

THE
WILKINSBURG
TRAIN STATION
RESTORATION
» Est. 1916 « PROJECT All Aboard!



> GRAND REOPENING CELEBRATION 2021 <

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Special thanks to:

Anne Elise Morris, longtime Wilkesburg resident and local historian for her help, guidance, and expertise throughout the restoration process.

Our past staff members, Marlee Gallagher, Sandra Roberts, and Sophia Yeung, for all of their work on this project.

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Join the Celebration!



Thank you to all who supported this monumental project.

One of the first things people notice about Wilkinsburg is its architecture. Our community is full of historic homes and churches as well as traditional main street corridors that feature hundreds of small, local businesses.

Though we face many challenges in our community, we can be and are proud of these special features that truly set Wilkinsburg apart.

The Wilkinsburg Train Station, because of its central location and its historic designations, has long been a source of architectural wonder. Residents would often ask about the building, sharing their personal stories about it, and visitors would be curious about future plans for it.

Over decades of vacancy and changes in ownership, the Wilkinsburg Train Station aspired to be a museum, an art studio, a community center, an antique store, and more. Over the years, it was used for storage and, at one point, a haunted house! In later years, it became overgrown with ivy, unsecured, and an easy target for vandalism. The skylight glass eventually broke, letting rain, snow, and ice into the building regularly.

Until 2016, there was no solid plan for the Train Station.



The opportunity to restore it came up suddenly with a project grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation. The foundation offered one caveat: prove that the community wanted to save the building.

Over the next year, through a crowdfunding campaign as part of our overall capital campaign, we worked with business owners and current and former residents, both near and far, to demonstrate vested interest in the preservation of this community landmark. And not only did people want to see the building preserved, they wanted to see it become an asset to benefit the community economically and culturally. They wanted to restore what the Train Station always meant to the community: pride, success, and a vibrant future.

I want to thank everyone who helped us achieve this milestone and complete this project. Thank you for donating to the project, for giving your time to it and to the community, and for your dedication through five years of project successes and setbacks. Your support, no matter how big or small, is evidenced in every aspect of the restoration project and will be preserved within the walls of the Wilkinsburg Train Station for years to come.

Thank you for being a part of the Wilkinsburg Train Station Restoration Project. Now, it's time to celebrate!



Tracey Evans
Executive Director
WCDC

An iconic and historic landmark

Designed for the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1915 by Philadelphia-based architect Walter H. Cookson, the original Wilkinsburg Train Station was completed and opened to the public in 1916. A multi-day celebration marked its opening in the community. The Beaux-Arts style building featured a central waiting room capped by a skylight that featured a series of glass diffuser laylights set into a decorative plaster beam and panel ceiling. The floor in the main space was made of terrazzo with a mosaic tile border. Polished stone pilasters and marble panels lined the walls of the waiting room and rear lobby, while wood flooring and wainscoting were found in the secondary office spaces. An ornate, decorative steel canopy marked the main entry to the building, providing weather protection for passengers as they were picked up or dropped off.

For decades, this landmark building served as a gateway into and out of Wilkinsburg for local residents and visitors. It was a source of pride for a community regarded as one of the wealthiest and most successful boroughs in the region. But in the mid-1970s, after Amtrak discontinued its passenger train service to Wilkinsburg due to declining ridership, the Train Station building was vacated with no

plan for its reuse. Despite its decline over the next decade, the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 and later recognized on the Young Preservationist Association's Tip-Top Ten List as the Pittsburgh area's number one building worthy of preservation investment.

In support of Wilkinsburg Borough's acknowledgment of the historic relevance and community importance of the building, and given the immediate need for stabilization and protection from further damage, the Wilkinsburg Train Station was eventually acquired by the Allegheny County Redevelopment Authority. An environmental, architectural, and historical evaluation of the Train Station was commissioned and completed by EDGE studio in May 2010.

The building sat empty for nearly six more years until the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation (WCDC) received a \$1 million grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation to jump-start what would become the Wilkinsburg Train Station Restoration Project in 2016.

