HIGH-TECH PITTSBURGH—THEN AND NOW

By 1929, Henry Ford had already made a fortune turning out millions of affordable cars. His extraordinary business sense was matched by his curiosity. When he learned that Pittsburgh steel makers were producing a new product that was impervious to corrosion and staining, he was intrigued. Stainless steel, then known as “Allegheny Metal,” was being used in the construction of the Chrysler Building in New York and restaurateurs had already adopted this wonder metal for kitchen utensils and flatware. Ford determined to use stainless steel for all of the bright trim on his Model A’s.

Allegheny Steel (later Allegheny Ludlum) of Pittsburgh worked day and night to keep up with the demand for stainless steel and played a major role in promoting it. Working in partnership with Ford Motor Company, Allegheny Steel had the Ford plant stamp out six 1936 DeLuxe sedans—almost entirely of stainless steel. Salesmen drove these shiny, futuristic cars all over the country to demonstrate the durability of the metal.

You can view one of these marvels, recently installed at the History Center, thanks to a generous donation by Allegheny Teledyne (successor to Allegheny Ludlum).

Pittsburgh has always been on the leading edge of new technologies. Today, companies like Red Zone Robotics and MOBOT are developing industrial robots for a variety of uses. A team of MOBOT engineers recently designed a robotic docent for the History Center. Weighing in at 300 pounds and standing 6 feet tall, this robot is no pushover—but he has a heart of gold and a wonderful sense of humor. Jim Krenn, WVEE-FM morning personality and Strip District native, provided the personality and voice for our robot greeter, who can give tours and answer history trivia questions while navigating effortlessly through crowds of children and architectural obstacles in the History Center’s Great Hall.

Come visit the History Center today to view Pittsburgh’s pioneering technologies—old and new.

Andrew E. Masich
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