of working with Plexiglas," she recalls. "I would build a model out of wood and use their press."

Acrylics was a novel outlet for artistic expression. "I like its transparency," states the artist, "the overlapping of colors and the effect of contained light within it. When the sculpture is motorized, it takes on a life of its own."

She entered her works in two of the earliest shows for artists working with acrylics, the Flint Institute of Art's "Made of Plastic" and the Jewish Museum's "A Plastic Presence;" today her acrylic sculptures can be found in a multitude of public and private collections in the U.S. and abroad.

With Plexiglas, in contrast to steel, "I can be much more involved," Gruber maintains. "I have sanders and buffers in my studio. I go to a friend's machine shop and show him where I want holes drilled in solid lucite, and sometimes I paint into the holes."

Of all the aspects involved in art -- creation, production and marketing -- the most objectionable to Gruber is having "to depend on other people to sell your work. You have to take your art around and show it." She believes it's hard for women in this field.

"The creative part is what I like the most," Gruber continues. "I do whatever is the most challenging thing at the moment," and unless commissioned to create a particular object, "I work on my own, for myself."

Gruber, who was selected 1981 Artist of the Year by the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts and, more recently, received an award for her color photography at Westmoreland County Community College, advises young artists "to do a lot of things and create a lot in the medium you are into. Don't worry about exhibitions. Do a lot to work out your ideas to find your direction."

Her own biggest reward, despite the artistic acclaim, was "raising my family and having three wonderful children. They were always supportive."

And if she were to do anything differently? "Because of the problems of dragging materials with you," smiles the artist, who has resumed painting, "I would come back as a belly dancer," noting in that capacity she wouldn't have to worry about carrying the tools of the trade.

JS

"My goal," states Alan Sher, "is to try to confine myself to the parameters of music -- there's too much to do in music and I don't like to do a shoddy job, so that's all I want to do."

Director of the Music Department of the Jewish Community Center, which includes the Anna Perlow Music School and the Y Music Society, he is also on the faculty at Duquesne University and is a founding member of the Gateway to Music Program which brings music into the schools. He also sits on the Arts Advisory Board of the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts.

A native of New York City with degrees in Music and Music Education from Brooklyn College and Columbia, Sher played cello with the Houston Symphony and



ALAN SHER

the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. In 1965, he became director of the Anna Perlow Music School; and in 1971, he was asked to direct the Y Music Society.

"When they first asked me, I said I couldn't do both jobs at once," he recalls, "but they told me they were planning to phase out the Society and there wouldn't be much to do."

"We didn't follow instructions," he noted. "Rather than phasing it out, we turned it around and made it an impressive series."

He says the series was taken "out of the realm of being a Jewish series" and made accessible to the entire city. "Even the artists have come to recognize us -- Serkin, Rampal and Yo Yo Ma all say nice things about the series. Serkin said, a few years ago, that the only audience with more warmth was in Israel. No one had to pay him to say that."

Instead of selling the series as a series, Sher and his committee began to sell each recital individually, cultivating more publicity than in prior years and letting concert goers know that "we can always find a few extra chairs if we have to -- we really want people to come."

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ILENE WINN-LEDERER

Artist/illustrator Ilene Winn-Lederer, whose commissions have included artwork for The Jewish Chronicle, is known throughout the country for her use of Jewish themes. She was recently chosen by the Jewish Community Center to design, with Helen Sysko, 12 four-by-eight-foot banners to be hung around the Center's new swimming pool. The theme of the banners, the 12 tribes, was researched extensively and the pieces will be constructed of waterproof, fireproof, brightly colored materials.

Other recent commissions include a drawing with a Hanuka theme which hangs in the Beth Shalom Hoffman Library. She is also working on a line of Jewish greeting cards for Recycled Paper Products in her native city, Chicago.

A former student at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and the Art Institute of Chicago, Winn-Lederer used to teach graphic design. At present, she works in a studio at home, where she can keep an eye on her two children.

Asked about the key to success as an artist, she replies, "Insanity -- unless you're rich enough to be called eccentric."

In a more serious vein, she says, "My identity is so firmly entrenched in the visual arts that I don't really think about doing something else -- everything in my career and in my life is perfectly balanced. But maybe I'd consider writing, which would permit me to do something else with art -- to write children's books."

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FINANCE

For William Berkowitz, life -- at least his professional life -- really began at age 30.

The Penn State graduate's entry into the investment business represented a major career change. He had received his degree in Ceramic Engineering in 1964. But in 1972, Berkowitz, a South Hills resident, "perceived opportunities in the investment business. The projected demise of the steel industry," he continues, "was also a major motivation. Finally, I found the investment field satisfied my entrepreneurial needs."

Berkowitz worked for several money management firms in Pittsburgh before taking another major plunge: last year he opened his own business, Berkowitz, Pierchalski, Inc., of which he is president, co-owner and chief officer.

The fledgling firm is already a major force in the city. Berkowitz explains that they have enlisted over 500 clients since opening for business in 1986.