

# THE 11 COOLEST JOBS IN PITTSBURGH

CONFLICT

BY JULIANNE BAGWELL

SIEGEL

Most of us are still waiting to hit the big time. Sure, your jobs as a student/barista/lab guinea pig keep you on your feet, but they've got nothing on these 11 swoon-worthy careers that range from being a massive-scale party host to setting up production for the newest Netflix series. There's no denying that Pittsburgh is home to some of the most unexpected job opportunities around that are guaranteed to make you question the hours you've spent perfecting your latte art skills.

## Blaine Siegel, education and outreach director for Conflict Kitchen

**How he got the job:** "I am an artist with a burgeoning social art practice and I have been focused on arts-integrated education for the past 10 years. Like many people who choose a life in the arts, I also have a ton of restaurant experience. Working for Conflict Kitchen is unique in that it allows me to draw on my life experience working in the restaurant business and my skill set as an artist and arts educator."

**What he does:** "No two days are ever the same. On Monday, I may be running an education workshop with a focus on Palestine for middle schoolers. On Tuesday, I am working with a translator to speak with a colleague in Cuba. On Wednesday, I am moderating a lunch hour discussion about Iran, or working with one of our community partners to organize a Muslim Solidarity Potluck Dinner. And I get to eat really good food."

"I think that I can safely say that there is no other job in which I can be a part of a tremendous group of people who run an engaging art project/restaurant that allows me to not only work with diverse people and leaders within the community of Pittsburgh, but that also allows me to work with amazing people across the globe."

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COURTESY OF NISHA BLACKWELL

## **Nisha Blackwell, founder and lead design curator for [Knotzland](#)**

**How she got the job:** "Often we hear stories about people who 'stumble' into entrepreneurship. Well, I'm that girl. About two years ago while working at a coffee shop, I taught myself to sew. This new skill inspired me to create meaningful gifts for people. The first one being a set of hair bows for my girlfriend's daughter. I remember being so nervous about them that I stayed up all night long trying to perfect them, and when I got to the party I promptly gave my friend the 'handmade' disclaimer. So vividly, I remember hiding in the background as the baby opened the package only to see the overwhelming response to the opening of the gift, that I handmade."

"'Who made these? They're beautiful,' is all I could remember before having six eager customers. This was at the beginning of the summer in 2014. As time went on, my brand followed customer requests for boys' bowties and eventually found a home in the menswear space. The end of 2015 was big for us. We won a grant competition that provided us with additional funding that actually helped us build a team and phase into our in-store strategy."

**What she does:** "I knew that I had an unconditional love for the environment and environmental justice, so as requests came in, it tested my integrity early on. I would wholeheartedly say that I was inspired by both my love for environmental awareness and advocacy, along with a lifetime of thrifting and fixing things with my mom and gram. This life experience has allowed me to bring together worlds that I am passionate about. The process of reconstructing things that people would view as garbage, and making them beautiful brings ultimate joy to what I do."



COURTESY OF PETE SPYNDA

## **Pete Spynda, event producer, DJ, promoter, operations manager, Porta Potty mover**

**How he got the job:** "I've been in bands and playing shows in Pittsburgh since I was 15. I didn't really decide to get into this, I was absorbed into it. Long story short, in 2012, I was working at a fabrication studio. It closed and I lost my job. At that point, I was already producing/DJ-ing Pandemic Dance Parties (and related events for 'global bass' or 'Global Music bands'). Bill Brittan, my friend and owner of [Shadyside Nursery](#), invited me to throw a party there. That's where the concept of a weekly all-ages, all-inclusive Sunday evening music series began. That was the beginning of the end for me. From there I created Pgh Abides, Pittonkatonk, and took over Bayardstown Social Club."

**What he does:** "My job consists of... Oh god, do we really wanna go down this rabbit hole? Generally, I/we (the 'we' being my production partner Stephanie Brea) develop an idea/concept for a party, brainstorm and refine ideas, find a venue, decide who is going to do what and how, then we do initial press releases, social media, web development, poster design, more production meetings, networking, and a lot of wishful/hopeful thinking."

"Often times people just assume I produce events that are bands and beer. I wish it was just that simple. We create engaging participatory events. We invite attendees to engage in experience through participation (whether it's a photo op, game, potluck, etc). We want the audience to own the event, not just spectate."

