WELL, WE MADE IT.
How fortunate we have been to help give shape to a dream chosen by the community as being important to its identity.

We are here to celebrate a dream — the dream of a history center — which touches everyone in the region because it’s about all of you, and all of your families, and it will be about our children and grandchildren.

Today, surrounded by our government, civic, business, and cultural leaders, we have a feeling that this new facility was inevitable. But a dream doesn’t come to fruition without a lot of miracles along the way. Most of those miracles are people.

A large group of people have worked these past eight years to push, and shove, and muscle this project along. But it began with a small group of believers dedicated to the vision of a place, a place where our heritage would be cared for, a place where people could make connections to the past, a place of learning and enjoyment.

In 1986, when I started at the now 115-year-old Historical Society to embrace the notion of a new museum and research center, several key individuals had been taking a slide show around to promote just such an idea. The Post-Gazette’s Clarke Thomas, noted architect David Lewis, and Post-Gazette art critic Donald Miller were the most public prophets calling for something to be done. Just months before I had arrived, the Committee on Pittsburgh Archeology and History sponsored a community-wide meeting on the subject of creating a facility like this.

It was the leadership of CPAH who came to me a month after I arrived and suggested that the Historical Society should take the lead in developing plans for a history museum.

For one year, Mike Weber, Carolyn Schumacher, Verna Cowin, Lu Donnelly, Jim Richardson, Jack Bauman, Ron Carlisle, Ted Muller, John Opie, Frank Kurtik, and Preston Schimer worked with a tiny contingent of Historical Society staff to conceptualize the plan for the History Center. The document they produced called for a facility extraordinarily similar to the one we gather in today. These people, these busy archivists, historians, professors, and archaeologists, put in countless hours carrying out the planning process. I will be forever grateful.

One month after I took up the reins here with a staff of five, I persuaded my board to let me add a staff position to develop our educational programs, exhibits, and museum collections. The tremendous and productive partnership I have had with Bart Roselli, now Deputy Director for Museum Programs, greatly benefited the momentum for the History Center. His talent and hard work has resulted in a division staff which has earned a national reputation for our institution’s museum activities.

That early professional partnership has been augmented with several outstanding people who form our senior management team. Dr. Carolyn Schumacher has done an excellent job as the head of our Library and Archives. As a Pittsburgh historian and experienced archivist, she has led an incredible staff in the growth and expansion of this important division. She has created not only the premier regional history archives, but also a very significant center for the study of American business and industry.

Bruce Hayes joined us not a moment too soon to head up our operations, facility and visitor service areas. This fellow is talented and trustworthy, and he has our operations humming. He is also the grandson of the last manager of the ice company which operated in this building and it is a wonderful turn of history for Bruce to be returning to the Chautauqua Lake Ice Company.

When Audrey Brouerman and I connected, history was ready to happen for the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Audrey has so significantly contributed to this project that it is difficult to describe her resourcefulness. She is a person of tremendous character and integrity and no one has done more to bring about the History Center.

And, we benefited so much from the work of two terrific museum professionals — Ellen Rosenthal and Bill Keyes, who have served as planning directors of the History Center effort, and Betty Arenth, our director of development.

This list of dedicated leaders heads up a talented and outstanding staff numbering 65 people who carry out the work of this institution. Sixty of these positions are new job creations and our elected officials present here today can note — with pleasure, I hope — that 50 percent of these new employees live in the city and 100 percent live in the county! Staff members are here to serve, each one contributing greatly to his community, and we have
made tremendous sacrifices to bring this project to fruition. Nothing was too hard.

Three trustees whose contributions must be highlighted are distinguished by their devotion to getting this project done. In the beginning, there was Bill King. His vision, cool judgment, wisdom, and hard work have been extraordinary.

Steve Graffam came to us at the very point we needed to break a log jam. Fortified with a deep love of history and incredible organizational experience, he has made a compelling president and I owe more to him and Bill King than I could ever express.

The third trustee I particularly need to thank is Tod Hunt. When he agreed to chair the first phase of the Pittsburgh Regional History Center campaign, he risked his personal reputation and historic Pittsburgh name if we failed. His leadership in the launching of this project was so crucial, and he has been simply great to work with.

We needed, in the early phase of the project, a “leader of the parade,” someone who would put the first major gift on the table. It was a very disillusioning time until County Controller Frank Lucchino and Commissioner Tom Foerster got involved. It was Tom Foerster who made that first leap of faith by committing county funds to purchase this building.

Allegheny County’s Pennsylvania state legislative delegation has provided bipartisan support, and among our many friends there I want to thank Ivan Itkin, Chris McNally, Bill Robinson, Tom Michlovic, Dave Ledvansky, Mike Dawida, Mike Fisher, Len Bodack, Rick Cesar and all the other elected officials who have supported our funding requests in Harrisburg.

The leadership of Frank Cahouet, chairman, president and CEO of Mellon Bank, and historian-author David McCullough as the chairs of the rest of the campaign has meant the realization of our first goal of $22 million with high hopes of hitting our next $11 million goal. These two make quite a pair and their leadership has been superb.

Finally, we have been working with the architectural firm of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, particularly Jon Jackson and Rob Pfaffman, George Notter of Notter Associates, and Tom Murphy at Jendoco Construction, our construction managers. They have made a complicated process fun and effective.

Now what these people, with our Board of Trustees, Campaign Cabinet, Blue Ribbon Committee and Primary Gifts Committee have been all about is creating this place of learning and enjoyment — finally a proper repository for the active collection, care, and presentation of the pieces of our past.

In 1893, the Society’s president, the Rev. Lambing, reflected on the need for such a repository when he said, “We hang our heads in shame when people ask to see our rooms and collections.” Forty-five years later, in 1938, Society Director Franklin Holbrook continued this lament: “It remains for the leaders of the community to see and respond to the need for more adequate and permanent support of those day-by-day undramatic labors for history that must be carried on unremittingly, for the most part behind the scenes, and by other than volunteers or mere caretakers.”

One hundred and one years after the Rev. Lambing’s com-

Historical Society staff poses outside the Bigelow headquarters after last year’s annual meeting.