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Science Technology

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by Noah Brode April 30, 2012

CMU Creates Virtual Observatory from U.S. Steel Tower View



(highpointpittsburgh.com)

A screenshot of the High Point Pittsburgh simulation, looking down on the three rivers' confluence from the U.S. Steel Tower.

Carnegie Mellon University is offering free sightseeing visits to the roof of the U.S. Steel Tower.

Well, sort of.

Students and staff at CMU's Entertainment Technology Center have constructed a virtual world in which the one-acre space atop the skyscraper becomes an entertainment destination.

David Bear of CMU's STUDIO for Creative Inquiry said visitors to the "High Point Pittsburgh" website can wander through a three-story glass enclosure that includes a stage, a gallery, a restaurant, and even a green space.

Oh yeah, and there's a nice view.

"The most stunning thing about this is that it's all enveloped in a 360-degree photograph that we took also as part of this High Point Pittsburgh investigation," said Bear. "There's the actual view that you would see if you were up there. It's pretty spectacular."

Bear said the project began more than ten years ago, when he envisioned the large, flat space atop the U.S. Steel Tower as a destination for tourists and Pittsburghers alike. He said it's a unique experience to look out from Pittsburgh's highest building.

"[It's] the largest, highest space on the top of any building on Earth," said Bear. "I mean, there are lots of higher buildings, but they come to a point, or they shrink, or they just don't build them like this anymore."

Bear said the owners of the building haven't warmed up to the idea, so it may take an outpouring of community support for the project to get off the ground — or out of virtual reality.

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