

Interview with George Bartlett, February 22, 1984.

Annette: Your name keeps coming up. Since you've been ill, I've just been impatient to get ahold of you, because your name keeps ~~38888888~~ coming up. It sounds like you have been a mark of continuity with the group, from what I can see. I've talked to a number of people who were there very early--1970 or so, before you came. Then before they left, you came. And it's like you've been there, from the early to the present?

George: No. Originally, it was started by the OEO, which was the original North Coast Opportunities. Office of Economic Opportunity.

Annette: That was before NCO?

George: That was before NCO. And they appointed an adhoc committee composed of various members of the community, and I was asked to serve on that committee too. So that when we came up with plans and all, as to what purpose and how we should proceed established, and we formed a Senior Citizens' Center, and they adapted the name, "Greater Ukiah Senior Citizens' Center," and then we applied for our incorporation.

Annette: What year are we talking about, George?

George: Oh, the regular committee was formed around 1970--the latter part of 1970--and they served as a committee, and organization, until they incorporated in 1972. Our incorporation was, August 2, I think it was, of 1972. And at that time the committee members were selected to be the original Board members. I happened to be one selected for membership on the Board, the first one under our new incorporation.

And so I have been involved as a Board member until 1975, when I resigned to take the office of Administrator.

Annette: And that was Director? Did you replace Mr. White?--I can't remember his first name.

George: ^(Paraphrase) White, yes. He was the first director appointed by the Board, and he served for approximately a year, maybe a little longer, and then he had to retire on account of his health. He had high blood pressure, and he was afraid of a heart attack. So he resigned, and the Board then debated who they would get to replace him. Somebody said, 'Well, why don't George take it?' So that's how I got appointed then, as Administrator for the Center. And that was in September of 1975, I think.

Annette: I've been hearing a lot about the Progressives in those early days. Did you have any involvement with the PROgressives?

George: Not exactly. The Progressive Seniors were an organization in themselves. Now certain of the Progressive membership was involved in establishing the Center, but it wasn't the same in itself.

It was primarily for entertainment. They had potlucks and card parties and things like that, and they had a membership fee. Do they participated in the formation of the Center, but they were separate organizations.

Annette: You see the Center as being different from the Progressives? In its goals, in its activities--and so on?

George: Well, I think the Articles of Incorporation that we drew up...as I say, the Progressives were an entertainment-oriented organization. It was for people's enjoyment, rather than what we could do for the community, or what we could do for Senior Citizens. And the Articles of Incorporation specifically state that we organized to...let me get the book.

(Reading) "The Senior Citizens' Center is a non-profit social service organization, incorporated in 1972 to create programs for seniors in the fulfillment of their social, physical and intellectual needs."

Annette: So it was more multi-faceted, and had more of a breadth of covering needs, beyond the Progressives?

George: It involved health programs, outreach work, as well as nutrition. We started a nutrition program one day a week, when we had no Federal funding whatsoever.

Annette: Now was this when it was on State Street?

George: That's when it was on State Street. And everybody paid a dollar at that time; food was a lot cheaper, and NCO furnished the cook, and we got along very nicely with the one dollar contribution. Then in 1974 was when we got our first grant, from the Department of Aging for our Nutrition Program. That's when we hired a director, Mr. White. We also hired a secretary, we hired some bus drivers, and that's when we really started to operate as a Center, was when we got some funds to do it.

Annette: You were telling me a minute ago about your first transportation. Could you repeat that?

George: Well, the first transportation was a bus that we bought for \$5,000, using revenue-sharing funds. It was a bus that had been used in Napa and Vallejo to transport workers to and from work. It was done by a private individual who couldn't make a go of it, so he had to sell the bus. Well, we were able to buy the bus at \$5100. We started by having volunteer drivers. We didn't have any paid drivers. Everything was volunteer. It created some problems--in other words, we couldn't make as full a use of the bus as we do now. We didn't have the means for using the bus to its fullest; such as taking people shopping, and to doctor's offices and so forth, as we do now. It was more to bring people in to the nutrition program than anything else. And also to develop home-delivered meals. We were able to secure funds from the Republican Women's Organization for \$1800 to do that, and that's how we started delivering home-delivered meals. This was in 1973, before there was any funds from

did a lot for the Center,

the Department of Aging. We operated the bus and produced what funds we could scrape together, and we had potlucks, and we had card parties, and we had rummage sales, cake sales--those kinds of things--in order to supply funds for the Center.

