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## Chateau, a fragmented history and a colorful future

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Outside of Johnny Angel's Ginchy Stuff in Chateau. Photo credit: Neil Strebog

## A historical hemorrhage from Manchester has left Chateau with a unique blend of cultural novelties despite a dwindling population

By: Nick Eustis

At first glance, Chateau may seem a barren urban desert. Old warehouses and factories dot the landscape and wide boulevards host few cars; sparse greenery grows through the cracks in the concrete, resilient like cacti. But like many deserts, there are still many beautiful sights to behold for those who venture in.

Chateau is home to some of Pittsburgh's most well-known hotspots, including Three Rivers Casino and the Carnegie Science Center. It also plays host to intriguing museums like [Bicycle Heaven](#), a museum packed with bicycles of all shapes and sorts from its floor to its ceiling.

Despite this, Chateau is a name unfamiliar to many Pittsburghers. This lack of recognition isn't necessarily surprising, as Chateau didn't even exist until the 1960s. The neighborhood was originally part of Pittsburgh's Manchester neighborhood.

Manchester was incorporated into what was then the City of Allegheny in 1867. Later, Manchester became one of the hubs of business in Allegheny City. The neighborhood quickly became a thriving residential area, with a vibrant immigrant and African-American community. Manchester also became a center of late 19th-century architecture in Pittsburgh.

The 20th century, however, brought increased development in both Pittsburgh and its suburbs.

A period commonly known as the 'Pittsburgh Renaissance,' beginning in 1946 and ending in 1973, saw large-scale urban redevelopment throughout the city, most notably downtown, the Hill district and Northside. One such project envisioned "industrial districts...created west of Chateau Street," as well as



Neon bikes and more at Bicycle Heaven in Chateau. Photo credit: Nick Eustis



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“new highways [running] along Chateau Street,” according to Dan Rooney and Carol Peterson, authors of “Allegheny City: A History of Pittsburgh’s Northside.”

The proposed new highways running along Chateau Street would become what is now Pennsylvania Route 65. Construction began in 1961. The highway became the border for the L-shaped urban islet that is now Chateau, forcibly separating it from Manchester and creating a new neighborhood. A sharp decline in population had already struck Manchester; in a twenty-year span from 1940 to 1960, the neighborhood’s population dwindled from 11,797 residents to 8,528 – a 28 percent drop. With Route 65 splitting Chateau from Manchester, the population of the area quickly plummeted. By 1970, only 681 people still remained in Chateau.

Today, Chateau bears the scars of its redevelopment. The great wall that is Route 65 left Chateau isolated and difficult to access, crippling the neighborhood’s population to the point that very few persons still currently reside there. One of those residents, Newport Marina Inc. manager Jason Fleming, estimates fewer than 30 people live in the area. “I’m only aware of three or four [residents], to be honest,” Fleming said.



Bicycle Heaven in Chateau. Photo credit: Nick Eustis

Fleming moved to the region after accepting his current job, as the position came with a house behind the marina he manages. Fleming describes his home as, “a green oasis in the middle of warehouses.” He is content with the privacy, a scarce commodity compared to city living. “It’s small, it’s comfortable [and] it’s very private,” Fleming said.

However, Fleming acknowledges that privacy likely won’t be permanent. “The face of this neighborhood is going to change drastically in the next five to ten years,” Fleming said. With Chateau sitting on valuable riverfront property, development companies have taken an interest.

One such company is the Pittsburgh based [Millcraft Industries](#), which is currently working on a 15-acre project called ‘Esplanade,’ which means “a promenade over water.” Esplanade plans to transform the Chateau neighborhood into a mixed residential and business district.

“This project will include a wide mix of apartments, condos, and workforce housing opportunities along with a full-service hotel, community-oriented retail and service businesses, entertainment and restaurants,” said Millcraft president and COO, Lucas Piatt. The project is also expected to improve and expand upon current walking and biking trails, public transportation, and roads in Chateau.