**TL;DR:** "Have you ever hosted Thanksgiving dinner for 20 people? It's kind of like that, but tenfold. Also you never know if you'll get to eat at the end of the day."



COURTESY OF STEPHANIE ROSS

## Stephanie Ross, costume designer and fabricator

**How she got the job:** "I have always been involved in theater. Since childhood, I have been an active consumer of it, and in high school I would perform in student-run musicals. I went to Carnegie Mellon University for Fine Arts, focusing on illustration at first. I thought that my love of making characters and drawing/painting them would benefit an illustrator's career. But after taking a few performance art classes on a whim, I rediscovered my love of bringing a character to life in a way that it would be able to physically interact with an audience. I dove headfirst into doing that as my exclusive line of work, and I've been at it ever since."

**What she does:** "Putting together a costume involves many different parts of one long process. My job consists of designing and fabricating costumes, puppets, and animatronics. I make for outside clients as well as myself, because let's be honest, dressing up as some sort of odd creature is just as fun as making that creature for someone else! I'm best known for making fursuits for the furry community. I love being able to make someone's personal character come to life with my skills and talents. For some folks, this is how they best express themselves, and I like facilitating that for them."



COURTESY OF SAMANTHA NEIRA

## Natasha Neira, dog caretaker

**How she got the job:** "I got into dog walking/animal care by chance. I was a student looking to make money between classes and so found an ad seeking a freelance dog walker. The job required attention to detail and sensitive care for a dog with special needs. From there on, I started working for many clients from word of mouth. Most of the animals I take care of have special needs. Many of them were rescued and aren't keen to interacting with people or other animals. I found this work really rewarding and so it stuck, I've been working as a dog walker for four years.

**What she does:** "Depending on the animal, I have a certain route I mind, making sure to avoid areas with lots of foot traffic or other animals, so the pet gets the best quality walk possible. I also try and stay off my phone, unless I need to check the time or a perfect photo opportunity presents itself... This way the dog has my full attention and I'm completely aware of our surroundings. When I'm dog sitting, I make sure the dog is comfortable sharing its space with me, I follow any dietary restrictions carefully, and walk the dog several times that day to cure boredom and keep the pups nice and active. I also make sure to clean up after the dog, which makes the owners very happy!"

