Didja know?
A few quick facts from History Center exhibits.

Two of the six crew members who crashed into the Monongahela River in a B-25 airplane perished while trying to swim ashore in icy waters.
The wreckage from the Jan. 31, 1956, crash was never found.

Pittsburgh's first television stations were WDTV and WJAC. What, no KDKA? Yes—WDTV later became KDKA.

You've heard of Heinz Field, but how about Heinz Pier? In 1898, the H.J. Heinz Company leased a 1,000-foot-long pier in Atlantic City, N.J., to build a huge exhibition hall.
The entire pier was destroyed in a 1944 hurricane.

Across My Desk
By Brian Butko, editor

Every year or so, I get a package from Jim Sacco with a cool surprise: an HO-scale model kit. The fact that they are based on Pittsburgh buildings is intriguing enough, but Jim makes these himself. No, I don't mean he glues and paints them—he makes them.

Jim's company is called City Classics, but as he explains, it's a staff of two: he and his wife Cyndi. When Jim started attending model railroad trade shows in the 1980s, he saw many small companies exhibiting products. Jim's thoughts turned to structures: "There were very few realistic American style buildings on the market at the time."

When a friend began producing freight car kits, Jim took the plunge too.

The first decision in making a 1/87th-scale HO kit is choosing the type of building to produce. Jim and Cyndi try to gauge what will sell best and what it will cost to produce. Although their models are often based on actual structures, compromises have to be made to simplify production and make them usable on a variety of railroad layouts.

The manufacturing is pretty complicated, but Jim explained the basics: "I make the master patterns for each of the parts. These patterns are used by a tool and die maker to make the finished injection molds. The molds are very expensive—they weigh hundreds of pounds and are run on enormous plastic molding machines by a number of companies that do custom molding in this area. After the parts are molded for us, we package all the kits ourselves and ship them to hobby dealers around the world."

The kits have been well received by modelers but Jim says it can be a struggle: "You need to sell a lot of kits to cover the expenses. A business like ours relies on disposable income, and hobbies such as ours have been hit pretty hard by computers and other hi-tech pastimes over the past decade."

Among City Classics' kits are a diner, gas station, and the 9-inch-tall East Ohio Street model (left). The newest addition is the Roberts Road Mobile Home (below), which includes a metal stamping of the grill and chairs. The models are available at hobby shops and the History Center's Museum Shop, or www.cityclassics.com