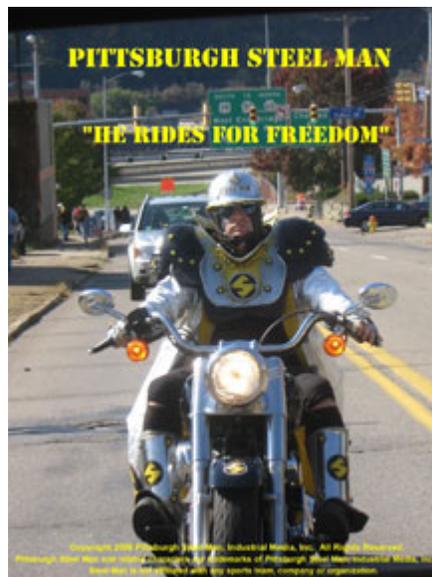




Local man brings Burgh-based comic book hero to life

by Daniel Sleva
Contributing Writer
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A steelworker from Whitehall transforms himself from the average Pittsburgh sports fan into a superhero -- Steel Man -- using only discarded clothing and safety gear found on the shop floors of area steel mills.



"Iron Grandma decorated the original Steel Man suit with all sorts of Pittsburgh regalia and did all the sewing. I did the machine work," Steel Man says.

"Together, Steel Man and Iron Grandma forged and fashioned quite possibly the greatest costume Pittsburgh has ever seen."

Steel Man, who describes himself as "a mild mannered mechanical engineer" by day and "Pittsburgh's Official Super Hero" by night, will debut his first comic book -- Steel Man, Volume 1 -- Sept. 9, just in time for Pittsburgh Comiccon.

The Pittsburgh Comiccon will be held at the Monroeville Convention Center Sept. 11 through 13 and will be headlined by Stan Lee.

Steel Man, who like other superheroes refuses to reveal his true identity, is regularly spotted at Steelers', Pirates' and Penguins' games, as well as local community events in the South Hills.

"The kids are always very responsive to me. Maybe it's my charisma or my extravagant shiny suit that most have never seen before, or maybe it is because they want to believe in real superheroes," he says.

"I enjoy making the balloons for the kids and making them happy. I find it amazing that something as simple and inexpensive as a balloon animal or hat can make a child happy.

"Every time I perform there is that one kid that is amazingly happy and appreciative of my work. I know I make at least one kid's day every time I go out as Steel Man -- no matter what event I am going to -- and that is why I do it."

Along with Steel Man, there are also Steel Dog, a female white boxer, and Steel Puppy, a male brown boxer, that travel with him according to his agent, Carol Vicini.

"The dogs are hot," Vicini says. "Anywhere they go, the kids love them and the kids love to pet them."

Although the Steel Man is kid-friendly in person, his comic book, Steel Man Volume 1, will be have a darker theme, with him playing an anti-hero.

"If I am performing at a show with a lot of kids, I adapt my show to be more kid-friendly and more like a traditional comic book hero, he says.

"However, in the comics, you will find my character has a more dark side, much like **Batman** has a dark side. My comic book will be Rated PG-13 because of the adult subject matter and violence"

Steel Man said that the comic book, which he hopes to develop into a novel, is based on personal experience and real people, and he hopes that will make it more realistic for the reader.

The comic was written by Steel Man and illustrated by Loran Skinkis, also of Whitehall.

"I am very proud of the new Steel Man look from my artist, Loran Skinkis," he says.

"Loran is extremely talented and I am excited and lucky to have him as my artist and illustrator for this project."

Vicini said the best part of this project is the joy it brings.

"These are South Hills guys that are really doing a lot for the community and for the art of comics," Vicini says.

For more information on the Steel Man visit: www.pittsburghsteelman.com.

<http://www.yoursouthhills.com/southhillsrecord/article/local-man-brings-burgh-based-comic-book-hero-life>