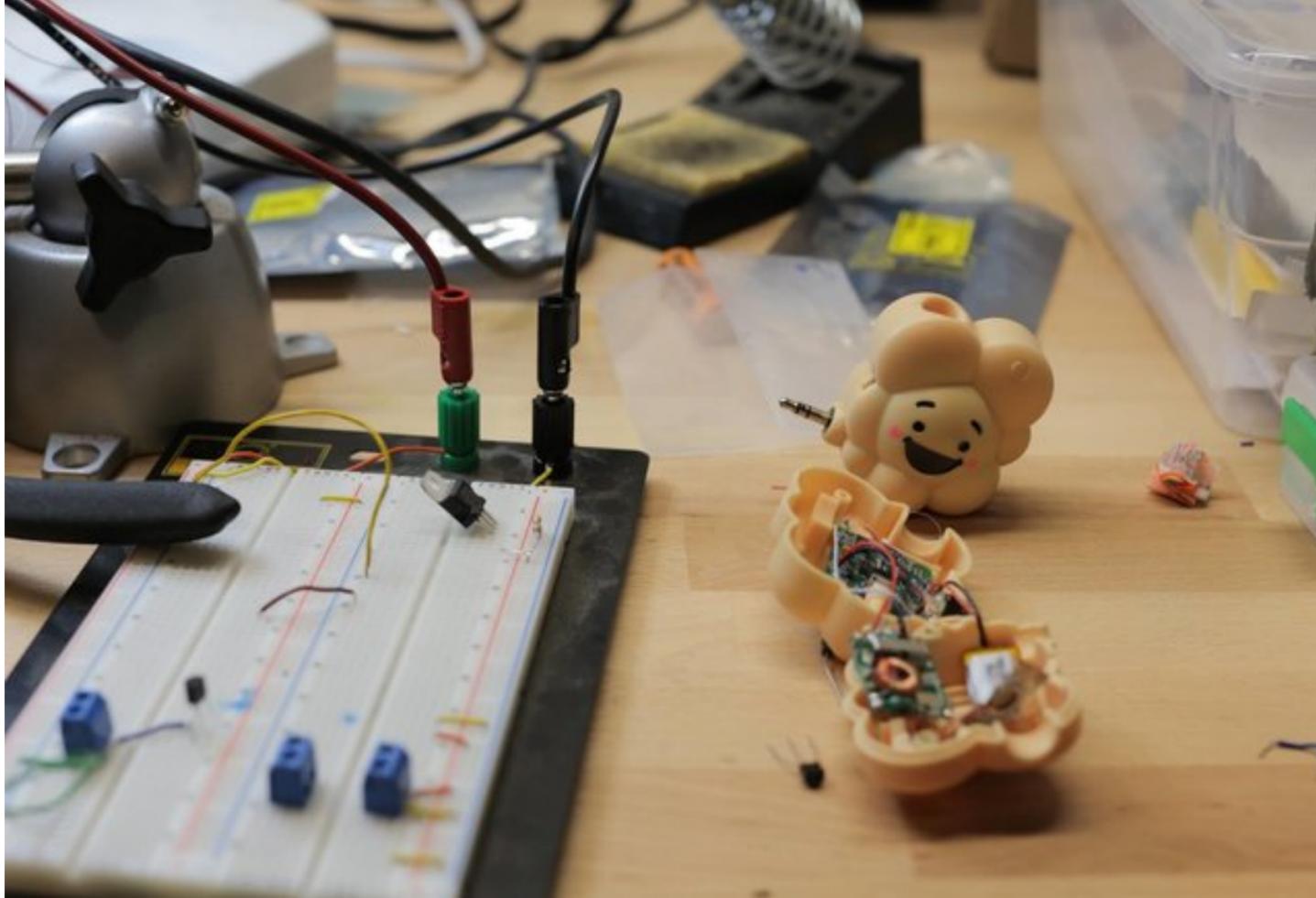


COURTESY OF ASHLEY ANDREWS

## Ashley Andrews, shop manager and curator of the [Pittsburgh Center for Creative Reuse](#)

**How she got the job:** "I feel like my background as an artist has set me up to be a pretty unique manager -- I conceptualize what needs to be done, I work through the creative process to make my vision real, I embrace and anticipate failure, and I have a worldview that is decidedly different. I'm a member of [The App Expo](#) (a technology/art mega-collaboration with my art partner, Ashley Andrykovitch), and I'm also a self portrait/gender performance artist, an installation artist, and a filmmaker. A background in the arts makes for super-dynamic individuals who are solution-finders, beauty-makers, and honest-to-goodness movers and shakers."

**What she does:** "We run a shop that's full of reclaimed materials you can't find anywhere else in Pittsburgh -- industrial discards, design samples, oddball leftover doodads, half-used art supplies, and strange vintage finds (and more!). It's my job to make sure that this operation runs as smoothly as really, really hot butter. One of the most vital things I do here at Creative Reuse is keep the vibe of our workplace goofy and wildly creative but still super efficient and unabashedly visionary. I want everybody to feel empowered to create whatever it is that they want to create, no matter their background."



DEELOCAL

## Emily Price, head of account management at [Deeplocal](#)

**How she got the job:** "When I graduated from NYU, I had my heart set on publishing. I started out at Conde Nast working in the marketing department of DETAILS magazine -- a dream job right out of school. Always drawn to companies that view creativity as an essential ingredient of business strategy, I've worked in industries spanning magazine publishing, boutique hospitality, and the performing arts sector. After about 10 years, I decided to switch over to the agency side, where I could contribute to campaigns for a range of brand clients. That's when I looked into Deeplocal. From a street-printing robot for Nike to a mind-controlled bike for Toyota, the Pittsburgh-based agency was gaining a reputation for innovative work, and I wanted to be a part of it."

**What she does:** "I head up business development and account management for the agency, working with our creatives and engineers to design campaigns for our clients that generate press headlines and authentic conversation. We're a CMU spin-out, and we have a unique model in the ad industry; we're both a creative agency and a production studio in one. Our team includes mechanical, robotic, and software engineers working alongside designers, creatives, strategists, and marketers -- all in an old flour mill in the Strip District."



