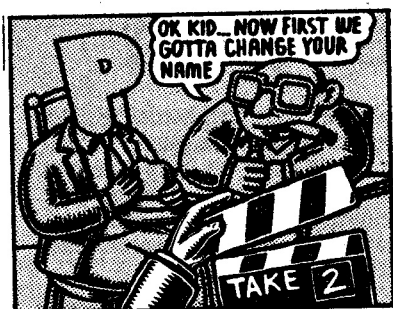




Peter Leo

Visit Pgh., PSX or just 'the P'

The returns are in. The people have spoken. And once again, we are forced to conclude that democracy isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Last week, I asked readers to come up with a new name for Pittsburgh. Many responded. Now the rest of you have to pay the price and hear the results.

The assignment was inspired by an offhand remark at the annual meeting of the Greater Pittsburgh Convention and Visitors Bureau. The keynote speaker, a gentleman by the name of Randall Crain of Crain Communications in Chicago, playfully suggested that a new name would go a long way toward ridding Pittsburgh of its image problems once and for all.

For some reason, Crain left town immediately. So I took up the cause. The good news is, we don't have room for all the suggestions sent in. I assume the ones that slipped past my blue-ribbon panel will be on the next voter referendum.

As usual, Michael Murphy of Munhall got to the heart of the name matter: "Hey, I'm as tolerant as the next guy, but what a ridiculous name — Randall Crain. Give me a break. Let's face it, if he ever expects to be taken seriously, he's going to have to do something about that moniker."

"But if we have to trash Pittsburgh, I feel we should go for a name that is not only hip, now and today (like L.A., which has an actual brand of beer named after it), but also a name that succeeds in communicating our stature in the field of health care. That's why I like Los Ambulance."

Yes, and our football team would be the Los Ambulance Chasers. But I've interrupted Murphy.

"On the other hand, we could also summon the crap-shooting spirit of Las Vegas without losing sight of the problem of urban flight with **Lost Wage-Tax**, or call attention to city government's on-again, off-again attempts to tax commuters with **Council Bluffs**. Or has that been taken?"

Kay McLafferty of Butler had a promising suggestion: "**Heinz Site** — so we can get the name in the news so the senator can ketchup and maybe run for president." But maybe Heinz Site is an idea whose time has not yet come. Besides, it's not very forward-looking. I'm not even going to mention her other choice, **AtroCity**.

Scott Timm of the South Hills recommends we bow to the inevitable and go with Pgh. The questions is, how would we pronounce it — Pug? Pij? Peew?

His other ink-saving idea was inspired by PAT, which has given us the T. "Perhaps we should just go with 'the P.' It's short, it's modern and it's a natural for advertising — 'Take the T to P,' 'I left my heart in P,' or 'I ♥ P.'"

I can already hear some high-powered New Yorker with urgent business in Pittsburgh telling his secretary, "I've got to go P."

Regina Sestak of Squirrel Hill also got pithy. "We could follow the lead of our corporate leaders — no, not leave Pittsburgh. Shame on you for even thinking that. We could call our city **PSX**."

Getting off her all-consonant diet, she further suggested "we get modern and call it **Rivermania**. This would have the advantage of rhyming with Pennsylvania. Or we could get logical and call it **Grandmother's House** because you have to go over the river and through the woods to get here."

J. Hunter Mica of Greenfield feels we must improve our market position. "If we want to position ourselves as a classier locale, we might try **Tetrapotamia**. This is from the Greek meaning four rivers." A purist, he counts the river that runs under the Golden Triangle.

"Or we could go with the somewhat less accurate, **Mesopotamia** (between the rivers). Mesopotamia has the added value of name recognition. People will know in some vague sense that a classic place is being referred to." Given our litter problem, maybe **Messedupotamia** would have more local name recognition.

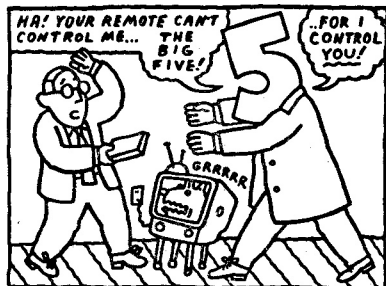
Mica says we might want to consider **Sunbelt City**, since Americans are woefully ignorant of geography and therefore unlikely to figure out that Western Pennsylvania isn't in the Sunbelt.

