

# NEWS & NOTES

from the ALLEGHENY REGIONAL ASSET DISTRICT

Summer 2009

## RAD RENEWS SUPPORT OF MAJOR REGIONAL ASSETS

The District Board voted earlier this year to renew its commitment to the original regional assets whose contributions to the community led to the creation of the District in 1995. The contracts will begin in 2010, the 16th year of the District's operation, and conclude at the end of December, 2014.

Following a nine month review and public input process, the Board unanimously extended for five years the agreements with the **Allegheny County Library Association**, **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh**, the **Allegheny County regional parks**, the **City of Pittsburgh regional parks**, the **City of McKeesport's Renziehausen regional park**, the **Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh**, the **National Aviary**, **Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium**, and **Phipps Conservatory &**

**Botanical Gardens**. As a group, they are classified as "contractual assets" by the District.

The contracts provide a minimum funding guarantee to the nine assets of \$39 million with the allowance for them to request additional funds during the annual budget process. The total grants to this group of assets in 2008 was \$60.3 million. The original group of assets included Three Rivers Stadium whose annual grant was folded into the new stadium bond issue. Adding this grant means a total of \$73.7 million is going to the originally-identified community assets, or nearly 90% of the District's annual budget.

In March of 2008, the District board appointed a year 16 Project Committee composed of three of its members and seven members of the District's Citizen Advisory board. The committee was charged to provide advice to the Board on

how the grant project should be structured beginning in budget year 2010, the 16th District budget.

The committee was provided with extensive background material. Before deliberating a specific plan, the committee also sought input from assets, elected officials and others through a public comment solicitation that was posted on the District's web site. The effort resulted in 150 individual comments.

In its report, the committee found that there was general agreement that the assets had greatly improved as a result of the District's support and that the designation is important to their operation and financial stability.

These pictures show the new and improved contractual assets, demonstrating how their boards and staff have worked to improve their service to the public.



(left) The Tropical Forest addition to Phipps Conservatory is a model for energy efficiency and conservation. The room immerses visitors in this unique eco-system with cascading waterfalls, winding pathways and education stations. (right) The City of Pittsburgh's Schenley Park features numerous playgrounds, including the Anderson Playground, improved by RAD funds.



The Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh underwent a major expansion from 2005-2007 and introduced "Dinosaurs in their Time," the first permanent exhibit in the world to feature a scientifically accurate, immersive environment spanning the Age of Dinosaurs.



The new "Penguin Point" at the National Aviary, home to a team of 11 African penguins, is the first exhibit to be opened as part of the Aviary's renovation project.



The RAD-funded EIN (electronic information network) links all county member libraries and Bookmobiles. More than 2,200 personal computers have been linked at over 87 sites.

## Revenue Update

Sales tax revenue through July totals \$45.5 million compared to \$46.7 million for the first six months of last year, or a 2.7% decline for the year to date. The rate of decline increased sharply in June and July as the impact of the national recession bears down on the local economy.

In order to properly assess the impact of this trend, the District board is continuing to withhold 10% of operating grants and postponing the release of discretionary capital grant. The Board is committed to reevaluating the budget and additional 2009 funding if and when possible. According to the RAD Allocations Committee, which recommended the policy, "This action is consistent with how the District has approached the management of the fund while still advancing our mission. Adhering to budgets is a discipline required of an agency that has no control over its revenue source." Regardless of the final decision, the District will still invest a minimum of \$75 million in the regional assets in 2009.

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## Oh the Places a Library Book (or CD, or DVD) Can Go in Allegheny County



*Becca Tsapis Mosse at the Squirrel Hill Library*

Becca Tsapis Mosse is a sixth-grader in search of *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life* for her summer reading list. Not currently on the shelf, Becca has requested the book through the on-line catalogue at the Squirrel Hill Library using her Carnegie Library card.

In little more than three days, *Jeremy Fink* will travel from its shelf in the juvenile fiction section of the Castle Shannon Library, through the Library Distribution Center in the West End, to the "hold" shelf in Squirrel Hill where it will await her pick-up. The short journey is made possible by the unified library system in Allegheny County.

Geographical and virtual boundaries are non-existent when it comes to library services in Allegheny County. Because of cooperation between RAD, the Allegheny County Library Association, and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP), a patron with a library card can borrow and have sent materials from any library to any in the system.

Materials move from library to library

through the CLP's Library Support Center in the West End. CLP is one of 29 District Library Centers that receives state funds to provide service to local libraries in their geographical areas.



*Library Director Heather McCue at Castle Shannon Library retrieving "Jeremy Fink."*

### How Does This Happen?

Every morning, every library branch in the county receives a "send item" list from the EIN – the RAD-supported electronic information network that links all member libraries and Bookmobiles, and provides shared catalogues, databases and other electronic communication on-line. Materials are then pulled from the shelves, marked with coded stickers and put in the bins for pick-up. Most branches receive a drop-off/pick-up every day (an average of 60 pick-ups a day); "send" items are then brought back to the Center for sorting and sending to the library or Bookmobile selected by the requesting patron.

Until six months ago, all materials were hand-sorted at the Center, a time-consuming process. This changed after RAD provided a \$250,000 grant to CLP to automate the sorting process. The ability to mechanize the sorting and delivery of materials throughout the library system was dependant on the EIN to code materials and equipment.

At the Library Support Center, a staff member puts the material under the sorter's bar code reader and places it on the conveyor. The conveyor then automatically dumps the materials into library bins, which are then put into a color-coded ready area for the delivery vans. Hand-sorting back-ups any technology failure. When the material arrives at the receiving library, it's scanned and a notice sent to the patron by phone or email.

Each year, nearly 5 million items circulate through the Distribution Center bringing books, CDs, DVDs, magazines and other materials to patrons from one end of the county to another.



*Automated sorter, purchased with a RAD grant, at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Library Support Center.*

### NEWS FROM THE RAD BOARD

#### District Seeks Nominees for Advisory Board

The District is seeking nominations for members of its 27 person Citizen Advisory board. Any resident of the county with an interest in the regional assets is eligible. The advisory board provides input on matters of eligibility policies and budgets.

Interested persons should submit a brief bio to the District office via email at [jg@radworkshere.org](mailto:jg@radworkshere.org), or fax at 412-227-1905, by September

15. Appointments will be made later this year. Questions can be directed to staff at (412) 227-1900.

#### Connections Grant Applications

RAD has a new project category for year 2010. Connections Grants are meant to provide concrete assistance for the District's interest in fostering collaborative efforts that will lower overhead costs, thereby enhancing programming. The District expects to allocate \$250,000 for this program in 2010. Applicants must meet RAD's regular eligibility requirements.

#### RAD Adopts Diversity Plan

Reaffirming its commitment to diversity and inclusiveness among assets and in its own work, the RAD Board recently passed its own Diversity Plan. The plan outlines specific goals and strategies for operating the agency in a way that allows all District residents to participate in employment, business opportunities, appointments and grant applications. *Starting with the year 2011 application, all applicants will be required to submit a Board-approved diversity plan.*

### Parks are Free!

A new initiative is encouraging people to get out to the more than 2,000 acres and 33 trail miles of City of Pittsburgh park spaces. *Parks Are Free* was launched by the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, the City of Pittsburgh, UPMC Health Plan and the Regional Asset District in June.

The campaign features a new web site, [parksarefree.com](http://parksarefree.com), that lists free events (music, film screenings, art programs, sports clinics, etc.) throughout the City of Pittsburgh's park system.

"Our parks and trails provide no-cost recreation that is essential to our region's vitality," said David L. Donahoe, RAD executive director. RAD is the major funder of the City's four regional parks.