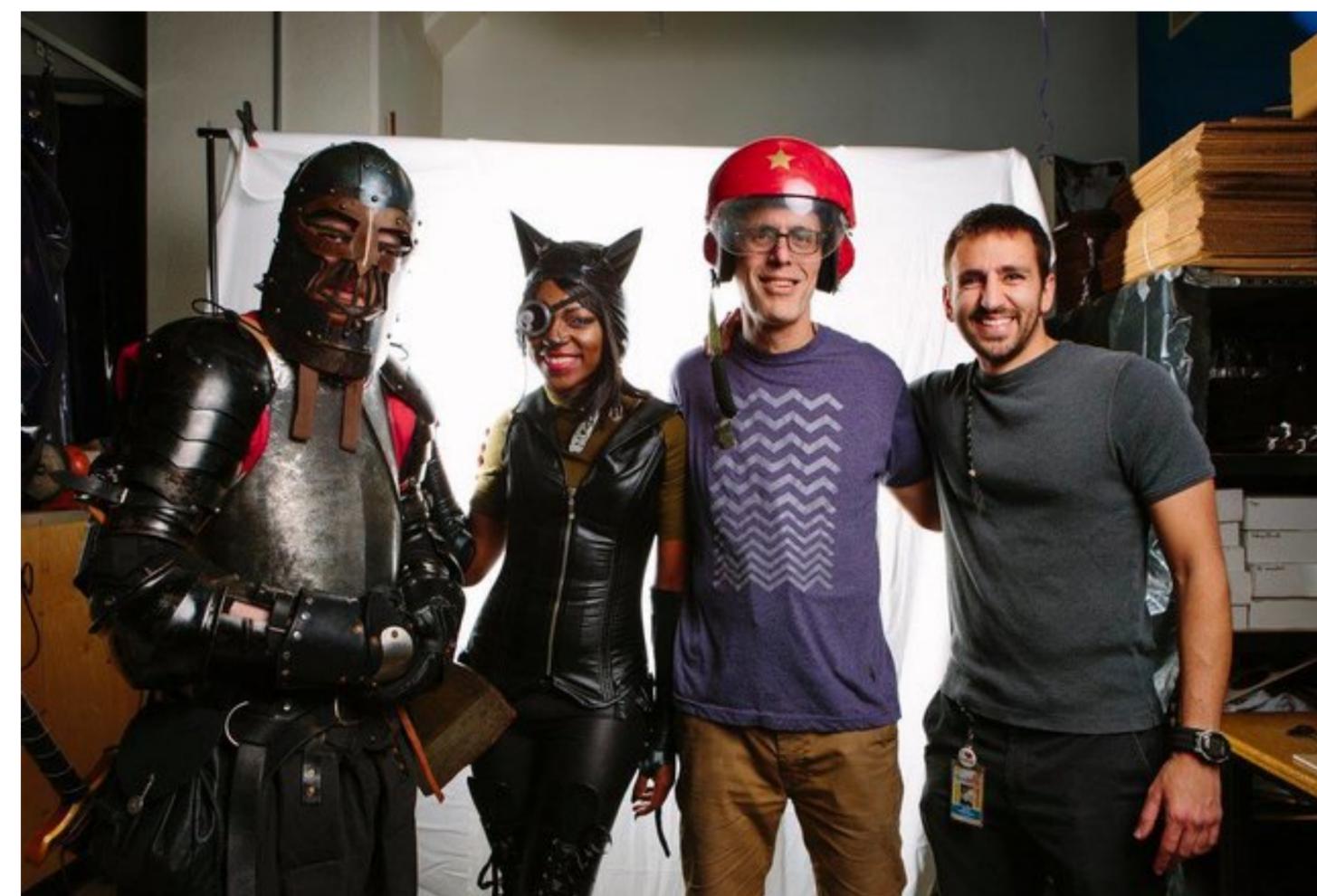
ASA FOSTER/THE BREW GENTLEMEN

## Asa Foster (co-founder & creative director) and Matt Katase (co-founder & CEO) at [The Brew Gentlemen](#)

**How they got the job:** "We decided to start a brewery when we were juniors in college. With a shared love of beer and the culture surrounding it, we decided to drop our respective career paths of math and art and switch to self-defined majors in order to focus on our new pursuit full-time. We graduated, raised the money to get things going, and set off renovating an old electrical supply store in Braddock, Penn. We fell in love with the tiny steel town and its many layers of history, we wanted to contribute to the revitalization effort that was already underway, and we wanted somewhere we could do nearly all of the renovation ourselves. After 18 months of construction, we opened our doors in May 2014."