Annette: So you were there at a real grass-roots period. What is your first memory of the Center?--What was your first experience with it coming in, before you were a Director

George: Well, to be quite frank with you, when I was on the Committee, I didn't know what it was all about. It was quite an educational process of attending their meetings and meeting with other people and getting ideas advanced from one person to another. It was quite an educational process for me. Like I say, when I first agreed to serve on the committee, I ~~didn't have the faintest idea of what a Senior Center should be~~ shouldn't be hadn't the faintest idea of what the Senior Center should be or shouldn't be and what it should accomplish and how it was to be operated. I hadn't the faintest idea. And the fact is, the original committee and the original group was very loose, especially as far as funds was concerned. In June of 1973 I was made the Treasurer. And I discovered that there wasn't any accounting system, and there wasn't any record-keeping. By saving bank statements, and the checks that were in the bank statements, they determined what the money was spent for. The same way with deposits--you had to kind of guess as to what the money represented, just because there was a deposit slip. I went back to January 1 of 1973 and set up the double-entry bookkeeping system that we use today.

Annette: Of course, you were a business man. It must have been a real challenge to you.

George: Well, it was. It took a lot of work, and some of it was guesswork, because there were no records. And it graduated up as we went along--we have quite a complicated system now. The monthly report for the Board of Directors is composed of 11 pages, of statistical data regarding the finances of the Center. And, through it, we were able to control our expenses. Maybe I was criticized for not spending as I should have spent it, but I'm old-fashioned, I don't believe in spending money till you have it. As a result, we've gradually built up a bank account now to where we have operating moneys. Even though that some of our grant money, such as MTA funds or Department of Aging funds won't come to us for 60 days. Well, we have to have money to operate, until those funds arrive. And if you don't have plural capital to do that, you're in trouble. In other words, you have to put off paying bills and decide who's going to get the money that you have. But now we're operating on a cash basis, with ample funds and a cash flow, so that we are able to pay the bills as they come in.

Annette: Uhuh. To get back to talking about how the Center has developed and how it's evolved--could you explain a little how it developed from the State St. place-- where it went next, to where it's come now here to Leslie?

George: Well, the 601 N. State St. house was inadequate in that it did not have the space. We could only seat about 20 people for our

noon meal. There was just a living-room, which was our reception room, and the recreation room and whatever else was necessary. So--we had to pay rent; we began looking around for something to substitute. The first thing that came to our attention was that the Junior Achievement Organization was going out of business, and they they had a building that was donated to them by Masonite Corporation, and located on E. Perkins near the railroad. This building was purchased for around a hundred and seventy-some odd dollars. We took that and remodelled it and then added to it--added 1600 square feet. And that was when we moved in and started to operate, really as a Center. Mr. White was our Director. We were receiving our funds from the Department of Aging at that time.

This was in 1974. And this evolved from the building on E. Perkins Street to what we have now, inasmuch as, here again, the opportunity arose that the Teen Center was going out of business--they owed somewhere around \$25,000 in debts, plus their mortgages, and they had no funds coming in at all, very little support from the community. So, rather than see this all go down the drain--because they owned the property on Leslie Street, and they owned the metal building, which we had appraised at somewhere around \$60,000. ~~Well, I worked out a deal with the Teen Center Board that, if they would deed the property to us, we would pay off their debt.~~ Well, I worked out a deal with the Teen Center Board, whereby we would pay off their indebtedness, plus assuming their mortgages and bring those up to date--in return for a deed to the property. To compensate them for equity, that they had in the property, because--here, we'll say, around \$30,000 was what we had to pay out, on a value of around \$60,000--so to compensate them without cash, we entered into a lease-use agreement with them for 10 years, at \$6500 a year--that That'll be up in-- I think, 3 more years.