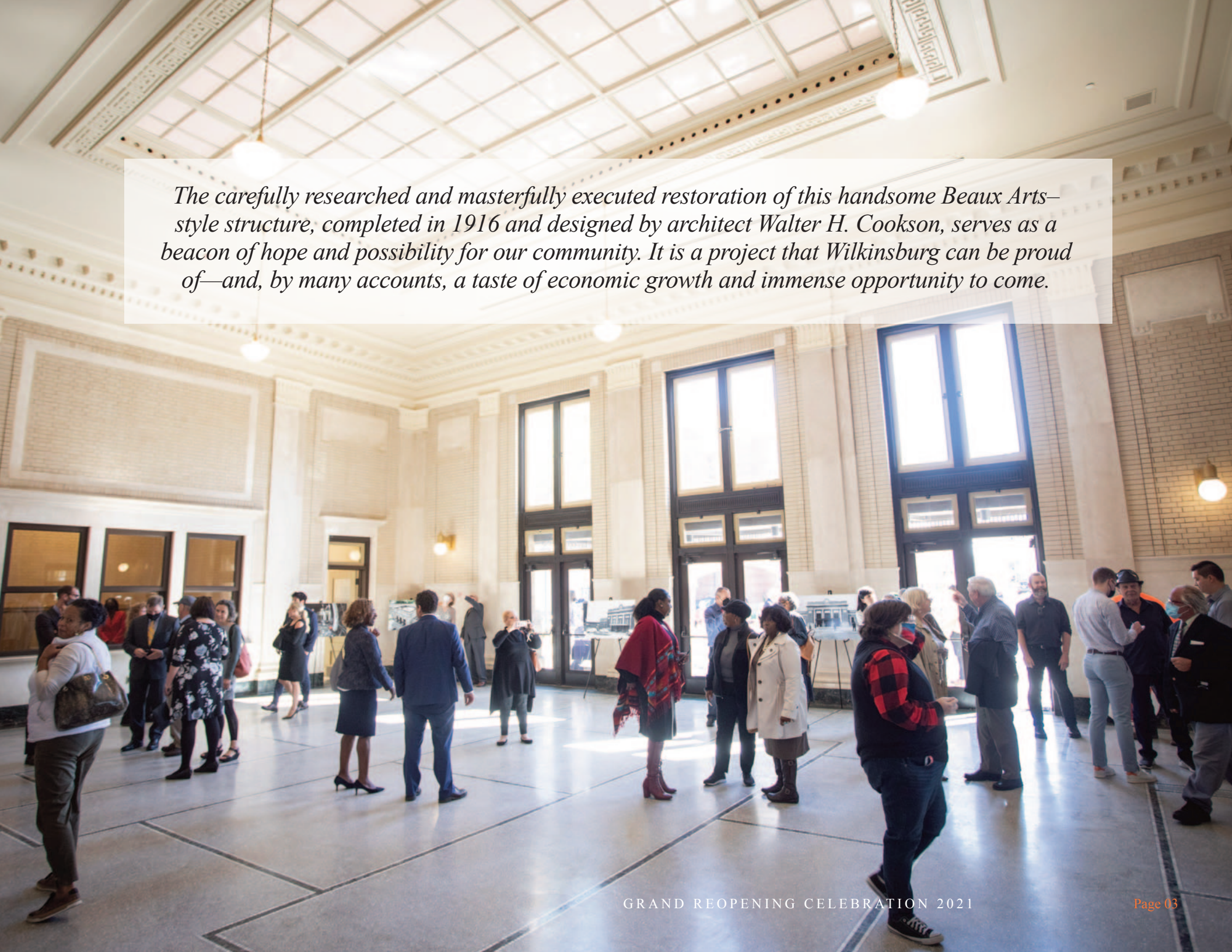
During 2016 and 2017, the WCDC convened an expert project team and initiated a capital campaign

to raise critical funds for the project. The initial campaign engaged hundreds of residents, business owners, and Wilkinsburg High School alumni in the restoration effort.

The WCDC successfully raised the \$6.5 million needed to bring the Wilkinsburg Train Station back to life, not only restoring an important community and architectural asset but also restoring a sense of pride in the borough.

As construction crews got to work on the building, it became apparent just how remarkable the Wilkinsburg Train Station building was. From the ceiling to the walls to the floor, there was so much time and care put into constructing the original Train Station. Saving and restoring the building was a matter of preserving as much of its historic integrity as possible while upgrading its mechanics and replicating any special features that could not be preserved.

The following pages highlight different aspects of the restoration and those involved in making this project possible.



