

Oral History: Anton Vishio

Recorded: June 27, 2012

Interviewed by Mac Barrett '67

On Community Service

Barrett: You also filled a vitally important role as tutor and community outreach organizer for a long time. What are your reflections on those areas?

Vishio: That started rather innocuously. Ludlow Baldwin, my second year here, said that he had received a call from Echo House, an inner-city organization, that requested we send students down to tutor and to help out there in the afternoon or on the weekend. So I picked Saturday morning, and we had a few volunteers. Went down, and I thought we would use their athletic facilities. Well, at the [unclear] there are no athletic facilities. There's a grocery store on the corner and a corner across the street, which has been devastated. And men were selling drugs on the corner.

So, I asked Mr. Baldwin for permission to bring the kids to Gilman School on Saturday mornings to play sports and maybe to tutor. And that's what we did. I started that in 1967, and it lasted until the year I retired. We don't have the relationship with Echo House any longer. Not our fault, really. Echo House lost funding. I believe it was JC Penney that was the major funder, and they cut their funding to Echo House, and they had to cut many, if not all of their programs for adolescents, which is a darn shame.

We called it Operation Green Grass. Many of those youngsters from that area would never have known Gilman School, but because we would give them sweatshirts, really, anything that was left over at the end of the year, Gilman became a name in that area of Baltimore because of the kids wearing our various garb. And I can remember some of them coming back and saying what a wonderful program it was.

Next, we started delivering food at Christmas and Thanksgiving, as well as clothing and toys at Christmas, and at other times of the year, garments, clothing — whatever we could pick up — to various inner-city locations. The kids really became involved and became into these donations. I think it gave them an opportunity to see another side of the urban experience. So, we continued that, and the effort still continues today. Mr. Donell Thompson runs the program and does a wonderful job.

Later on, we added more things. People would call us to help out with this program or that program. We were never at a loss for volunteers. Finally, the Special Olympics called us — that was in about 1975 — and asked us to help. I had taken volunteers to the Maryland games out at Towson for a few years prior to that and became acquainted with various administrators in the Special Olympics in Maryland, and they wanted to use our facilities for basketball, for track and field, and for other events. In fact, we put a day in, which was dedicated to Special Olympians, and that still is done today up to this year in late September every year. I'm not too sure we're doing all the other things that we did with the Special Olympics before.

And then, we added the Lunches for the Homeless, which is still going on. Mr. Thompson is running that. And we spread that to other schools. There are now about three or four different schools, and we added three or four different organizations that are making lunches for the homeless and taking them to places like Our Daily Bread and Paul's Place and other soup kitchens, which is a great legacy for the School, that the School has started and passed on to other places.