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Viewpoint: Going away? Wait! Say yes to Pittsburgh

By Linda Topoleski



This summer, more than 35 local employers who normally would compete for talent instead collaborated to position Pittsburgh as a destination of choice, post-graduation, for more than 1,500 college interns from around the world.

The Pittsburgh Passport Summer Internship Series was the ticket to a deeper dive for young talent into all that Pittsburgh has to offer as a choice place to live, work and play. Through outdoor excursions – kayaking on the Allegheny River, nights at The Andy Warhol Museum, a kickball tournament on the historic South Side, Pirates baseball and a series of corporate open houses that showcased the wide range of employment opportunities here – interns got to experience more of the city than many had previously experienced or even imagined existed.

Comments such as, “No one told me Pittsburgh was so beautiful!” and “My friends are interning in other cities and they can’t believe what Pittsburgh is doing for us,” and “There’s so much going on in tech here, it’s unbelievable,” indicated that most interns were wowed by Pittsburgh.

As competition for talent intensifies worldwide, the region can no longer rely solely on a local talent pool to fill the growing needs of its workforce. In response, Pittsburgh employers are embracing branding together to sell the region overall to increase the size of the talent pool for all employers. PNC Executive Vice President, Director of Talent and Total Rewards [Cat McLaughlin](#), who headed up Pittsburgh Passport as chair of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development’s talent attraction working group, said it best: “All boats rise if companies come together to attract talent to the region. It’s one of our goals to put Pittsburgh ahead of the competition – the other markets students may be considering.”

With half of all students from area colleges leaving after graduation, we need to do all we can to immerse them in the region while they are here – with the goal of getting a greater percentage to make Pittsburgh their post-graduation choice. Focus groups and surveys with college students reveal that many simply don’t know enough about Pittsburgh to seriously consider staying here to start their careers and live. Contributing to this dilemma is the fact that many students rarely go far from their campuses and don’t get to see and experience a much bigger and truly vibrant Pittsburgh. As best as organizers can determine, Pittsburgh Passport stands out as something that no other U.S. city or region has attempted, on such a scale, to change perceptions.

Surveys completed by the interns before and after the program showed that the more they experienced, the more positive their reaction to Pittsburgh in general and as a place to live and work after graduation.

We plan to build on that positivity, and the interns have volunteered to keep momentum high by serving as pro bono Pittsburgh Passport ambassadors when they arrive back on their campuses. We also are planning for additional Passport-type events this fall and winter. The more that college students know and love about the city, the easier it will be for them to say yes to Pittsburgh when they are ready to enter the world of work.

Visit ImaginePittsburgh.com/college for a complete overview of this year's Pittsburgh Passport experience.

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