The carefully researched and masterfully executed restoration of this handsome Beaux Arts–style structure, completed in 1916 and designed by architect Walter H. Cookson, serves as a beacon of hope and possibility for our community. It is a project that Wilkinsburg can be proud of—and, by many accounts, a taste of economic growth and immense opportunity to come.

The fascinating and varied life of a train station

“We all want the same thing — for Wilkinsburg to grow, for Wilkinsburg to be prosperous for all and for Wilkinsburg to be successful. The restoration of the Wilkinsburg Train Station is no longer just a symbol of Wilkinsburg’s past. Today, it’s a symbol of Wilkinsburg’s future.”

TRACEY EVANS / WCDC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The Wilkinsburg Train Station has lived a fascinating and varied life. Once a thriving Pennsylvania Railroad transportation hub, serving a growing community, the Train Station became an obsolete property, housing a parade of temporary functions over the years. Nobody has followed the twists and turns of the Train Station’s story more closely than Anne Elise Morris, president of the Wilkinsburg Historical Society. Anne Elise has spent more than 50 years in Wilkinsburg Borough and has been active in the Historical Society for the past 30 years.

“There was no shortage of ideas to repurpose the Station,” Anne Elise explained. “One organized group, named SOS (Save Our Station), searched for a new caretaker. In the mid-1970s, another dedicated group considered the Station a landmark and dubbed it Landmark Art Center. They began replacing broken windows, patching the roof and had the clock restored to function. The Landmark Art group had interest and support for a glass blowing center and training acad-

emy for youth to create glass items to sell. The funding did not materialize because Landmark Art did not own the building and could not purchase it. Then the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation (PHLF) added the Station to their list of historic structures and provided a plaque.”

In the following decades, the Station saw proposals for an antique emporium, a public food court, and even as the home of the relocated Wilkinsburg post office. But it was only after the WCDC’s inception in 2008 that momentum truly surged to bring the Train Station back to life. The WCDC paved the way for an ambitious fundraising mission as well as a marketing campaign designed to convince the community that the project would deliver long-term value for Wilkinsburg’s reputation, commercial prosperity, and sense of cultural pride.

Initially led by John M. Evans, former principal at MacLachlan, Cornelius, & Filoni (MCF) Architects, and later by Chris Watt of MCF, the early phases of

restoration involved collecting and storing many of the building’s physical artifacts and original fixtures. Following a thorough environmental and structural assessment of the building to determine the full extent of decay and salvageability, replacement of the heavily damaged roof served as the critical stabilizing element that would pave the way for all future work.

As you will see in the following pages, the project team approached the restoration with flexibility in mind, designing a space that preserves the integrity of the building’s architectural style and material character while creating highly adaptable interior spaces, allowing for a broad range of future uses. As one example, the reconstructed central skylight, now protected by a solid roof above, will emit controllable recessed lighting designed to replicate the warmth of natural daytime sun while providing adjustability to create varying moods or accommodate different event settings.



Revitalizing a landmark

PROJECT TEAM

Wilkesburg Community Development Corporation

Wilkesburg CDC Holding Co.

MacLachlan, Cornelius, and Filoni Architects

Sota Construction

PROJECT PARTNERS

Allegheny County Economic Development

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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The art of fixing and restoring marble

“What the Train Station means to me is that you can honor the past while moving forward. We don’t necessarily have to build a three-story mass retail building. We have all of these assets right here, and the Train Station really is the peak. It’s the light to show us that this can be done.”

MARITA GARRETT / WILKINSBURG MAYOR



Neal Mehrenberg and his crew began working at the Wilkinsburg Train Station in August 2018, reconstructing the iconic exterior clock that crowns the building’s facade.

From there, they began the painstaking restoration of the interior marble throughout the building. Patching and polishing original sections of marble, fitting old and new pieces together like a puzzle, and ensuring that the copper ties hold the marble in place for decades to come is a true artform.

For Neal, the art of historic restoration is more than a career, it’s a way of life, a privilege, and a legacy. At the beginning of the restoration, broken pieces of marble from the building’s walls were carefully numbered and neatly organized on the floor to await restoration and reattachment. Nearly all of the intact marble would eventually be taken down, cleaned, polished, and reattached, starting with meticulous staging and labeling.