Mary Luthy of Point Breeze wants us to show solidarity with our neighbors in Ohio with **Y'unstown**. **Giardiasis Springs**, she believes, fits a city on the run. And **Belly Acres** draws inspiration from City Council.

And that's not all. "I'd like to fashion for our city a melodious American Indian name that translates to 'Take that chair out of my parking space and you're history.'"

"Or why not just call it **San Francisco** and hope people will come here by mistake?"

Well, that wouldn't be right. But we could come close with a name that captures our snappy new identity, as Earl King of North Versailles, did with **San Floppy Disco**.



PETER LEO

He's a slave to electronics

Those of you who feel hopelessly out of it because you don't have a sufficient number of electronic toys, take heart. Less may be more.

Two weeks ago, I confessed publicly that I do not own a VCR. I went beyond this dirty little secret to disclose that not one of the other Big Five appliances of the modern world — the home computer, the compact disc player, the video camera and the microwave oven — had darkened my living room — excuse me, home entertainment center — or kitchen.

Not altogether comfortable with this lack of modernity, I expressed doubt that I would be able to hold out.

Since then, several people have come out of the closet to assure me I am not alone. What's more, they're smugly proud of being deficient in the Big Five.

Of course, it's easy for them to say. It's possible they're putting a good face on a life of deprivation. But you can't say that about Scott Timm. He lives in Dormont and is a dancer with the Dance Alloy — that is, in the odd moments when he isn't being held hostage by one of his appliances.

It must have taken great courage for Scott Timm to go public. But he's doing it so that others might learn from his mistakes and live a relatively appliance-free life. He wrote:

"I am guilty of being one of those people 'of excess,' at least as far as the Big Five, and I can tell you it ain't all it's cracked up to be.

"I own a VCR, a personal computer, a compact disc player and a microwave oven. Although I don't actually own a video camera, I have lusted after one in my heart, and isn't that almost like having one? These appliances create a great deal of hardship, and you are blessed to live the simple life.

"The VCR started out as fun and a great convenience. Instead of watching shows when the networks chose to air them, I was able to see them when I was ready.

"As I began to tape more programs, I had to buy more blank tapes to hold them. I now have what seems hundreds of tapes, and with every program I want to tape, I have to determine which show to tape over. Should I keep last week's 'Moonlighting,' or should I save 'Munster Go Home'? Will I want to watch 'Holiday Inn' again, or should I record 'Cheers' over it? By the time I figure out what tape to use, the program is half over.

"And when I set the time to record away from home, I never know what I will get. I have 'Casablanca' on tape, all except where Bogart and Bergman arrive at the airstrip. That's where the machine shut itself off. I can't bear to tape over a classic like 'Casablanca,' but I can't bear to watch this truncated tale, either.

"The personal computer would be a great device if it did the things you needed done. Unfortunately, one must buy hundreds of dollars of software to do them, and like any addict, you keep needing more. A database is a thrill, sure, in the beginning. But then you have to have spreadsheet functions, and then it's a long ugly ride to integrated desktop utilities.

"I recently spent a good deal of money to purchase money management software. By running the program I could figure my net worth, and I discovered it was a negative figure — and almost exactly the cost of the software.

"Same thing for the CD player; one easily becomes a digital junkie. Have you noticed the record stores display the CDs right up in front now? Once enticed, you purchase music you would *never* listen to normally, but you are so eager to build a CD collection, you will grab anything.

"I remember when my parents first got a microwave oven. (It was a gift from the kids!) We hooked the thing up and microwaved a cup of water. We passed it around and sampled it all declaring it was the best hot water we had ever had! It takes merely seconds to reduce a slice of cheese to a vaporized smear, and only moments to bring lukewarm coffee to a seething boil, which will take hours to cool to a drinkable level.

"I think there is a great danger with the video camera, and that is the 'home movie syndrome.' In addition to the cost of all the tapes, there is the risk of driving all friends away with your video of oil oozing down the Mon.

"No, my friend, you don't know how fortunate you are to have withstood the pressure. My electric usage now, if harnessed and saved, could extend Light-Up Night by at least a week. And when the power goes out, I spend two days adjusting digital clocks.

