

STEELSTACKS HISTORY (1996-2013)

In 1996, one year before the plant closed, officials of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation formed Bethlehem Works to preserve, interpret, and redevelop portions of the plant. The City of Bethlehem encouraged the effort and updated its zoning ordinance to enable a broad range of uses for areas within the complex that no longer played a role in the company's operations. Bethlehem Works commissioned a redevelopment plan for approximately 125 acres at the eastern end of the plant that envisioned the preservation and repurposing of numerous historic structures including: the Stock House; the Bessemer Plant and Rail Rolling Mill; Machine Shop No.2; the Hoover-Mason Trestle; the Turn and Grind Shop; and five blast furnaces.

In 2000, The City of Bethlehem, Northampton County, and the Bethlehem School District – the three real estate taxing bodies with jurisdiction over the Bethlehem Steel complex – created a 20-year Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) for the former steel plant that included the 125-acre Bethlehem Works site. Through the TIF, tax dollars generated by new businesses on the former plant would exclusively fund capital improvements within the complex such as installing new streets and utility systems to extend the infrastructure of commercial and residential districts abutting the former plant, and constructing new civic facilities and facilities for nonprofit organizations.

Bethlehem Works was a short-lived venture that came to an end when the Bethlehem Steel Corporation filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2001. In 2003 a United States bankruptcy court approved the sale of the company to the International Steel Group, placing the survival of the historic structures in the former Bethlehem plant at risk. In 2004, the National Trust for Historic Preservation designated the Bethlehem steel plant among the 11 most endangered historic places in America.

Although the Bethlehem Works organization dissolved, other groups in the Bethlehem community carried its ambitions forward. When later in 2004 investors purchased 129 acres of the abandoned Bethlehem steel facility that roughly corresponded to the 125-acre Bethlehem Works site, they worked in close collaboration with the Redevelopment Authority of The City of Bethlehem and community stakeholders to create a new master plan for the site that placed a gambling casino at the east end of the 129-acre parcel, a 9.5-acre arts and cultural campus at the west end, and residential, commercial, and institutional development in between. Among other facilities, the plan spared the site's five 20-story-high blast furnaces (steel stacks), the Hoover-Mason Trestle, the former Turn and Grind Shop, and the Stock House.

The Pennsylvania Gaming Board awarded the investors a slots license in 2006. Casino construction quickly followed and in 2009 the Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem opened at the location specified in the master plan. Through the previously established TIF, real estate and

income taxes from the casino and its hotel, retail, parking, and convention facilities supported the development and maintenance of the remainder of the site including the planned arts and cultural campus.

Designed with the majestic steel stacks of blast furnace row as a backdrop, the campus -- appropriately named the SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus -- is an arts and entertainment district that showcases music, art, festivals, and educational programming. Sands BethWorks Retail LLC donated the land for the project. Campus facilities include two new flagship buildings (one for ArtsQuest, a nonprofit organization that programs campus events; the other for PBS39, a Public Broadcasting System affiliate), an outdoor concert pavilion with an amphitheater lawn at the center of the campus (The Levitt Pavilion SteelStacks), a large surface parking lot that also serves as a concert and events venue, several outdoor plazas, and a playground. All these facilities officially opened when the City of Bethlehem held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus on July 2, 2011.

One additional campus facility opened since 2011 and several more will soon come to life. The Stock House, the only surviving 1863 structure built by the Bethlehem Iron Company, was restored and adapted for use as a regional visitor center and office facility for ArtsQuest. The former Stock House -- now the Bethlehem Visitor Center -- opened several of its amenities to the public in 2012. The entire facility was fully operational at the time of its formal dedication on June 14, 2013.

Plans are currently being detailed to transform the Hoover-Mason Trestle into an elevated walkway to connect the casino with the campus. The Turn and Grind Shop on the SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus will be restored to U.S. Department of the Interior standards for historic preservation and its interior adapted for a variety of on-demand uses including indoor markets and VIP receptions. Finally, studies are underway for creating public gardens within the ruins of the Bessemer Plant and Steel Rolling Mill, which is immediately adjacent to the 9.5-acre campus. When complete, the gardens will expand the campus boundaries.

More than \$70 million have been invested in the SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus through TIF financing, state and federal grants, and corporate and private contributions. During its first two and a half years of operation, the SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus has attracted more than one million visitors for 1,750-plus musical performances, films, community celebrations, and festivals including Musikfest, the largest free music festival in the nation. During the Bethlehem Visitor Center's first 14 months of operation nearly 8,000 people signed in.

The historic heart of the former steel plant is thriving once again.