Three types of marble stonework are featured in the Wilkinsburg Train Station:

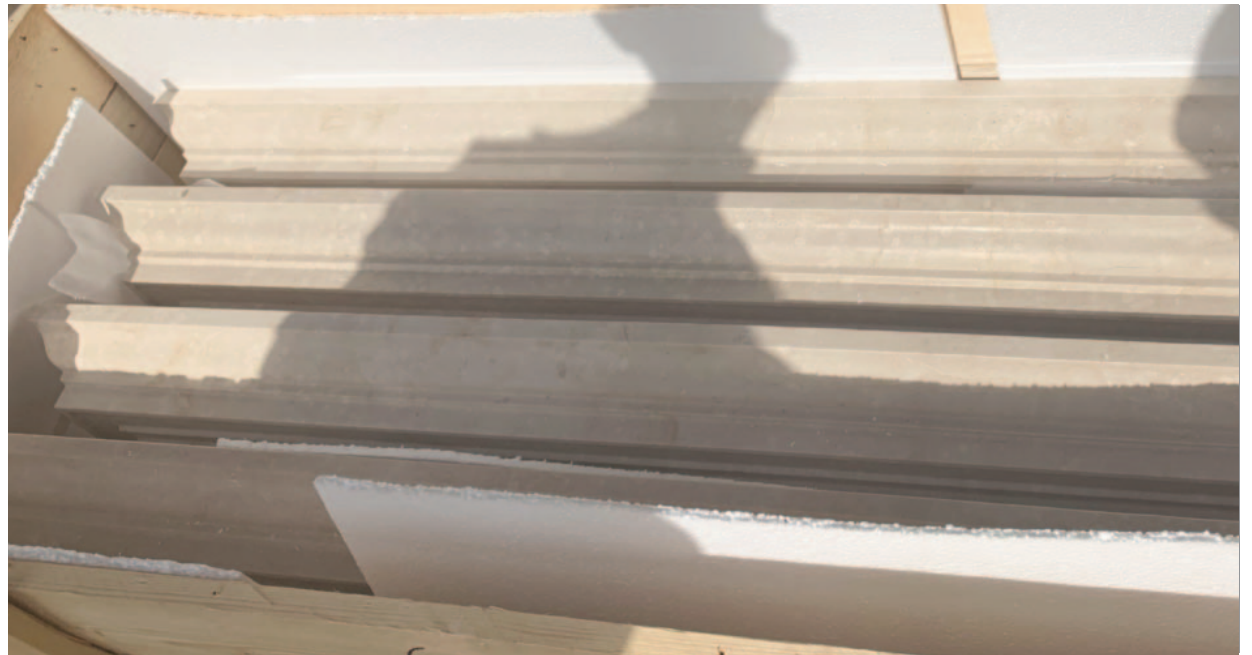
Italian Botticino marble, a cream-colored stone, adorns the walls through the building.

White Carrera marble, a light stone, can be found on the interior sills and in the building’s anteroom, which leads toward the tunnel access to what was once the train platforms.

Tinos green marble accents the stonework.

Each piece of marble has its own unique character and each slab polishes and cleans up differently. Thinner cuts of marble can warp and deform over time. Imperfections, whether natural or the result of human activity and inevitable wear, are part of the story of each piece of stone.





CRAFTSMAN:
Neal Mehrenberg, Bricklayer
Marsa, Inc.

—

CREW:
Rick Lopatta
Troy Sackett

THINGS ARE LOOKING UP

Recreating detailed, ceiling-level plasterwork

At 84 years old, master plaster craftsman, Harry Stites, brought more than 50 years of industry experience and knowledge to the Wilkesburg Train Station restoration.

Between January and August 2020, Harry and his team from Steel City Plastering worked to recreate the detailed plasterwork along the waiting room ceiling.