"Hold off for as long as possible. Let a remote control television be your most sophisticated appliance. You will be happier for it.

"And for heaven's sake, don't even think about a Cuisinart!"



PETER LEO

A trip to Seen hall of shame

I was hoping I could make it through this with a minimum of damage. I was hoping I could count on your sympathy and understanding in this time of personal crisis. I was hoping this thing would blow over.

I guess I was wrong.

Apparently, I have no choice but to confront it head-on. There's no way I can get on with my life if I don't acknowledge that I have a problem. So I will: My name is Peter L. and I have been Seen.

Not only Seen, but photographed. Frozen like a startled deer caught in somebody's headlights. A decent life ruined in the flash of a camera.

It gets worse. I was pictured with none other than Jim Richardson (he's Mr. Seen), who was Seen staring at me with what appears to be a look of profound admiration.

(This last bit raises an ethical question: Isn't there something improper about the Seen guy seeing himself? But that's something Post-Gazette editors should be wrestling with. I've got my own problems.)

You'd think I'd be flooded with expressions of condolence, post-Seen. After all, who has done more to alert the world to the idiocies of Seendom?

Instead, I got jeering and cries of "Sellout." People seem to think being Seen was my fault. They seem to think I'm being hypocritical. They seem to assume I was asking for it.

I realize it's all part of a tendency in our culture to blame the victim, but it still hurts. These finger-pointers are masking their own fears. What they're really saying is: "If Leo can be Seen, who of us is safe?"

It's a difficult question with an answer too horrible to contemplate.

Apparently the people who are on my back think I control the news media. They don't seem to understand that I'm as much a victim of the media as anyone else is.

All I did was leave the house to go to a party for the publishers of the Post-Gazette. Sure I was aware of the danger involved, Seen-wise. But what was I going to do? Risk getting fired to avoid being Seen? Come on.

I was simply trying to make my way to the bar when I got ambushed. It's a sad day in America when a man can't get a drink without having his privacy invaded. Forgive me for sounding bitter, but they'll do anything to get their picture, these insidious paparazzi.

What do these media parasites care about my reputation? What do they care if my kids look at me, their eyes hard with disillusionment, and ask, "Is that really you, Dad?" What do they care if my wife says, "What a lousy picture."?

Still, I'm gratified that along with the catcalls has come an outpouring of support and exclamation points.

For example, this note from Pat Jennings, who, when she doesn't have her head buried in the Seen column, is pianist with the Pittsburgh Symphony:

"Good grief!! How will you ever live it down??!! Not only to be *mentioned* in Seen but to be *Seen* in Seen — and with your whole head, too!! (Odd that the gun isn't shown in the picture.)"

Dave Hall, a fellow bus rider frequently Seen on the 67F Trafford, made a game try at clearing my name: "A nice attempt by the Seen people but the man supposed to be you is definitely an imposter. We all know that you don't wear a tie."

Barbara Weis of Aliquippa took the long view. "Jan. 26, a day that will live in infamy, when the Seen columnist was Seen with you! What a shock! I can hardly believe my eyes! What a social coup for him! You still have a few good years to try and live it down."

A few good years?

Scott Timm, Dance Alloy dancer and VCR owner, was shattered.

"Say it ain't so! I'm a pretty reasonable guy. I could believe it when I-279 was finally finished. I was able to admit that AT&T had a bad day. I even believe that Grant Street will be done someday. But you in the Seen column?!"

"Who will be the Seen watchdog now that you are showing up at swankendas? You'll be hanging out with K. Barchetti, the Mulvihills and Jim Roddey. Who can we turn to?"

"And what's next? Do you want me to believe that the Pirates will take the Series next year? That news anchors at WPXI will last at least a year? That movie theaters will open again Downtown?"

"I can't tell you how sorry I am. I remember when it happened to me. I was a happy person, content in my anonymity. From the moment I was Seen, I stopped receiving invitations to events. I just can't believe it."

For years, I've been trying to tell people that Seen is not a victimless crime. Now maybe they'll believe me. Those of you who take pleasure in my predicament, watch out: Somewhere out there is a Seen column with your name in it.

As for me, I guess this whole thing proves the adage: "Live by the Seen, die by the Seen."