Fleming worries that development will ultimately force him out of Chateau. “I don’t necessarily know I want [Chateau] developed,” Fleming said. “I don’t know that a small business like this marina will survive.”

It was at this marina that Fleming met Tony DeCarlo, the owner of the Chateau Café and Cakery. This chance encounter led Fleming to take a job at the café as a barista, where he works today as a second job.

DeCarlo and his wife Keren opened the [Chateau Café and Cakery](#) in 2013. While DeCarlo is a lifelong Northside resident, opening a business in Chateau wasn’t always on his mind.

“A friend of ours told us about our building owner, looking to provide more food amenities to the tenants in the building. We saw it as a well-calculated risk in starting a business there, and so it goes,” said DeCarlo. In addition to cakes and lunch food, the café also caters, hosts private events, and even offers delivery through GrubHub and UberEats.

Since starting his business in Chateau, DeCarlo has come to see the area as an untapped reservoir of potential. “It has level land, with lots of brown spaces that could be converted into green areas,” DeCarlo said. “I’d like to see even more companies invest in fixing up some of the other vacant buildings, and provide jobs for the Northside community.”



The dining room at Chateau Café and Cakery. Photo courtesy of Chateau Café and Cakery

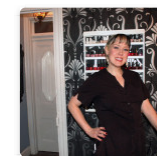
It’s not just commerce that has found a home in Chateau. Cultural centers, like [Bicycle Heaven](#), have also rooted



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themselves in the neighborhood. Founded as a vintage bike shop in 1996, the Bicycle Heaven Museum opened in 2011.

“It is the world’s largest bicycle museum and shop,” according to museum owner Craig Morrow. “Most [bicycle museums] only have a couple hundred bikes.”

The museum has approximately 3,200 bicycles on display and another 800 in storage. The collection ranges from the everyday to the eccentric, including Elvis-themed rides and the [ultra-rare Bowden Spaceland fiberglass collection](#). Currently, there are only 37 in existence, 16 of which are resting in Bicycle Heaven. The museum also operates as a repair shop seven days a week.

Just steps from Bicycle Heaven sits a quirky destination known as [Johnny Angel's Ginchy Stuff](#). Johnny Angel is a musician who grew up on the Northside, with a career spanning over 50 years. Angel still performs with his group, Johnny Angel and the Halos, specializing in the hits of the 50s, 60s and 70s. The museum hosts Angel’s massive collection of decade-spanning music memorabilia and audio recordings.

In addition to hidden hotspots, Chateau also has the resources to help build a successful community.

“Bidwell Training Center is a nonprofit career training school that provides full scholarships to qualified students,” said Bidwell admissions coordinator, Bridgette Kennedy-Riske. Bidwell has been on the Northside since its foundation in 1968 and in the Chateau area since 1987.

In order to take advantage of [Bidwell's resources](#), “A person must live in Pennsylvania, have a high school diploma or equivalency, and complete the three-step admissions process,” said Kennedy-Riske. From there, Bidwell works with employers to identify career paths for applicants.

Bidwell’s programs have been an important resource for many Pittsburghers. One such case is that of Chelsey Seevers, a chemical laboratory technician at Covestro, a material sciences company. While working multiple jobs in the service industry trying to support her young daughter, Seevers decided she needed to take progressive steps towards a more stable career path.

A friend of Seevers introduced her to Bidwell and its courses. Soon after, she began a one-year chemical laboratory technician program. After eight months of class and lab work, Seevers began an externship at Bayer (five of Bidwell’s seven training programs require externships). Within weeks after starting at Bayer, she was offered a full-time lab technician position with the company. Her division later broke away from Bayer to create Covestro, where Seevers works today.

“Anyone that goes in [Bidwell] comes out different in a very good way,” said Seevers.

Despite its historical hardships, Chateau is a pivotal slice of Pittsburgh. It’s where people can see a slice of Americana through bicycles and old records, where people can find a career they didn’t know they wanted, where people can see the legacy of Pittsburgh’s city planning and possibly its next revival.

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