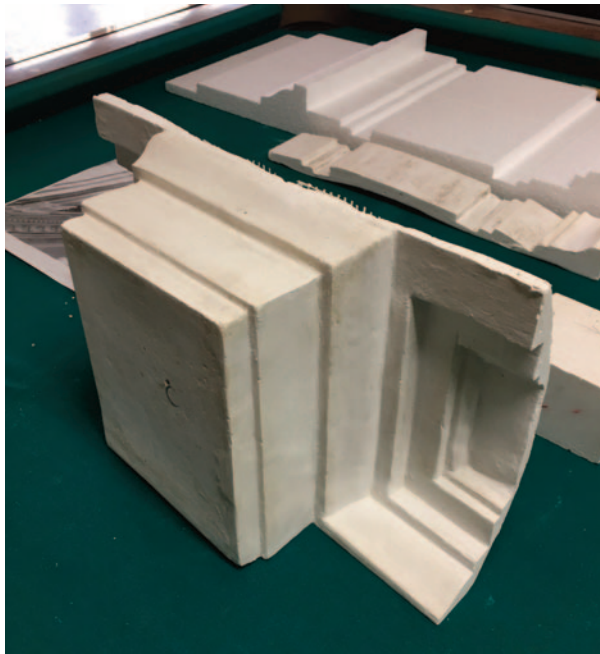
The process of recreating the plasterwork started with a single piece of salvaged plaster from one of the Train Station's original cornice moldings. With enough detail intact to provide a full understanding of its design and proportions, Harry's crew expertly created a mold that was used to recreate exact replicas of the original cornices. This process was completed offsite at the Steel City Plastering workshop in Cheswick, PA.

The cornices were then affixed to a waterproofed plywood base using a durable substrate material and modern adhesives designed to withstand the test of time. Harry and his team operated daily, working slowly across the room, in tandem with the other contractors in the building and with the help of a mobile scaffold rig. The finished product

ensures that what visitors see when they look up today is a perfectly rendered replica of what once encircled the building's grand waiting room more than 100 years ago.

For Harry, working on the Wilkesburg Train Station restoration was an honor and he is proud to have had a part in rebuilding and restoring this century-old building. Harry and his crew look forward to sharing their expert work with the public and for others to experience what he and the other craftspeople involved in the restoration have accomplished.





CRAFTSMAN:
Harry Stites, Owner
Steel City Plastering

—

CREW:
Matt Pope
Jerry Cole
Chuck Hawk

Preserving and repairing the original terrazzo floor

Terrazzo is a special floor-making technique that combines crushed marble, granite, or quartz with a base bonding component, such as cement, concrete, or a polymer mixture. The stone composite is spread evenly over an area of subfloor. Once cured, it is ground down and polished to create a uniformly smooth finished surface. Traditionally, terrazzo floors are approximately one-half inch thick. The floor in the Wilkesburg Train Station, however, is closer to three inches.

To create the original terrazzo floor in the Wilkesburg Train Station, workers would have manually ground down and polished the floor using tools resembling wooden push brooms with a coarse stone attached to the bottom. With each pass, the coarse stones would be replaced by finer and finer stones, working across the floor until the desired smoothness was achieved.

Even after years of wear and, in more recent decades, regular exposure to rain, ice, and snow, surprisingly, the original terrazzo floor in the Train Station remained solid and largely intact. This realization helped steer the project team's decision to restore the floor rather than replace it.

Michael Toole, third generation owner of Allegheny Installations, was brought in during late summer 2020 to complete this task — one of the final pieces of restoration in the building.

Michael and his crew sought to preserve as much of the original floor as possible. As with other aspects of the Wilkesburg Train Station restoration, the basic challenge was to balance old and new, minimizing the visible difference between the two.

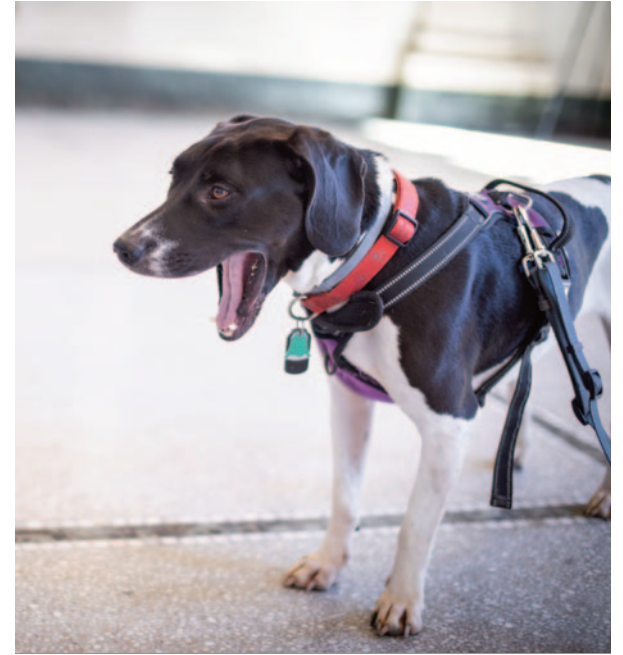
In areas where the original floor was badly damaged or destroyed altogether, Allegheny Installations poured a new terrazzo mixture closely mimicking the original. A small room just off of the central waiting room served as a test area for creating the optimal near-match mixture before applying it to the larger space. The grouting and filling were achieved with a clear epoxy resin, with new mosaic tile applied where needed. The floor was patched and cracks were repaired across the span of the room. Finally, the entire surface was polished to a 200-grit matte finish. In total, the 2,820 square foot floor restoration took just one month for Michael and his dedicated crew to complete.





