

Pittsburghese and the Mills Mall

by
Raymond E. Muth

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I have to admit I'm not much of a mall guy. My goal when I am forced to go is to get in and out as quickly as possible. But I was taken by surprise at the number of empty storefronts during my trek to the Pittsburgh Mills Mall a couple weeks ago. Not that anyone cares but my quirky little brain made a quick assessment of what the Mall needed to do to pick up business as I raced around the big oval.

The fundamental issue is the mall doesn't reflect the tradition, character or demographics of the Pittsburgh area. There isn't enough older western PA flavor in the Pittsburgh Mills Mall.

Here's what I mean. I walked into an empty GUESS store and asked the clerk. "Do you sell babushkas?" "Wow, what's that dude," was the response. You see that's a problem. Our region has an aging population and you cannot even find a store that sells a fine, hand-crafted babushka, let alone find someone who knows what one is.

If I were the owner of the mall, my anchor store would definitely sell babushkas. It would give our seasoned citizens the feeling that our mall cares and understands. There are plenty of shops that sell personalized t-shirts over there. How many seasoned citizens are going to wear those? But a fine babushka... now we're talking.

Here's another problem. I went to Subway and asked for a chipped ham sammitch and I got quite a jolt. No chipped ham. Where's Isalys? You don't think there would be a line for chipped ham sammitches in that mall? I do. In fact, I'm willing to bet that people would fly in from out of town just to get to one.

Next, bring back a G.C. Murphy store and make it look like yesteryear. Don't remember it? Well maybe I'm getting old. But your parents know about it and perhaps your grandparents remember it too. Started in McKeesport, these were landmark stores in New Kensington as well as Pittsburgh. These stores dotted much of western PA. Can you imagine the people clamoring to get back to a piece of their heritage like G.C. Murphy.

How can you have a mall called the Pittsburgh Mills Mall and not have a full-size Mister Rogers replica trolley slowly meandering through the mall giving people a lift from store to store while handing out lollipops to kids? It's inconceivable. The Western Pennsylvania Railroad Museum has got it right. While there are plenty of trains for kids to play with including Mister Rogers trolley, the main attraction is a representation of the tracks between Pittsburgh and Cumberland, Md. set in the summer of 1952. Old is the new "cool".

Are you getting the picture? Why have a homogenous mall that looks like any other mall

in any other city? Meanwhile our native tongue, Pittsburghese is dying out for crying out loud. No one in the mall sells gumbands.

What makes the Stiller nation, the Stiller nation is that displaced western PA people scattered throughout our country are proud of their roots, of their unique western PA heritage. If you want a mall that will not only attract the locals but attract outsiders to make the mall a true destination stop and most importantly spend money, make it look and feel more like the traditions of western Pennsylvania, appeal to the older generation. Think outside the cookie-cutter box.

It might just be me but I buy almost anything of value through the Internet. There is no reason for me to go the Mills Mall except to drop off the kids to see a movie. But if there was something that tugged on my heart strings like throwing a pitch in virtual reality to Roberto Clemente, I'd probably go to check it out and I'd spend money doing it.

Old western PA is cool. I could see babushkas becoming the new headgear of choice on MTV and the trend could be started right here at the Pittsburgh Mills Mall.



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