

CATEGORY: PUBLIC RELATIONS/PROMOTION (23)

H. SPEECHES

Writer: Joan C. Johnson

Title: History of Washington County Community Action

Speaker: Larry Cole
Mayor of Beaverton, Oregon

Event: Annual Meeting/Banquet marking 20th Anniversary
of Washington County Community Action Organization

Date: October 11, 1985

Place: Greenwood Inn, Beaverton, Oregon

Audience: Approximately 150 people in attendance, including
Community Action board members and agency staff,
elected officials, representatives of local
businesses and community organizations, and
members of community at large.

Goal: To provide the audience with an understanding of
the history and growth of the Community Action
agency, as well as its place as a service-delivery
organization in the community.

*Joan Johnson won
"first place award" from
Oregon Area Women - March, 1986
for this speech*

HISTORY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION:

SPEECH FOR MAYOR LARRY COLE

(10/11/85)

GOOD EVENING FRIENDS AND HONORED GUESTS:

I AM REALLY PLEASED TO BE PART OF THE PROGRAM THIS EVENING
BECAUSE... AS A BOARD MEMBER FOR THE PAST 8 YEARS....

I HAVE WATCHED WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION CHANGE AND
GROW... YOU MIGHT SAY I HAVE SERVED THROUGH ITS ADOLESCENT YEARS.

BUT NOW, COMMUNITY ACTION HAS COME OF AGE...
AND TONIGHT WE MARK ITS 20TH YEAR IN WASHINGTON COUNTY....

BIRTHDAYS, OF COURSE, ARE NOT JUST TIMES FOR CELEBRATION....
THEY ARE ALSO TIMES FOR REMEMBERING...

AND SO MY JOB THIS EVENING IS TO REVIEW WITH YOU
HOW COMMUNITY ACTION CAME INTO BEING... HOW IT HAS GROWN...
AND HOW IT HAS BECOME AN INTEGRAL AND IMPORTANT PART OF THIS COUNTY.

WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION ORGANIZATION....
"WCCAO" FOR SHORT... IS A CHILD OF THAT GREAT EXPERIMENT --
THE WAR ON POVERTY.

TITLE 2 OF THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1964 PROVIDED
FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES... THEIR
PURPOSE WAS... (I QUOTE)

"TO STIMULATE A BETTER FOCUSING OF ALL AVAILABLE
LOCAL... STATE... PRIVATE... AND FEDERAL RESOURCES
TO HELP ALL LOW INCOME FAMILILIES AND INDIVIDUALS...
IN BOTH RURAL AND URBAN AREAS...
TO BECOME FULLY SELF-SUFFICIENT."

...IN OTHER WORDS... TO ELIMINATE POVERTY.

WCCAO WAS FORMED IN 1965 AS PART OF THAT AMBITIOUS UNDERTAKING... BUT IT WAS NOT ANOTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCY... IT WAS FORMED AS A PRIVATE, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION... WHICH IS ONE OF ITS STRENGTHS TODAY. IT SERVES THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTY... IT CANNOT BE ABOLISHED AT THE WHIM OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

ALTHOUGH NOT MANY PEOPLE IN THE COUNTY WERE PARTICULARLY AWARE OF THE ARRIVAL OF THIS FLEDGLING ORGANIZATION... ITS IMPACT BEGAN TO BE FELT. IT BROUGHT FEDERAL DOLLARS INTO THE COMMUNITY... IT ATTRACTED THE YOUNG AND THE IDEALISTIC WHO BELIEVED IN ITS GOALS... AND IT BEGAN TO IDENTIFY SIGNIFICANT AREAS OF POVERTY IN THIS, THE RICHEST COUNTY IN THE STATE.

IN ITS EARLIEST STAGES, WCCAO PLAYED MORE OF AN ADVOCACY AND EDUCATIONAL ROLE... IT ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS TO HELP THE POOR DEAL WITH THE TRADITIONAL BUREACRACIES OF GOVERNMENT... TO GIVE THEM ADVICE ON THEIR LEGAL RIGHTS... AND TO INFORM THEM WHERE AND HOW THEY COULD GET HELP.