And that is how we bought the property that we have at the present time. We moved the buildings that were there on E. Perkins Street over to Leslie Street. And, after they'd been moved, we remodelled them twice.

Annette: So these are the same buildings that were on Perkins Street?

George: This one we're in at the present time. The metal building, of course, was the Teen Center building, that we acquired. First we received a grant from the Dept. of Aging, Title V, to remodel the Recreation Room--the Recreation Room, which was the Teen Center building. Because it had never been finished, the interior--the ceiling, for instance, was just rough beams and so forth. Then when we acquired the Multi-purpose Senior Project, they had to provide office space for them. Now here again there was money available under Title V to do that remodelling, and provide them with office space. So we were given \$52,000 to remodel the building into its present structure. What we hope to do is to establish the MSSP in _____. We want to move the Day Care Center over here, and have everything in one building.

That's how we acquired the property here, on Leslie Street. And it's been taking advantage of opportunity as it came along.

Annette: That's what it sounds like. It just sounds like you've made the most of what was there, and it's worked out very well. You were telling me way back when we talked, about some changes that have taken place in the kitchen, recently.

George: Well, the changes in the kitchen were some remodelling. Basically, it's the same as it has been, except now we have a walk-in refrigerator and walk-in freezer, which has been added to and cost around \$12,000. And it's proved its worth, in that we received just recently from the Federal government over \$13,000 in surplus food. That's enough use for at least 6 months. And if we hadn't had a space to store them, or put them in refrigerated containers of some sort, we couldn't have kept it.

Annette: Outside of your growth in facilities, are there any particular changes you see in the work of the Senior Center, that you feel are especially important in the time it's been going? In terms of goals and activities?

George: Well, it's continually changing. However, I should go back to acquiring this property. I should mention how we raised the money for the purchase of the property. Surely, the Center didn't have \$30,000 which it could hand out for the purchase of this property. So we developed what is known as certificates. These were for sale in amounts of \$100 and bearing 4½% interest. They were sold to members of the Center. In the matter of two weeks we had raised over \$30,000 with this method.

Annette: Incredible.

George: So the purchase of this property is largely due to the generosity and cooperation of the members themselves. They knew a good thing when they saw it, and they were willing to get in and help. 4½% interest, that's pretty low. They could have gotten more money in a savings account. At least we gave them something for the use of their money.

Annette: Made them stockholders in something they believed in, too, and wanted to see happen.

George: You'd be surprised--these are _____ pioneers--and you'd be surprised at the number of people that, when their certificates were due, donated the entire amount to the Senior Center. And that's how we really got it started.

Annette: That's a wonderful story. What activities here do you particularly enjoy when you're doing them for fun? Outside of your job as Director?

George: Oh, anything is fun. Especially starting a new program. And every year we try to start some sort of new program; such as our Day Care Center, Video Assistance to Seniors, Direct Reading. One type or other of program we try to start almost every year, to try something new. Lots of these programs have been carried on year after

year. If it's of benefit to a Senior, then we want to do it. I think there are too many don't look at it from the standpoint of what we can do for the members. And that should be our primary purpose, is what we can do to assist Senior Citizens to a better life.

Annette: Something I've been asking people is to tell a little bit about their personal backgrounds, because I'm interested and I think it would be interesting in the History, from the human interest point of view--to find out how so many of you came together at this time to accomplish this Senior Center and your interest in it. What brought that about? Where do you come from?

George: Well--how far back do you want to go?

Annette: Where were you born?

George: I was born in _____, Nebraska. And I left there when I was about 4 years old. My father was a painting and paper-hanging contractor. He had learned the trade when he was very young, and in those days paint was made from white lead and linseed oil, and he developed lead poisoning. So his health wasn't very good, and we moved around; from Nebraska to Arkansas, from Arkansas to Washington, from Washington ~~to~~ to Idaho, from Idaho back to Washington, and from Washington to Montana, and from Montana to California--we became real travellers. In 7th grade I went to--from 7th grade through junior college in Santa Monica. I was going to work during the summer to go on to the University of California, so I got a job in the Exchange Bank in Santa Rosa. Well, that time was a pressure point.

Annette: Were you still living at home?

