

UNIVERSITY TIMES

Serving Faculty & Staff Since 1968

VOLUME 53
ISSUE 19: MAY 21, 2021

Hill District CEC's soft opening shows off Blakey Center site

Thursday, May 20, 2021

By **DONOVAN HARRELL**

The Pitt Hill District Community Engagement Center held a soft opening last weekend for its new temporary home.

Members of the University community, Pitt's community engagement leaders, Hill District residents, and community organizers gathered at the center, socially distanced, to celebrate the opening on May 14 and 15 at the refurbished Blakey Center.

Visitors also were able to view an art gallery and participate in various breakout sessions that highlighted the center's capabilities. The event was livestreamed on the CEC's Facebook page.

The renovations to the 9,000-square-foot space began in January 2020 and finished in February. The center, which is currently a temporary space, has six rooms, each equipped with audio-visual equipment for multi-purpose programs, and a conference room and computer lab.

Hill District CEC Director Kirk Holbrook said the building housing the center was special to him, and that it honors the building's namesake, Bill Blakey, who passed away in 2014.

Blakey was the "patriarch of the Hill District community, a true example of what it means to be a Hill District resident that dedicates your life to improving the neighborhood from which you came," Holbrook said. Blakey spent more than six decades as director of the building's previous tenant, the Hill House Association.

Marlo Hall, the center's outreach coordinator, said the center's rooms will be available for community members and organizations to conduct learning activities and events that promote teaching and service.

The event also highlighted the work the center has done in the community so far since Holbrook began working out of the Bedford Hope Center in 2018.

Since then, the center has helped facilitate numerous science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics programs for children and adults. It also has provided a space for residents, nonprofit organizations and other community stakeholders to connect to better serve the community.

Lina Dostilio, associate vice chancellor for Community Engagement, and Paul Supowitz, vice chancellor for Community and Governmental Relations, attributed the center's success to Hill District residents, Holbrook's hard work, previously existing community organizations and the center's community advisory council for helping to make the center a reality.

A video presentation featuring Pitt and community stakeholders outlined the center's plans for a STEAM studio at the New Granada Center, the CEC's future permanent home. When it's finished, the CEC will double in size to 20,000 square feet.

The studio will give community organizations in the neighborhood a space to hold activities and help show children career possibilities available in the STEAM fields.

Holbrook said STEAM won't just be an acronym for "science," "technology," "engineering," "arts" and "mathematics." The letters in the acronym can be swapped out to suit presenters' needs and programming. For example, "E" could also represent "entertainment" or "entrepreneurship."

"I also want to highlight that the STEAM studio in the Hill is intended to be an enhancer to the overall community ecosystem," Holbrook said. "We're really excited to have such a strong focus around STEAM work as part of our Community Engagement Center because STEAM has the power to unlock human potential, both in youth and adults."

Donovan Harrell is a writer for the University Times. Reach him at धारrell@pitt.edu or 412-383-9905.

Have a story idea or news to share? Share it with the University Times.

Follow the University Times on Twitter and Facebook.

UNIVERSITY TIMES
Serving Faculty & Staff Since 1968

University of Pittsburgh
Craig Hall, fourth floor
200 S. Craig St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

412-648-4294
utimes@pitt.edu

Archive

Volume 55-50
Volumes 49-27

Email Subscription

Name

Email*

SUBSCRIBE

Revised 06/13/25 Copyright 2025 Site by University Communications [Send feedback about this site](#)