ITS BEGINNINGS WERE NOT EASY. CERTAINLY THERE WERE MISTAKES. AND PERHAPS THE INITIAL VISION OF ELIMINATING POVERTY WAS NEVER ATTAINABLE.... BUT WCCAO BEGAN TO EARN THE CONFIDENCE AND THE RESPECT OF THE PEOPLE IT SERVED...

STILL, COMMUNITY ACTION REMAINED UNKNOWN TO MANY IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY... OR WORSE -- IT WAS SUSPECT. AFTER ALL...

WHO WERE THESE TROUBLEMAKERS WHO WERE GETTING THINGS ALL STIRRED UP?

AS THE 70'S PROGRESSED, COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES GENERALLY BEGAN TO TAKE A MORE REALISTIC VIEW OF WHAT WAS POSSIBLE... THE EMPHASIS SHIFTED FROM ELIMINATING POVERTY... TO HELPING POOR PEOPLE BECOME MORE SELF-SUFFICIENT.... AND MOST IMPORTANT, BECAUSE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION WAS A CORNERSTONE OF THEIR PROGRAMS, LOW INCOME PEOPLE THEMSELVES BEGAN TO HAVE A GREATER VOICE IN IDENTIFYING THEIR NEEDS... AND IN WORKING TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE.

PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY BEGAN TO HEAR ABOUT PROGRAMS LIKE... CROP GLEANING... A PROGRAM THAT ORGANIZED LOW-INCOME VOLUNTEERS TO SALVAGE THE LEFT-OVERS AFTER FARMERS HAD HARVESTED THEIR CROPS... AND THEN SHARE THEIR GLEANINGS WITH THE ELDERLY AND DISABLED WHO COULD NOT HELP IN THE HARVEST...

THE TRANSLATORS BUREAU... TO HELP THOSE WHO WERE NOT PROFICIENT IN ENGLISH...

HEAD START, A PROGRAM - WE NOW KNOW FROM 20 YEARS OF STUDY - THAT HAS MADE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN HELPING CHILDREN BREAK OUT OF THE CYCLE OF POVERTY...

RSVP, THE RETIRED SENIORS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM...

CENTRO CULTURAL, THE HISPANIC CULTURAL CENTER IN CORNELIUS...

DAY CARE PROGRAMS... WEATHERIZATION PROGRAMS.... THE FOOD CO-OPS.... THE SHELTER HOME... AND MORE.

SOME OF THESE WERE STATE OR NATIONAL PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY COMMUNITY ACTION IN OUR COUNTY... SOME WERE PROGRAMS

DEVELOPED BY WCCAO TO MEET SPECIFIC COMMUNITY NEEDS... AND OTHERS, LIKE CENTRO CULTURAL, WERE DEVELOPED INDEPENDENTLY BUT WITH ASSISTANCE AND ENCOURAGEMENT FROM WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION... BUT THEY ALL HAD ONE COMMON GOAL: TO HELP PEOPLE BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT AND MORE SELF-SUFFICIENT....

AS THE NUMBER OF PROGRAMS DEVELOPED BY, OR WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF WCCAO, INCREASED...

THE RESPONSE OF WASHINGTON COUNTY'S CITIZENS ALSO GREW. MORE AND MORE INDIVIDUALS GAVE THEIR TIME, MONEY, AND IN-KIND DONATIONS.... MANY CHURCHES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY BEGAN TO HELP... AND SOME BUSINESSES ALSO PROVIDED SERVICES OR IN-KIND DONATIONS. BUT WCCAO'S MAIN RESOURCE CONTINUED TO BE FEDERAL DOLLARS.

IN THE LATE 70'S, WCCAO'S BOARD WAS FORESIGHTED ENOUGH TO REALIZE THAT SOMEHOW WE HAD TO BROADEN THE BASE OF OUR FUNDING.... FEDERAL DOLLARS COULD NOT BE COUNTED ON INDEFINITELY... AND SO WE BEGAN TO APPEAL TO COUNTY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR SUPPORT.

THE CITIES OF BEAVERTON AND HILLSBORO, AS WELL AS WASHINGTON COUNTY, WERE AMONG THE FIRST OF A NUMBER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO RESPOND... BY PLEDGING FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THE WCCAO SHELTER HOME WHICH PROVIDES EMERGENCY SHELTER AND ASSISTANCE TO THE HOMELESS....

IN 1979... FOR THE FIRST TIME... WCCAO'S SHELTER HOME ALSO RECEIVED FUNDING FROM UNITED WAY...

