

Bob Goff: “Called” to a Role as Change Agent

Despite his many accomplishments, APD’s second full-time executive director prefers to look ahead to the challenges of today and the future.

Jane M. Loverin

This is the second article in a series on APD’s former executive directors.

—Editor

Bob Goff served as APD’s national executive director from 1972 to 1981, during a time when our country, the YMCA of the USA and APD were struggling with a number of major issues. Prior to his selection as APD’s executive, Bob served for eight years as the executive director of the Santa Barbara Family YMCA. Before that, he was on the staff of the YMCA of San Diego County.

Goff earned his bachelor’s degree from Willamette University and his masters degree in social work from the University of California at Berkeley. In 1962, he was the recipient of a special John R. Mott Fellowship for graduate study. His is currently a consultant for the Family YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties in Salem, OR.

“Looking back” is not Goff’s preference; instead, he chooses to look ahead to new experiences and opportunities. He talks in immediate terms, conjectures about the future and relates a number of his own philosophies as far as what he has learned over the years with the YMCA of the USA and APD. I feel an immediate bond between us because the YMCA he is working with is the Y that I grew up with.

Bob impresses me as an agent for posi-

tive change. In fact, he was one of the people to whom I, as a product of the traditional YMCA health and physical education programs, was in opposition when APD was going through changes in the 1970s. However, APD was in need of change and Goff helped that process move forward.

When he was selected as the second full-time APD national executive director, the organization was dealing with some difficult financial problems as a result of the structurally cumbersome nature of the APD sections (administration, physical education, program). Also, during the 1960s and 1970s, racism was a major concern within the YMCA movement in the United States. Goff felt that there needed to be special leadership in APD to address this important social issue. He hired Paul Norman as associate executive director to address the needs of APD/YMCA minority colleagues. Norman’s one year of service was an instrumental part of making APD more inclusive.

The issue of qualifications for APD membership was also tackled during Goff’s tenure. Who could join and how one defined “YMCA professional” had

to be addressed. Goff felt that “what you do” was more important than your actual job title. In recent years, the eligibility issue was addressed—all YMCA employees, committed to their professional development, are eligible for APD membership.

Goff also inherited a portfolio of publications. At the time, APD published four separate journals. Now there is just one—*Perspective*. The cost of publishing four journals was a major financial drain. By combining the publications and merging resources, APD was able to establish the highly respected publication that we have today.

Goff still believes that APD needs to remain the organization that is committed to developing the YMCA person—professionally and personally. He speaks of being “called” to a job rather than merely applying for employment. In our diverse world, he understands that the YMCA, as a career, is not for everyone. But, for those that choose the YMCA, APD should be there for them—for fellowship, for friendship and for professional and personal development.

Over the years, Goff has witnessed many changes in the YMCA. But in the midst of all of the changes that have occurred, he is pleased to see that the YMCA is promoting character development and staying true to its Christian character. Goff also feels that this is where APD can play a significant role. It is a vital part of how we relate to one another and

how we can advance as professionals within our organization.

When asked if there was anything that he wished he could have changed in his Y career, Goff had a definite answer. When he was “called” to the position of APD executive director he was asked to move to Ohio. Even though his daughter had only one year of high school remaining, he decided to accept the position and move, because, at

Jane M. Loverin is associate executive director of the Central Branch/Metro Family YMCA in Portland, OR and a member of APD Chapter 83.

