A Post-Gazette feature headline recently read, in part: “In the ’70s, it was a little scary coming to Braddock.”

The article was about a community battling back.

Rankin, Swissvale, Braddock and North Braddock are among the Mon Valley communities in profound decline since even before steel went away.

In 2008, three things occurred that spurred turn-around:

1. The proposed mon-valley expressway brought promise of new life. The corridor study raised issues, particularly about revitalization along braddock avenue, that encouraged the communities to start right away with serious comprehensive visioning and planning
2. The prospect of development at the old Carrie Furnace riverfront site started to make the prospect of regional revitalization real.
3. The UPMC Braddock hospital announced plans to make changes to its Braddock Avenue entrance that might become a centerpiece to launch other positive changes on the main strip.

But since then, the expressway corridor was changed to avoid Braddock. Worse than that, UPMC – after investing millions in façade renovations – closed the hospital. Two giant gaping holes were blown in the communities’ hopes. But here’s the thing: the attitude of change and revitalization did not go away; instead, it became galvanized. The town rallied. According to the same PG story: “What’s the driving force? Officials point to the closure of the hospital in 2010,  renewed cooperation among the communities, and millennials … who don’t remember what it was like before, so they aren’t afraid to go there.”

The hospital, right in the center of the town, was demolished. It its place now is a new 60,000 sf tree-lined public town square and gathering place called the Braddock Civic Plaza, which had its grand opening last month with a ribbon cutting by Gov. Wolf.

The Civic Plaza is the centerpiece of commercial and residential development that also includes the following:

* The Overlook, a family apartment complex;
* 501 Braddock Ave., a commercial and retail building;
* The Avenue Apartments, a senior-citizen complex;
* Free Press Buildings, a mixed-use commercial and residential development owned by Mon Valley Initiative.

When the hospital went away, there was not a single restaurant or convenience store in Braddock. Now:

* a 20,000-square-foot commercial building, anchored by an Allegheny Health Network urgent care center
* Five creative studios with retail and work space for artists and small business owners, including a studio specializing in wool jewelry and glassware
* The Brew Gentlemen, a small micro-brewery
* a Fossil Free Diesel Fueling Station
* Superior Motors, a restaurant called by Time Magazine one of the world’s 100 greatest places
* Brassero Mexican restaurant.
* Bob Portogallo’s Peppers n at, Italian restaurant.

On Tuesday Oct 9, as a departure from our norm, we’ll meet early. Because of rush-hour traffic woes, instead of dinner we’ll meet in Braddock for lunch at 1 o’clock. There will be a detailed presentation by the people directly involved in the planning and execution of Braddock’s turnaround, followed by a walking tour of the Civic Plaza and other points of interest.

Save the date, tell your friends, and watch your inbox.