**What they do:** *Matt Katase:* "As 'CEO' (whatever that means in a small company), I navigate the ship. Some days are full of meetings with the entire team, checking in to make sure everyone is on the same page and has everything they need in order to crush it. Other days are spent driving around town to visit accounts and handle sales. A lot of my job is conceptual -- I spend a lot of time reading and studying the beer industry and business as a whole, charting the course for The Brew Gentlemen's future."

*Asa Foster:* "As the brewery's right brain, I'm in charge of its branding, design, and marketing. That means I'm responsible for almost all visual and written content; product branding and packaging, social media and communications, interior design and fabrication for our space, website design and other tech projects, and everything in between. You can generally find me hunched over Adobe Illustrator, toting my laptop to a bar to write for a few hours, or knee-deep in power tools and a sprawling mess as I work on some form of construction project."



TECHSHOP PITTSBURGH

## Janeka Johnson, dream consultant (DC) at [TechShop](#)

**How she got the job:** "I was originally going to school to get into the medical field and found myself coming back to the city. A friend of mine suggested I check out the Maker Professional Program, which resides within TechShop. The program is a nationally-recognized apprenticeship from the Department of Labor that connects makers with start-up companies and businesses in support of domestic manufacturing. A month before I finished, I saw that TechShop was hiring for a front desk position, but when I came in for an interview, they felt I was better suited as a DC with the experience I've had during my time with the Maker Professional Program."

**What she does:** "I enjoy sitting down with members and brainstorming project ideas and making suggestions that could potentially improve or expound upon what they may have in mind. My favorite moments have been the late nights, having deep profound discussions, starting off with a project that turns into the person opening up about their life, their goals, themselves. When not helping members or talking with them about political and social issues, I'm teaching myself 3D design, furniture design, and working on a number of projects with other artists. TechShop is unique in that it gives employees the opportunity to shape our environment through provided resources. I'm currently putting together a fashion show with members, staff, and local designers."

