

SteelStacks the result of creative placemaking

The Bethlehem Gadfly Wind Creek Casino December 21, 2019

“SteelStacks annually attracts 1 million visitors and delivers \$55 million to the city.”

Gadfly doesn't know much besides nine uses of the comma.

And even that is fading. He's forgotten what an appositive is.

But he loves to learn new things.

And once again the student teaches the professor.

Gadfly mentioned his intrigue with “creative placemaking” in the context of Wind Creek a post or two ago.

And Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority executive director Tony Hanna — a memorable student of Gadfly's at Lehigh — immediately jumped in to say that “one of America's prime examples of [creative placemaking] is right here in Bethlehem — the SteelStacks campus and development.”

Tony said that he has “been working with the Urban Land Institute and their Creative Placemaking project for several years,” that “ULI is getting ready to publish a ‘How-To’ Manual on Creative Placemaking in 2020, and that Bethlehem and SteelStacks will be one of the major examples of successful planning and placemaking.”

In this new ULI publication, SteelStacks will be referenced in three areas: creative financing, operating strategies, and case studies.

Here's the kind of thing we'll find in the case studies section:

Bethlehem SteelStacks transformed the 124-acre site of the Bethlehem Steel Corp. manufacturing plant into an arts and culture campus that helped to revitalize and heal the city of Bethlehem. Operating for a century, the plant had produced steel for the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and the Chrysler Building in New York City, but it was shuttered when the steel industry moved overseas. The city debated whether to tear down the steel stacks and create something new but decided to restore the treasured historic assets. Residents who mourned the loss of the plant and the jobs it provided embraced the new complex with a sense of pride. The complex's design now incorporates the steel stacks—a natural gas flame burns along the spine of the 230-foot-high steel sculptures. Financing included a TIF district approved in 2000, which generated over \$100 million in TIF revenues through 2018, with over \$60 million for infrastructure, amenities, construction, and maintenance, including a visitor center, performance plazas, a trestle restored as a pedestrian walkway and park, and public parking. Over \$35 million funded debt service and principal payments for several bond issues and borrowings that will be paid off by 2020. Another \$18 million in TIF revenues is anticipated by 2020 from a casino resort. SteelStacks annually attracts 1 million visitors and delivers \$55 million to the city. On-going programming is key to attracting visitors and enhancing economic benefits. The project was recognized with a ULI Global Award for Excellence in 2015.

And SteelStacks won a prestigious placemaking-type award, not only acclaim but a \$50,000 prize: the [Rudy Bruner Gold Award for Urban Excellence](#).

Thanks for the info, Tony, and more from him on the Stacks and placemaking in the next post.