

# GAME CHANGING

Dennis Yablonsky, CEO of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, explains how Pittsburgh successfully reinvented itself after economic upheaval

**Pittsburgh's transformation has been called a Great American comeback story. What's Pittsburgh's secret for success and how did the region get back into the game?**

Pittsburgh has become a model for economic, environmental and quality of life transformation and has created, over the past 30 years, a diverse, balanced and resilient economy. Our region's unique ability to organise public-private partnerships of scale – such as the historic partnership that got Pittsburgh's air, water and image cleaned up – was leveraged to engineer and execute a transformation strategy that led the region out of economic collapse in the late 1980s.

Three key factors drove our successful transformation, and these keep our region in the game today. They are:

- Pittsburgh builds upon its history as a hub for manufacturing, finance, business services and energy.
- Pittsburgh leverages human capital to create new industries based on research, innovation and entrepreneurship – the latter around globally important fields such as life sciences, healthcare and information technology.
- And Pittsburgh capitalises on its natural and cultural assets to invest in infrastructure and facilities to generate economic development and improve our quality of life.

These assets make Pittsburgh a city and a region that's diverse, dynamic, clean and green. It's a place where companies want to invest and where people can actually live a life that can only be imagined in many places.

**Pittsburgh is branding itself as 'the US's new energy capital'. What does this mean for the region and those looking to invest in south-western Pennsylvania?**

South-western Pennsylvania has a 150-year history of energy innovation. The first commercial oil well was drilled here in 1859, and the natural gas pipeline, commercial nuclear power plant and air emissions control technologies were all created in the Pittsburgh region. We led the nation in sustainability when we monumentally cleaned up our skies and waterways through lasting public-private partnerships that span 65 years. In fact, Pittsburgh was a green pioneer long before

Photo courtesy of WHIRL Magazine – Pittsburgh



## CURRICULUM VITAE

### DENNIS YABLONSKY

**2009**

**CEO of Allegheny Conference on Community Development and the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance**

**2003-2008**

**Secretary of Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development**

**2001**

**Founding CEO of Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse**

**1999**

**Founding CEO of Pittsburgh Digital Greenhouse**

“THESE ASSETS MAKE PITTSBURGH A CITY AND A REGION THAT'S DIVERSE, DYNAMIC, CLEAN AND GREEN... A PLACE WHERE COMPANIES WANT TO INVEST AND WHERE PEOPLE CAN ACTUALLY LIVE A LIFE THAT CAN ONLY BE IMAGINED IN MANY PLACES”

'green' became a global buzzword associated with opportunities around clean tech, intelligent building systems and alternative energy.

That pioneering is coupled with the region's historic manufacturing expertise – our fundamental capacity to make parts and components. Today, we make mirrors for solar panels, gear boxes for wind turbines, and electrical control products and power distribution equipment for windmills and sustainable buildings, all with technological precision. The region is uniquely situated at a cross-section of critical assets: abundant natural resources, including the gas-rich Marcellus Shale field, a robust energy supply chain connecting to our natural resources base and R&D centres such as the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) – headquartered here – and a highly skilled talent pool that drives innovation. These attributes prime Pittsburgh to take a well-earned position as the nation's new energy capital.

World energy demand is projected to increase by at least 35% by 2030. Regions such as Pittsburgh that control energy supply and that are developing marketable global energy products and solutions will be positioned to flourish. With our combination of natural resources, engineering and manufacturing capability and innovation resources, the Pittsburgh region can do for energy what the Silicon Valley did for computing.

**What is the economic outlook for the Pittsburgh region heading into 2010?**

During the worst economic recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Pittsburgh region's balanced economy has outperformed the nation and the average of 14 benchmark cities throughout 2009. We're optimistic about our prospects for 2010. A powerful economic indicator is the trend of regional companies announcing plans to increase employment compared to those announcing cutbacks. Companies, including a number in the oil and gas exploration industry, have recently announced expansion plans – an indication of employers' increasing confidence in the economy and a confidence in the regional market.

We are not recession immune. But when pairing Pittsburgh's relatively healthy residential and commercial real estate markets with an overall stability – the result of a balanced economy, itself born of battling a wrenching economic collapse some 30 years ago – it's reasonable to expect that the region should rebound from the recession better than most. ■

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