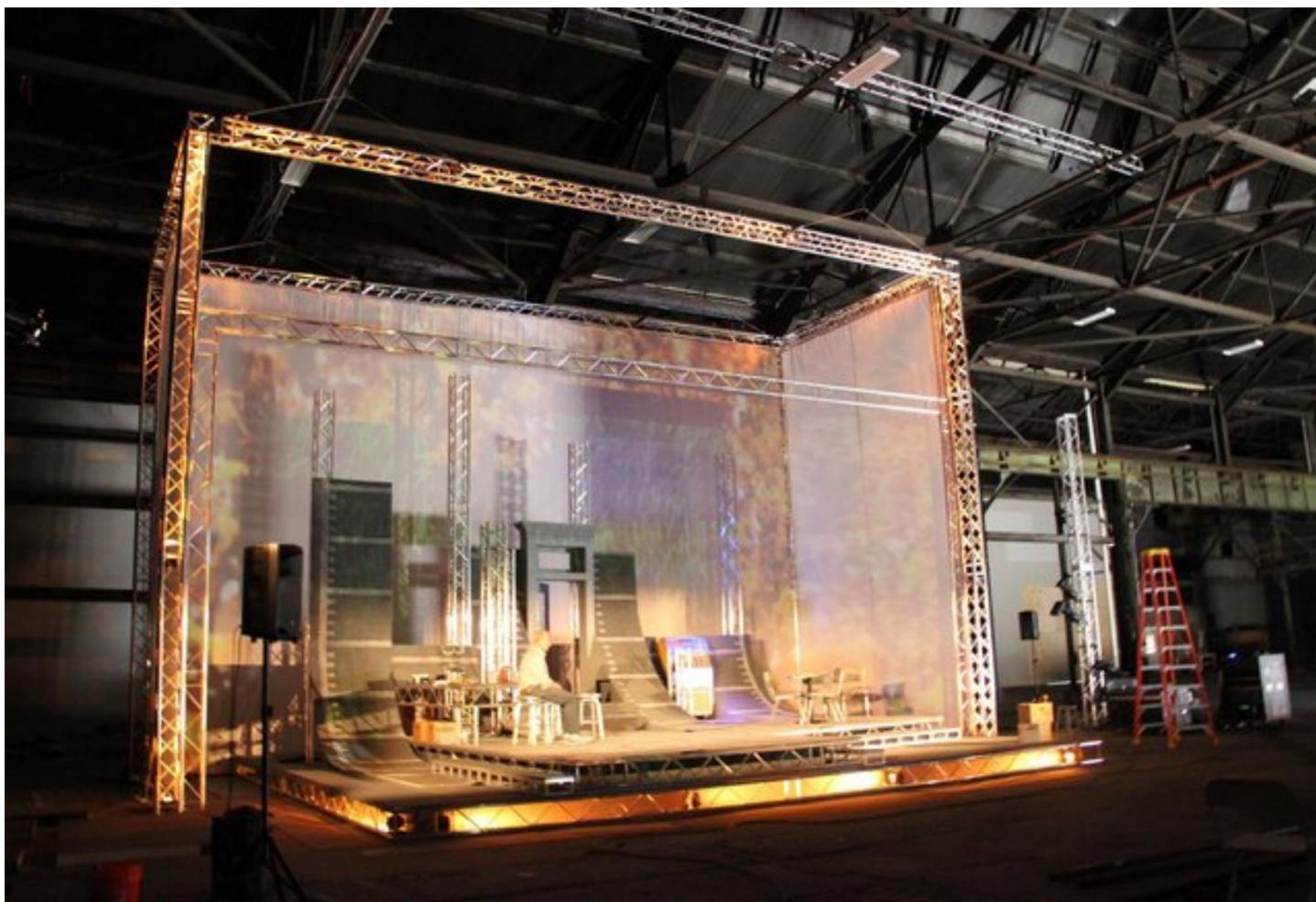


SHOWCLIX

## **Matt Donnelly, director of client services at ShowClix**

**How he got the job:** "After graduating with a degree in the music business industry from Northeastern University in 2009, I made my way to Pittsburgh. Two months later, I answered a Craigslist add and found myself working with a small team of six other like-minded individuals in Oakmont at a small startup called Showclix.

**What he does:** "Seven years later, I've moved up the ticketing ladder and serve as the director of client services, working with 60+ employees. My duties shift every day and can include everything from interacting with the sales team to immersing myself into the technological aspects of the company, to traveling to NYC Comic Con, musical events in Nashville, Vegas, or anywhere in between to oversee events. Showclix still feels like a startup. The field is interesting, the people on our team and the office culture are great, and we enjoy the product we launch. People I know can't believe this is a job I get paid to do."



31ST STREET STUDIOS

## **Alyssa Hanna, production manager at 31st Street Studios**

**How she got the job:** "I've wanted to work in the entertainment business ever since I was a little kid. Fortunately, I had an incredible mentor who introduced me to some executives in the business. I managed to land a production job at the National Geographic Channel. After about two and a half years there, I was ready for a change, and in particular, I missed being back in Pittsburgh with my family. Although 31st Street wasn't hiring anyone, I sent them my resume, and ended up meeting the CEO the next time I was in town. A few months later, I packed my bags and headed back to the 'burgh to work for him. I know I've been very fortunate to have had the opportunities which have led me to where I am now."

**What she does:** "It's really hard to describe a 'typical day' at the studios. There are so many factors that play into it. A lot of that is because the studio itself is so versatile. With almost 300,000ft of space, we're able to do a lot more than just movie production. We also have concerts, events, commercials, whatever you can think of. My job in particular deals with bringing new business like that into the facility. So, some days are spent working with members of the production company filming the new show Outsiders, and other days I'm helping to plan a concert for 4,000 people. I'll go from preparing the studio for a magazine photo shoot for the new Bentley, to a meeting downtown with a hotel to negotiate a partnership. It really just depends on what's needed that day!"

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*[Julianna Bagwell](#) is a writer, editor, and constant seeker of jobs which allow dogs in the office and allow her to have the occasional workday cocktail. Follow her long and arduous professional journey: [@JuliannaLocal](#).*

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