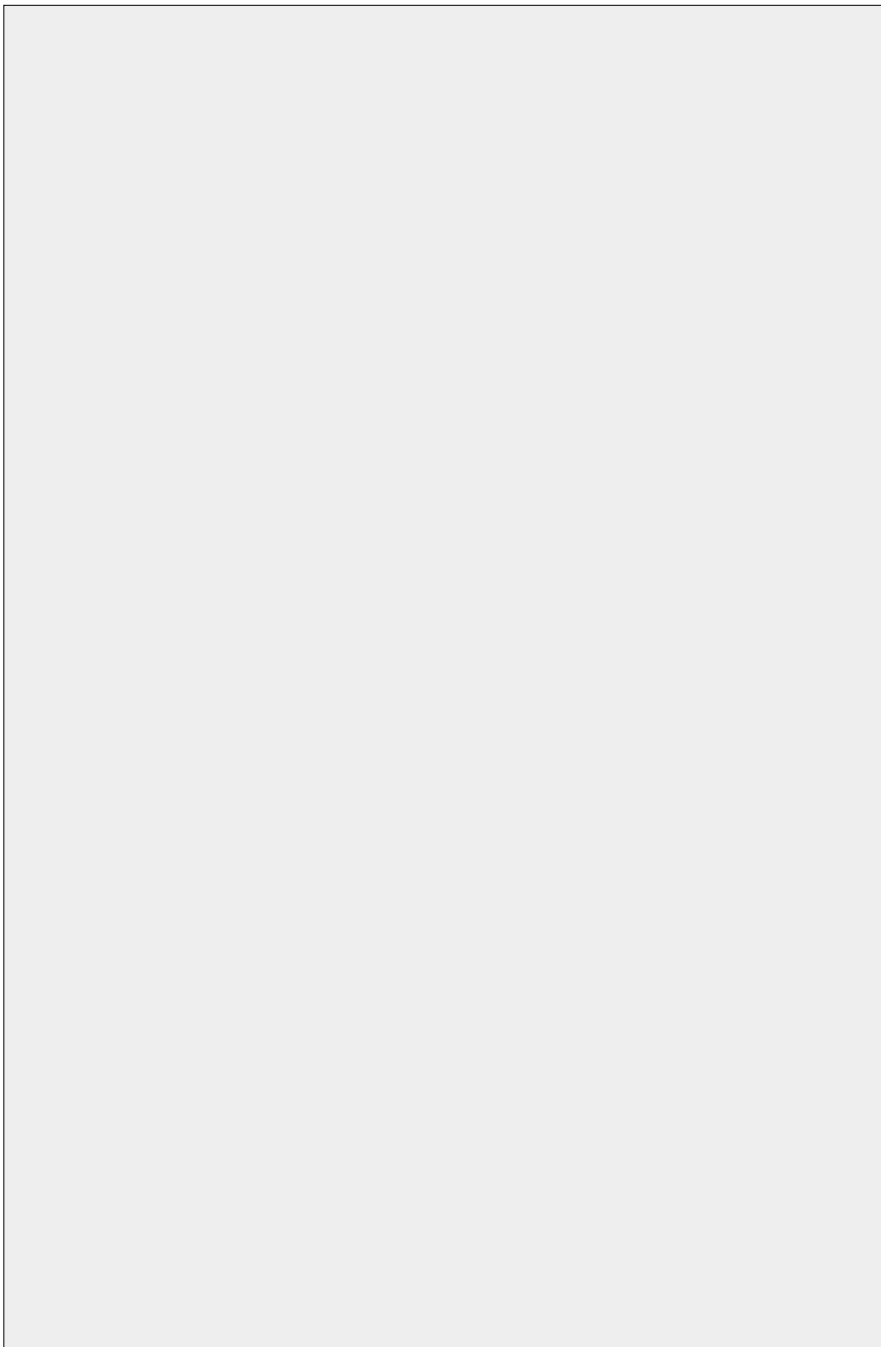
that time, it was not an option to negotiate an office relocation. Today, he says things would probably be different. Being in Ohio did have some advantages—he was never gone for more than one or two days when he needed to travel in order to conduct APD business or to help a fellow colleague. With today's issues of balancing home, life and work, the fact that he could keep his trips relatively short in duration was a big accomplishment compared to even today's YMCA consultants.

Bob Goff, past APD executive and also past YMCA of the USA employee, now consultant for local YMCAs, offers the following words of wisdom that are worth discussion and implementation:

- with regard to senior director status, everything needs to be considered—college degree as well as life experience
- look at the importance of knowing the YMCA heritage; listen to others and work towards understanding as we work together
- we are a membership organization; let's make people feel included—everyone wants and deserves a sense of belonging
- with regard to life-long learning, APD is not a 12-week program, it is a life-long journey
- APD must focus on the needs of its members; learning how to develop and maintain positive relationships and live



Bob Goff



in harmony is a major focus for most Y professionals

- APD needs to be an advocate for the YMCA professional and provide training opportunities that are not available from the YMCA of the USA
- *Perspective* is a good publication—even if you only get two or three great ideas each year that help you in your work or professional life, it's well worth it
- communication with APD needs to

involve the type of immediate feedback that today's professional is accustomed to—chat rooms and town meeting style forums—we need to share ideas and thoughts and create a sense of comradeship

- APD needs to be the facilitator for a closer working relationship with the YMCA of the USA; the two organizations need to be working closely together 