The Steel Curtain Banner

They became legends during the 1970s, feared by their opponents, revered in their hometown, and gifted with the moniker “Steel Curtain.” Inspired by their play, 17-year-old Mt. Lebanon native Greg Nixon set out to create a banner in honor of the Steelers’ front four. His mom sewed two bed sheets together to get him started, and then Greg, relying on painting classes he took in high school, designed the figures and poses. He added them to the sheets using acrylic paint, even taking a day off from school to ensure that he finished the banner in time to display it at a playoff game at Three Rivers Stadium. Greg’s father, a doctor in Mt. Lebanon, had become friendly with some of the players, especially Joe Greene and Terry Bradshaw, and had season tickets on the 45-yard line.

Greg took the banner to a playoff game, he thinks against the Buffalo Bills during the 1974-75 season, displaying it in the end zone. It immediately caused a sensation, drawing attention from L.C. Greenwood and Joe Greene who walked over to check themselves out. The Steelers won that game and the next as well, and headed to their first Super Bowl in Tulane Stadium in New Orleans. The banner went too, but Greg Nixon did not. Well-known bar owner and restaurateur Steve “Froggy” Morris took the banner to the game, ensuring that it was part of that first Super Bowl victory in January 1975.

The banner became an icon in its own right. It appeared frequently at Three Rivers Stadium during the glory years of the 1970s, a backdrop to the action on the field. Like the Steelers, the banner was simple, paint on white sheets, but strong, battling and beating the elements for more than a decade at Three Rivers. It became a symbol of the Super Bowl teams of the 1970s, featured in game day broadcasts and in NFL Films, pictured in Sports Illustrated and other media—a talisman honoring the impenetrable defensive line of Joe Greene, Ernie Holnes, Dwight White, and L.C. Greenwood. Nixon moved to California in 1984, but the banner stayed in Pittsburgh, stored by a friend, brought out for significant games. It was on display for the last game in Three Rivers, then made its way back to Greg on the West Coast.

Last year Greg Nixon decided to sell the banner and offered it to Hunt Auctions to feature in their Super Bowl Auction held in Dallas the week of the game. Projected to bring $10-12,000, spirited bidding pushed the purchase price over $50,000. Bought by a member of the Steelers Nation, the banner will eventually hang in a special spot in his newly built home in New Jersey.

For the next several months however, the Steel Curtain banner is back in Pittsburgh, featured in the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum. Visit the Museum and relive the glory days of the City of Champions and the Steel Curtain defense that helped earn that identity.
Preserve Pittsburgh’s rich history for generations to come.

To ensure a future filled with history for your children and grandchildren, please learn more about the History Center’s planned giving and bequest program by calling 412-454-6325.