

Taking care of business—and the community

Spencer's Way

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A

cluster of children surrounds the tall businessman as he turns a key in the door to the brick library in Pittsburgh's Hill District. The youngsters are eager to get into the Martin Luther King Jr. Reading and Cultural Center. They want to open books, learn about others, and explore new worlds.

Before now, the financially strapped library had been closed for several months. The computers had been removed, and some bookshelves were empty. Then, businessman Greg Spencer (CGS '80) volunteered to help. He had no experience with library management, but he realized that failure wasn't an option. The MLK center wasn't just a library—it was a safe haven for kids who otherwise might spend their afternoons in empty houses or on the streets; it was a place where children came to dream.

So, as an unpaid executive director, Spencer collected donations, books, and computers. He used his corporate connections to rally support for the center. He encouraged community members to become a part of the library's revival.

Enabling others to reach their potential is Spencer's passion, inspired by his parents' values, his struggles as a young college student, and a string of opportunities that allowed him to excel, beginning as a youth in subsidized housing to become a top-level executive with a reputation for success.

The journey wasn't easy. In 1966, as an undergraduate on a scholarship at an Ohio university, Spencer was frustrated by a learning hardship that hindered his ability to decode written words. This early challenge caused him to leave school. He remembers feeling like a failure.

He found redemption at U.S. Steel, where he started as a laborer and ultimately became general manager of human resources. To make the ascent, he earned a degree at Pitt through night and weekend classes. When needed, his wife, Janet, helped by reading his textbooks and highlighting important information. She also quizzed him during car rides. Spencer graduated *cum laude* with a Pitt bachelor's degree as a public administration major, and he later earned his master's degree from Saint Francis University.

Between 1994 and 2003, he worked at Equitable Resources—now EQT Corporation—becoming a senior vice president there. He left to establish his own firm, Randall Enterprises, and later Randall Industries, where he is president and CEO. These ventures encompass a real estate development firm and a “green friendly” chemical manufacturing plant, both creating jobs in the region. With his businesses, one of his primary goals has been to hire people who need a second chance in life.

“People oftentimes get caught up in destructive behaviors because they don't feel they have the opportunities,” he says. By example, Spencer shows others what's possible. He has helped people launch their own businesses, he mentors young people, and he continues to be an active community leader, serving on multiple boards of directors and often chairing them.

On that day in 2006 when Spencer reopened the door to the Hill District's reading center, he talked with the children about the site's namesake, Martin Luther King Jr., whose life inspired millions and whose civil rights legacy continues to be a beacon of light worldwide. Perhaps some of the children who gathered in the center that day might also be inspired by someone nearby—a modest businessman on a daily quest to better the lives of others.