AND IN 1984... WCCAO ITSELF WAS DESIGNATED A UNITED WAY AGENCY, ANOTHER MAJOR STEP IN DIVERSIFYING OUR FINANCIAL BASE.

THE MOVE TO BROADEN OUR BASE CAME NONE TOO SOON... WITH THE DRASTIC CUT-BACK IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS BEGINNING IN 1980... AND THE CONCURRENT RECESSION THAT SWELLED THE NUMBERS OF UNEMPLOYED... WE EXPERIENCED DRAMATICALLY INCREASED DEMANDS FOR SERVICE...

IRONICALLY, AS THE NEED FOR SERVICES INCREASED... GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT DECREASED. IT WAS CLEAR THAT OUR SEARCH FOR BROADER COMMUNITY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT MUST CONTINUE TO BE ONE OF OUR TOP PRIORITIES.

BUT THE NEWS WAS NOT ALL BAD... IN 1984, FOR THE FIRST TIME, WCCAO BEGAN A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY... TO PROVIDE TRAINING AND JOBS FOR UNEMPLOYED YOUTH... A PROGRAM THAT HAS PROVED IMPRESSIVE IN ITS RESULTS BY PROVIDING KIDS WITH REAL JOBS.

WE ALSO ACHIEVED ANOTHER IMPORTANT MILESTONE IN 1984 WITH THE OPENING OF THE VOLUNTEER CENTER IN ALOHA.... IN ADDITION TO BEING THE CENTER FOR SEVERAL IMPORTANT VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS SERVING THE COUNTY... IT IS THE DISTRIBUTION POINT FOR TUALATIN VALLEY FOOD CENTER, A FOOD NETWORK THAT COORDINATES THE SOLICITATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF DONATED FOODS THROUGH 43 DIFFERENT AGENCIES IN THE COUNTY.

BOTH THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM AND THE VOLUNTEER CENTER ARE GREAT EXAMPLES OF HOW WCCAO WORKS... BY BRINGING TOGETHER PEOPLE, GOVERNMENTAL FUNDING, AND PRIVATE COMMUNITY RESOURCES... TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS.

AS WE REVIEW OUR PROGRESS TONIGHT... WE CAN SEE THAT AWARENESS OF WCCAO, ITS PROGRAMS, AND ITS PLACE IN THE COUNTY HAS GROWN STEADILY OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS... AND YES, SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, WCCAO HAS OUTGROWN ITS REPUTATION OF EARLIER YEARS THAT IT WAS JUST A BUNCH OF WILD-EYED RADICALS BENT ON REFORMING THE WORLD...

OVER THE YEARS, COMMUNITY ACTION HAS EDUCATED ALL OF US TO THE FACT THAT POVERTY IS NOT A PROBLEM ONLY TO BE FOUND IN THE GHETTOS OF NEW YORK AND LOS ANGELES... AND THE RURAL COMMUNITIES OF APPALACHIA.... IT IS RIGHT HERE IN WASHINGTON COUNTY.

IT HAS ALSO DEMONSTRATED THAT... NO MATTER WHAT THE FUNDING SOURCE FOR SO-CALLED POVERTY PROGRAMS... THE MOST EFFECTIVE ARE THOSE THAT RESPOND TO THE REAL NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY... AND THAT INVOLVE COMMUNITY PEOPLE IN WORKING OUT THE SOLUTIONS.

AND FINALLY... COMMUNITY ACTION CONTINUALLY REMINDS US THAT WHEN PEOPLE ARE DOWN, THEY ARE LOOKING FOR A HAND UP... NOT A HAND-OUT. PERHAPS THE BEST PROOF OF THAT IS THE FACT THAT MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE WORKED IN WCCAO PROGRAMS... WHO HAVE VOLUNTEERED THEIR TIME AND SKILLS... OR HAVE MADE IN-KIND DONATIONS... ARE PEOPLE WHO, AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, WERE GIVEN A HELPING HAND WHEN THEY NEEDED IT MOST...

SO HERE'S TO 20 SUCCESSFUL YEARS OF PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE! WE CAN ALL TAKE PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION HAS HELPED MAKE THIS COUNTY A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE... FOR ALL OF US.... HAPPY BIRTHDAY, WCCAO!