

A Celebration for CHOICE on its Twentieth Anniversary

On June 6, 2007 a wonderful event took place at the University of Indianapolis. A hundred friends gathered from around the state to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the CHOICE home care program.

The Community and Home Options to Institutional Care for the Elderly and Disabled Act was passed by the Indiana General Assembly in 1987 and signed by Governor Robert Orr. That outcome was the direct result of two years of unselfish and public minded work by a remarkable collection of citizens, association leaders and legislators.

Many of those original advocates for CHOICE were at the June 6th celebration. Most notable was John Thomas, who was the author of the law as a member of the House of Representatives. Although John has been long retired from elected politics he flew in from Arizona specifically for the celebration.

With great elegance and kindness he recognized people for the crucial roles they played in developing, advocating and passing the CHOICE act. He honored those leaders of the home care movement who are no longer with us: Hubert Clodfelter, Jim Jontz, Ted Craig, William Fitz, Muriel Lee, and Frank McCalister. He recognized others who could not attend such as Vaneta Becker, Pat Bauer, Jeff Espich, Bill Crawford, Ruth Sears, John Render, John Dickerson, Dale Harris, Geneva Shedd, Bob Hornyak, and Don Blinzinger.

John Thomas noted the continuing critical importance of the CHOICE program to Indiana's most vulnerable citizens and their families. Most of all, he gave a message of thanks and goodwill. He made his moment a personal gift for everyone.

The presenters also included Paul Severance, the "retired warrior" of United Senior Action who was a driving force in the CHOICE movement, and Scott Severns, who embodied the creativity that was reflected in the original statute. Their *street theatre* carried the audience through the origins of the program.

Nancy Griffin of AARP, Elmer Blankenship of the IARA, Michelle Niemier of USA, and Duane Etienne of CICOA, all exceptional leaders for many years on a wide array of social justice issues, took people through the CHOICE program's evolution. Joining them in presenting this journey was Greg Server, the former state senator, who authored and passed more HCBS reform legislation than anyone in the history of the state, and Ralph Ayres of the IRTA, who was also among the team of legislators responsible for the

passage of CHOICE. The program's overall master of ceremonies was John Cardwell, the original and continuing chair of the Indiana Home Care Task Force.

Many current members of the General Assembly joined the celebration. From the House of Representatives Larry Buell (R-Indpls.), John Day (D-Indpls.), Phil Hinkle (R-Indpls.), Win Moses (D-Ft. Wayne), David Orentlichter (D-Indpls.), Amos Thomas (R-Brazil), Cleo Duncan (R-Greenburg) and Peggy Welch (D-Bloomington) described the importance of CHOICE to their constituents, communities and the state. These legislators made it clear CHOICE continues to have their unyielding support because it produces great health care outcomes at a low cost to the public while treating people with fairness and dignity.

A crowning moment was the back to back presentations of Senators Richard Young (D-Milltown) and Robert Meeks (R-LaGrange). Richard Young is the leader of the Senate Democrat caucus and Robert Meeks chairs the all important Appropriations Committee. They told the audience how they worked across party lines with Senator Vaneta Becker (R-Evansville), House Speaker Pat Bauer (D-South Bend), and representatives of the Task Force to convince budget conferees to place language in the new state budget law that would continue Indiana's commitment to CHOICE and to the growth of HCBS Medicaid waivers.

In their shared civics lesson with the audience, Meeks and Young told a story of courageous legislators who were willing to hear and engage informed citizens from throughout the state. Their presentation was a powerful confirmation of the value of the citizen education support services provided by The Generations Project for the member organizations of the Indiana Home Care Task Force.

Throughout the course of the celebration at the Schwitzer Center on the University of Indianapolis campus a giant replica of the original CHOICE act circulated among the audience for their signatures. Like the nation's Declaration of Independence in 1776, the signed CHOICE act of 1987 now serves as a declaration of freedom and humanity for senior citizens and persons with disabilities in Indiana.

The celebration was also a success because of the commitment of its sponsors. Major supporters included AARP Indiana, Centene Corporation, and the University of Indianapolis. Dr. Ellen Miller of the university's Center for Aging and Community was a wonderful problem solver as the event was being planned. The Nina Mason Pulliam Trust in Indianapolis and the Retirement Research Foundation in Chicago also contributed substantially to the event's success as major underwriters of The Generations Project.

(An attached letter to accompany the above article follows below.)



A Letter Regarding the CHOICE Celebration

August 10, 2007

Dear Friends,

The twentieth anniversary CHOICE celebration of June 6th at the University of Indianapolis was an extraordinary gathering for many reasons.

The celebration allowed people to give John Thomas long overdue thanks for his central role in the passage of the act two decades ago. The event also allowed John to thank friends, colleagues, and the people throughout Indiana who have supported home and community based services for so many years.

At the celebration we were privileged to witness the civics lesson presented by Senators Bob Meeks and Richard Young, and their House colleagues, regarding the value of citizen participation in public affairs.

Most importantly, the gathering allowed the persons who are on the front lines of home and community based care every day to be recognized for what they do. 24/7 they demonstrate the true benefits of the services provided through CHOICE and Medicaid waivers. They do it as creative and frugal users of publicly funded care, as exceptional family caregivers, and as dedicated and innovative LTC professionals.

From these fellow citizens we have learned much over the last twenty years, and we intend to continue to share that learning with others. Because of what these citizens do everyday, policy makers, our financial backers, and many others have discovered the miracles of home care and community based services. We are still learning, and hope the coming twenty years will continue the growth of this remarkable story.

Sincerely yours,

John Cardwell, Director
The Generations Project