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## Mapping Pittsburgh

### Connecting locals with creative venues

**PILLBOX** | Sanyu Kyeyune

Pittsburgh is home to art studios, galleries, independent museums, music venues, and a grassroots culture that is rapidly expanding and attracting out-of-towners to the city — and most people don't even know it. In every neighborhood of Pittsburgh, movers and shakers are creating new works and contributing to the art community that pervades the city's cultural underground. Yet, without a forum to discover artists' new projects, many visitors and residents alike tend to overlook Pittsburgh's various forms of artistic representation.

Nathan Martin and Carl DiSalvo of the art group Carbon Defense League and [DeepLocal.com](http://DeepLocal.com) are working to solve this problem. The pair collaborated with friends at the Andy Warhol Museum on the Mapping Pittsburgh project, which produced an interactive map website called Altwarhol ([altwarhol.maphub.org](http://altwarhol.maphub.org)). The site allows users to add hotspots, photographs, and videos, as well as make comments and suggestions about places on the map. In celebration of Mapping Pittsburgh's site launch, the Warhol Museum held an event Friday evening complete with DJs, a feminist punk band, clothing reconstruction, sticker-making, and local art exhibits.

With the hope of better enabling community members to collect and share information from their neighborhoods, Martin, a College of Fine Arts alum, and DiSalvo formed [DeepLocal.com](http://DeepLocal.com) to develop business solutions using information systems technology. "We're not content creators, we're technology providers," Martin specified. Even before the invention of Google Maps, he, DiSalvo, and fellow techie Jess Maki were hatching plans for an interactive maps website, [MapHub.com](http://MapHub.com), a project now three years in the making.

Given the popularity of Wikipedia and Urban Dictionary, it may come as no surprise that *PopCity* magazine called MapHub “the Wikipedia of maps.” In addition to developing MapHub, which should benefit all of Pittsburgh, DeepLocal has worked with residents of the Homewood area, collecting videotaped oral histories, mapping assets, and determining the area’s amenities. Using this information, DeepLocal helped Homewood to capitalize on resources that had previously gone unnoticed and increase the revenue of local businesses.

Though [altwarhol.maphub.org](http://altwarhol.maphub.org) is only a few days old, several points of interest have already sprung up on the map, including independent movie theater Melwood Screening Room (Melwood Avenue, North Oakland) and an alternative gallery space called ON (Penn Avenue, Garfield). Martin intends for the site to “give a forum for artists, musicians, and DJs to publicize their own work and get some exposure.” He believes that “the assets in a city like Pittsburgh are hidden,” and so the website will reveal the numerous underground activities that, in Martin’s words, “don’t happen in [just] the Cultural District and in the South Side bars.” In addition to benefiting locals, the site should influence Pittsburgh visitors; if local artists and other contributors to the site add their favorite hip bars, funky art spaces, and quirky music venues to the map, it should encourage people to get out and see all that the city has to offer in the way of cultural activity.

Warhol Museum Director of Education Leslie Clague did not hesitate to help DeepLocal achieve its goal of exposing art in Pittsburgh. Clague, another College of Fine Arts alum, advocates using the Warhol’s resources to not only showcase and preserve Warhol’s work and “link Warhol’s legacy with contemporary [work],” but also to unify what she called the city’s “disconnected grassroots culture.”

In addition to employing local artists, the museum contributes to the local art scene by holding showcases of local art; Clague is campaigning to organize happenings such as Friday’s gathering more often. Much like Martin, Clague wants the *Altwarhol* website to “be a resource and an archive,” especially for those unaware of the arts in Pittsburgh. Regarding her experience as a student at Carnegie Mellon, Clague said, “The kids on campus did not leave campus. They never got out and weren’t aware of the city. There’s this weird Pittsburgh phenomenon [that keeps people from exploring the city].” Clague attributes part of the problem to Pittsburgh’s disconnected topography and the separated neighborhoods that make up the city. To counter this effect, Clague said, “[Pittsburgh] needs that connectivity to really make things start to happen.” Projects like Mapping Pittsburgh will hopefully inspire people to take advantage of the clubs, bars, restaurants, galleries, and music venues that make Pittsburgh a diverse and interesting place to live.

Another point on the map that enhances Pittsburgh’s art scene is the Cogniscenti Art Gallery in Bridgeville, a studio owned and operated by artist Wendy DiNicola. With the aim of bringing various art forms together, DiNicola added yoga classes and aromatherapy to her repertoire and plans on holding drama classes and open mic nights in the near future. After working out of her home for nine years, she opened her own gallery a year ago. Now, though DiNicola has high expectations for community outreach programs, her primary goal is to let “everybody express themselves.” Acknowledging the difficulty inherent in an artist’s career, she said, “It’s not a glamorous life. There’s a lot of sacrifice. We are unique people.” Even if her gallery may take time to be profitable, she asserts, “I’m doing my own thing and I’m happy with it.”

Likewise satisfied with her art is DJ Mary Mack, a local artist who got her start DJing for Carnegie Mellon’s radio station WRCT as an undergraduate. A performer at Friday night’s event, Mack organizes themed dance parties

and gives the proceeds to organizations such as the alternative Big Idea Info Shop. Past themes have included *Flashdance* and Hot For Teacher. On April 20, Mack will host a railroad-themed party in a storefront space at 5020 Penn Avenue in Garfield to inform the public about the 1877 railroad strike. In Mack's words, her parties attract primarily "punks, artists, and activists," but she wants to cross over into other social circles as well. Summarizing her contribution to Pittsburgh's alternative art scene, she said, "We like throwing parties and supporting good causes." Mack, who strongly supports *Altwarhol*, said, "There's been a need for a while for people who are doing events to communicate with each other. I hope this site will serve as a big connector for art, music, and activism." Mack said she may add to the map two of her favorite hangouts: Lawrenceville dive bar Belvedere's and North Side coffee shop Beliza. "There's a lot of love for Pittsburgh and funny little idiosyncratic things about the city," she said.

Manny Theiner, director of Garfield Artworks and another Carnegie Mellon alum, also sees the need to make art accessible to the public. "My favorite phrase is 'frame of reference,' " Theiner said. "If people don't have the ability to relate to something, then it's hard to explain to them or attract them in any way." As director of Garfield Artworks, he books local bands, schedules touring acts, selects artwork for display in the gallery, and works with independent film organization Jefferson Presents... to show experimental and avant-garde films every month. Theiner characterizes Pittsburgh's art scene as "fragmented by neighborhoods and cliques and who has the money and who doesn't," but still believes that the city booms with activity given its size. Having witnessed students' failure to explore Pittsburgh while at Carnegie Mellon, Theiner said that "people on this campus [need] to leave it to find out what's going on."

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