

UP FRONT



By Lawrence McCullough, PhD, Board of Directors, Battle of Homestead Foundation


Battle of Homestead Foundation

The early 1980s saw a crushing wave of worker layoffs in the Pittsburgh steel industry that threw thousands out of work and decimated the economies of dozens of area towns. Existing aid providers were overwhelmed and struggled to meet the increased demand for relief services. Leaders of United Steelworker Local 1397 in Homestead met the crisis by organizing a large-scale food bank for unemployed

This guitar strap belonged to concert organizer and union songwriter Mike Stout. He adapted the classic expression “up by your own bootstraps” to emphasize the concert as an example of workers taking on new challenges and artists using their talents to spotlight pressing social needs.

Courtesy of the Battle of Homestead Foundation.





IRON CITY HOUSEROCKERS
G-FORCE/GRANATI BROTHERS
BILLY PRICE KEYSTONE RHYTHM BAND
RARE EXPERIENCE

STANLEY THEATRE
7th & Penn, Downtown
Thursday, April 15 • 7PM

TICKETS \$7.50 available at National Record Marts, Stanley Theatre Box Office & USWA Local 1397 Union Hall in Homestead. All proceeds go to 1397's Unemployed Food Bank.

Steelworker labor donated

members. Startup funds for the “worker’s food pantry” came from a traditional grassroots source: a benefit music concert featuring popular local bands.

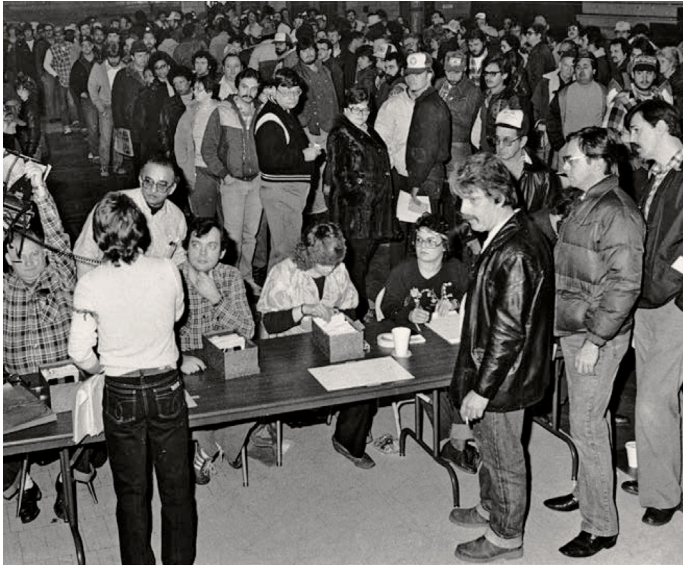
What the concert committee lacked in formal showbiz experience, they quickly overcame with enthusiasm and urgency, securing four top regional acts for the show—Billy Price, Rare Experience, Granati Brothers, and Iron City House Rockers. Titled “Homestead Works,” the concert was set for April 15, 1982, at a major Pittsburgh venue, the Stanley Theatre (now the Benedum Center). Rock radio station WDVE-FM offered critical media support; National Record Mart, the area’s largest record-store chain, distributed tickets.

As the concert date drew near, the organizers wondered if the community truly cared about the plight of unemployed steelworkers. “We would have been thrilled if 300 or so people showed up,” recalls union member Mike Stout. “We got 3,000.”

Homestead Works raised more than \$15,000 and sparked similar food bank efforts in nearby steel towns. The ad hoc concert collective evolved into the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee and took on a range of community reforms—successfully slowing and curbing mortgage foreclosures, passing and funding the Pennsylvania Homeowners Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program, and extending unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed. The concert was a powerful demonstration of how popular arts could foster an infusion of empathy in a community undergoing intense social and economic upheaval.

Benefit concert poster, 1982. Musicians, record stores, radio deejays, and union workers combined forces to spread word about the “Homestead Works” concert at Pittsburgh’s Stanley Theatre. Held on April 15, 1982, it raised startup funds for the Local 1397 Unemployed Food Bank.

Courtesy of the Battle of Homestead Foundation.



Coordinating food bank distribution at the Steel Valley Council of Governments building.

Gift of Mike Stout.



Live music thrills the crowd at the steelworkers benefit concert.


Gift of Mike Stout.

Four decades later, workforce disruption remains a serious concern for many Western Pennsylvania communities. The Music for Justice Starts with Your Song! exhibition illustrates how viewers can use music and other arts to publicize a pressing social issue and inspire meaningful action.

The Battle of Homestead Foundation is one of 15 History Center Affiliates Program members participating in the “Civic Empathy through History” project funded by The Grable Foundation. This project will feature the story of “Music for Justice Starts with Your Song!” and many others. Please be sure to visit the History Center’s website for more information.

The History Center Affiliates Program, HCAP, is a membership-based network that allows local and

regional historical societies, museums, educational institutions, libraries, and history-minded organizations access to museum professionals and best practice standards through the Senator John Heinz History Center.

To find out more about HCAP or to apply for membership for your organization, please contact Robert O. Stakeley, History Center Affiliates Program (HCAP) Manager, at rostakeley@heinzhistorycenter.org or (412) 454-6359. 

Steel workers get aid from rock bands

Homestead Local 1397 of the United Steelworkers union staged a rally in Market Square during the noon hour yesterday to promote a rock concert.

The concert, to be held at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Stanley Theater, will benefit Local 1397's food bank for unemployed union members. About 2,400 of the local's 6,500 members have been laid off.

County Commissioner Cyril H. Wecht said that 26,000 steel workers have lost jobs here. The commissioners have declared April 15 “Steelworkers Day.”

Mike Stoudt, who serves on Local 1397's grievance committee, said, “Easter is not going to be the Last Supper for Pittsburgh steel workers.”

But he said the situation was desperate.

The rock groups' aid is a first here, he said.

Rock groups including the Iron City Houserockers, G Force/Granati Brothers, Billy Price Keystone Rhythm Band, and Rare Experience will perform in the concert.



Bill Lewis/Post-Gazette

Mike Stoudt of the United Steelworkers addresses a noontime rally in Market Square held yesterday to promote a benefit rock concert for unemployed steel workers.

A crowd gathers in Market Square to rally support for the benefit concert planned by Homestead Local 1397 of the United Steelworkers union.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, April 9, 1982, p. 35.