

NAMING NAMES

by John A. Herbst, Executive Director

AFFIXING NAMES of people to public institutions is tricky business. Colleges, universities, schools, hospitals, libraries, museums, performing arts centers — even churches — bear the names of founders and luminaries who distinguished themselves in certain fields, or who were financially supportive benefactors. Why and how institutions come to bear these names is part of the history and tradition of arts, education, and humanities organizations. There is often a range of relevancy as to whether the life and times of the individual being remembered is actually reflected in the mission of the institution.

This is an issue which pertains to our own institution. On June 15, 1994, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania took another momentous step in its work to create a comprehensive facility for the care and presentation of history. Leaders of the Historical Society Board of Trustees, and its campaign for the Pittsburgh Regional History Center, announced the new center would be named after the late Senator John Heinz. Mrs. Teresa Heinz and son Andre were on hand at a special press conference at the Chautauqua Lake Ice Co. building which, when renovated, will serve as The Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center.

The naming of the center for Senator Heinz was carefully thought out by the Historical Society and the Heinz family. It, in fact, represents a desire by the institution to pay tribute to one of the region's most beloved public servants who died tragically in an airplane crash at age 53 in 1991. The name is meant to reflect the senator's lifelong commitment to the people of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania and the life choices he made to serve the public good.

H. John Heinz III was the great grandson of the founder of the H.J. Heinz Co. From its early Pittsburgh roots, the Heinz Co.

grew to be a multi-national giant with a name famous the world over for its "57 varieties."

As the heir to a great name and fortune, John Heinz could have chosen anything, anything at all, to which to devote his time. After five years with the Heinz Co., he chose political life. In 1971, he became the youngest Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives, and in 1976 began serving the Commonwealth as U.S. senator.

During 15 years in the Senate, Heinz was active in legislation which protected the elderly, helped the region during the decline of the steel industry, and protected the environment. Because of the stands he took, Senator Heinz enjoyed remarkable bipartisan popularity with people from all walks of life who appreciated his record of public service. His leadership enhanced the quality of life in our city and region. The Heinz philanthropies, which he directed, have played a major role in shaping the region. Grants helped to rebuild communities devastated by de-industrialization and supported the continued renaissance of Pittsburgh through various major gifts. The new History Center was one of the recipients of this support, which helped to launch the current capital and endowment campaign.

His untimely death caused an outpouring of sympathy for his family and a sense of loss on the part of average citizens who felt that Senator Heinz's concerns were their own. The Pittsburgh region is an amalgam of immigration, ethnic, industrial, labor and business history, and the fascinating interplay that created our regional community will be told in the History Center. Affixing the senator's name to the Pittsburgh Regional History Center helps us evoke the traditions of excellence, service and inclusiveness which characterized John Heinz's life and career, and we are pleased and honored to pay tribute to his legacy and spirit. ☉