“It’s a good feeling to bring back history that’s been hidden for many years.”

- BRETT HUGHES -



CRAFTSMAN:

Michael Toole, Owner
Allegheny Installations

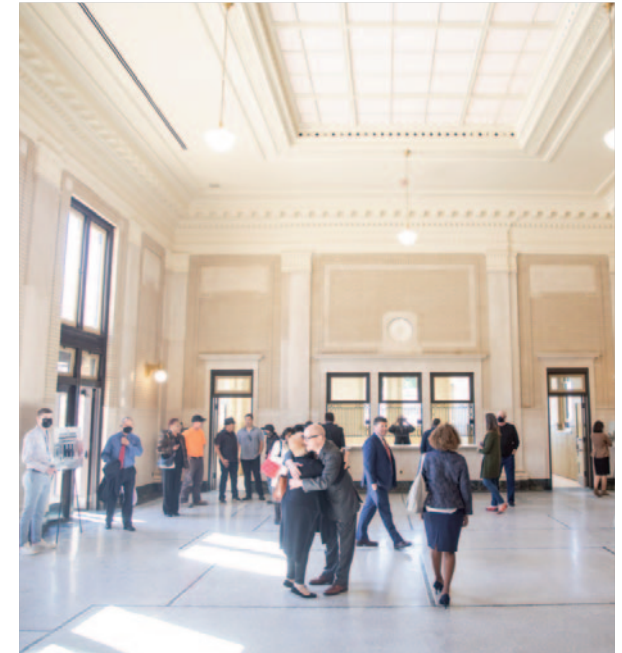
CREW:

Nick Granata
Brett Hughes
Ray Mincin

SUPPLIER:

Terrazzo & Marble Supply

Cutting the ribbon at the restored Wilkinsburg Train Station



“The restoration of this building right here demonstrates what can happen when we talk about rebuilding neighborhoods. If we rebuild and restore this transit center, we can do what we do best as people: restore hope.”

ED GAINNEY / PA STATE REPRESENTATIVE



In Friday, September 24, 2021, the WCDC hosted the official ribbon cutting for the restored Wilkinsburg Train Station.

Dozens of community members, business owners, and honored guests and speakers, including PA Department of Community & Economic Development Secretary Dennis Davin, PA Senator Jay Costa, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, PA Representative Ed Gainey, and Wilkinsburg Mayor Marita Garrett, participated in the event to come together and celebrate this landmark achievement.

The WCDC is now working to secure tenants for the Train Station, including a restaurant for the main lobby area. Once operational, the restored Train Station is estimated to generate \$7.2 million in economic output annually and \$3.8 million in value added to the region’s economy consisting of labor income, property income, and indirect business taxes annually.





Thank you to our friends and supporters

The Commonwealth of PA, Honorable Tom Wolf, Governor

PA Department of Community and Economic Development

Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County

Bridgeway Capital

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

With the support of more than 360 community donors, including local businesses and foundations, residents, government officials, and Wilkesburg High School alumni, we raised \$6,500,000 to support the restoration of the Wilkesburg Train Station.

MAJOR FUNDERS

Foundations

Allegheny Foundation
Anonymous
Hillman Foundation
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on Behalf of
James B. Richard
Richard King Mellon Foundation

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THE
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TRAIN STATION
RESTORATION
»Est. 1916« PROJECT All Aboard!

*To learn more about the Train Station
and find out what's next for this iconic
building, visit [wilkinsburgcdc.org/
wilkinsburg-train-station](http://wilkinsburgcdc.org/wilkinsburg-train-station).*

WCDC
Wilkinsburg Community
Development Corporation

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