

## ON FIFTY YEARS IN COMMUNITY ACTION

Today, Monday, June 19, 2017, I observe my fiftieth anniversary of becoming part of the Community Action Movement. As a 1967 college graduate who in high school heard President Kennedy's call, little did I know that on a June morning I would begin a lifelong big adventure! Earlier Dixie Kalmanoff had interviewed me for the summer Neighborhood Youth Corps counselor position with the Economic Opportunity Corporation in St. Joseph, MO. The interview was a success and I was on my way!

The EOC office address was 613 Corby Building, a professionals building located in the heart of bustling pre-Urban Renewal downtown St. Joseph. After being taken by elevator operator to the sixth floor I clearly remember on Monday, June 19, 1967, apprehensively walking down the long, tiled floor hallway to door 613. My first grown-up calling was waiting just beyond!

Corby Building office doors were mostly glass that let in light, but distorted sight so that the most one could make out on the other side were blurred shadows. Under the painted "613" on that door was a large white sign with black stick-on letters: "NEIGHBORHOOD YOUTH CORPS." That sign was my ticket to life; wonderful things were on the other side of that door!

NYC enrollees signed-up in the Corby Building, and some affluent professionals quickly said how they felt about "those people" being in their building. So began my service in Community Action, and in fall 1967, I stayed as EOC Head Start Director. I was lucky and give thanks for my many marvelous mentors including Charles Braithwait, Wayne Thomas, Kermyt Roebuck, and Tom Lawlor. I learned.

Chance Blaeuer coaxed me to the Missouri SEEO in 1975 as Missouri's first Weatherization Director, and Alice Weathers kept me there in 1979. Because of CSBG in 1981, the SEEO was catapulted to a new level of power and influence and I wanted to become a leader who could be followed. I tried. Retirement from Missouri government was in 2000, but not from Community Action.

I had been fortunate enough to be involved with CCAP since its first day, and after 2000 remained involved as a national CCAP Commissioner and mentor. I began celebrating my fiftieth a few days early by proctoring the Austin CCAP examination and then visiting the LBJ Library. There I noted the displayed copy of mimeographed *Neighborhood Youth Corps News*, Murfreesboro TN, April 21, 1967.

In a sense, I was born fifty years ago today, and places I celebrate are old familiar places with familiar memories. Baseball's George Brett got it right: There have been the bad times and the good times, but the magic of nostalgia has done its work, and now the bad times have become the good times, and the good times have become the great times. I cannot imagine what good I might have done with my life had it not been for Community Action. I am blessed and lucky, and looking forward to my fifty-first year.

Charles H. McCann, CCAP Emeritus  
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