George: I was still living at home. So between that and the death of my father, I had to give up going to the University. I spent 8 years in the banking business, with the Exchange Bank, and I went to night school for 8 years taking the bank courses that were offered--everything from Elementary Banking, to Psychology, to Handling of Bonds, and so forth--were in this course that I took at night. Then in 1938--37--I left the bank and came to Ukiah to start our own business, and I started a business of Bartlett's Bottled Oil and Water Company. the business known as Bartlett's Oil and Water Company. We furnished service for heating and air-conditioning, as well as sales of heating and air-conditioning equipment. We opened the store and had appliances too.

We opened the store on December 1, and December 7 was Pearl Harbor. So we had nothing to sell all during the war except _____. So I had to learn everything more or less the hard way, trial and error, and I think that we had a very good business; I think all our customers appreciated what we did for them.

So that is more or less on the background. And I was asked to serve on this committee by Claude Trimble, and--like I said before--I hadn't the faintest idea what it was all about.

Annette: Yes, that was going to be my next question. What caused you to become interested in Senior work, do you think?

George: Well, as I say--and Claude Trimble was a friend of mine, and a customer--he was in the store one day, and he needed some people to chair on this committee. He asked me if I would be willing to do it. I didn't know what I was getting into, I hadn't the faintest idea, but some way I said yes, and that's the way it started.

Annette: Can you think of any particular questions I should be asking that I haven't asked? Or anything you can think of that you would like to include, that I haven't thought of?

George: No. There's lots of things of course. How we have grown, as far as employees are concerned--we started out with 4 employees, and we now have 22. You can't have that many employees and not have problems of one kind or another. When we started out, we didn't have much in the way of personnel policy--everything has just evolved, from the need. This book here, this handbook for the Board of Directors, I compiled. It has everything in it, from what a Board should consist of and how it should function, to our Articles of Incorporation, our by-laws, our office procedures. Even things such as the forms that we use has been compiled into the handbook. So that when a new Board member comes in, they can take this and have some idea as to what it's all about.

Annette: So it sounds like you've given the Center organization and specific strategy by which to operate.

George: That's right. This has been invaluable to other centers too. They can take what we've compiled and try to operate the same as we do. We have had--well, as an example, Mr. Lambert, from Fairfield, came here to visit his relatives. He stopped here at the Center and saw what we were doing, and he was so impressed that he went back and he wanted to start a Senior Center in Fairfield. Well, he used us as an example. And that's how they got a Senior Center started in Fairfield. One of the phone calls when we were interrupted was the Director from Santa Rosa Senior Citizen's Center, wanting me to come down and talk to the Board members about how we operate. So, I think we have been known all over the state for the way we do things.

Annette: That's when something really begins to feel successful, when it starts influencing beyond our own boundaries, doesn't it?

George: We started the Willits Center. Here again, we were given some funds to do so by revenue-sharing funds. Harvey Sawyer, who was a Supervisor at that time, lived in Willits and was so impressed that he wanted to see a Center started in Willits. So we received a certain amount of revenue-sharing funds. It's been a long struggle to get the Center up there in Willits established. But now it is operating and one of the three best centers in the county.

Annette: Uhuh. Are you connected with the Indian Nutrition Center?

George: No. That's an entirely separate independent. We have tried, both for our transportation and also nutrition program, to get the Indians to participate with us. But they just won't do it, they want to be entirely separate. We started out with transportation. There

was no reason why our buses couldn't pick up an Indian as well as a white person. Take them shopping or to a doctor's office or something. But they absolutely refused to ride on our buses. They wanted their own buses. So it's not that we haven't tried.

On the wall over in the other building- in the dining-room near the front desk--is a plaque with the names of individuals who contributed to the Center, in some manner. We have planted a tree in their honor-- Italian cypress--a free for each person--when we finish there will be a whole row.

Dec. 1973: The first Dept. of Aging grant for \$15,000.

Find out why people became interested and involved in the Center. We must have done something right to get these people involved. Now we have 1300 members.

About the book: Take into consideration that every member is going to want a copy, and we have to take into account what we can sell it for when deciding what to put into it.