

Alumni



Chatter

April 2015

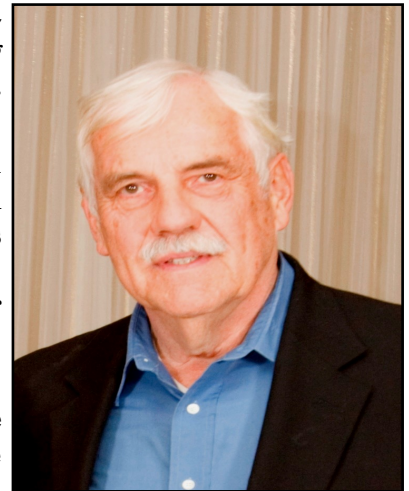
SPECIAL EDITION

A TRIBUTE TO RICH BRANDON

Rich Brandon passed away on February 21, 2015. On March 28th a memorial service was held. Jim Kartheiser gave the welcoming address to those assembled at the Lake Street Church. The following is an excerpt from his address.

Richard was taken from us all too suddenly, having been diagnosed with a brain tumor and cancer in September of last year. Having visited Rich after the surgery and having him stop by the Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club on Thanksgiving, I was hopeful he was going to win his battle. To many of us he was thought of as "Paul Bunyan" or an "Energizer Bunny" full of energy and desire to "make things happen"! Unfortunately, Rich is now on another path!

Richard was born in Chicago on October 13, 1935. He attended Lane Tech High School where he played football. Rich met Maryann at the Logan Square Boys Club, where he was the "Program Director" and Maryann ran the library. He attended college at George Williams University and majored in "Group Work & Recreation". Richard and Maryann were married in 1955 and shared 59 years. Together they had a love of children and young adults.



I joined the NBC in 1960, at the age of 7, and soon met Richard Brandon who had been recently selected by Dick Valentine and Robert Buehler to be NBC's new Program Director. After a few years of being a member I was invited to be a "Leader", which was the junior staff, who kept score, officiated games, and supervised activities and trips. I was hooked on the NBC and Rich Brandon's mentorship style, which also included being welcomed by the Brandon Family.

Soon thereafter Maryann and Richard bought a home in the Ravenswood Manor Community on Richmond St. and began their family, which would include 5 children, 14 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren and 14 foster children! In order to support a growing family and new home, Rich always had a second job, be it a Pinkerton guard, a night watchman, owner of a Re-Sell It Shop, or performing maintenance jobs, where the NBC van came in handy. Not to be undone, Maryann was very active in the Brownies and Girls Scouts. In the early years she initiated her in-home children's day care service, which grew quickly with word of mouth recommendations! On that note, Maryann just recently retired after taking care of 312 "little people" in her home.

Rich became a key component of the NBC Staff at a most important time in the organization's growth. With the explosive growth of the new children in the community and a new clubhouse, Richard brought energy and talents to grow the NBC's sports programs and, with help from Maryann, developed many new special activities and events to round out its programming. NBC's membership swelled to nearly 700 boys, and provided some of the best Youth Programming in the City of Chicago.

Continued on Page 2...



In 1977, Richard was named the "NBC Executive Director", a fitting, most deserved promotion. Rich implemented his "Can Do / Can Happen" attitude to mobilize new NBC committees and fundraising. The five day traditional Carnival was expanded to a "Family Festival" adding music, more booths & games, and afternoon day camp matinees. Rich helped develop the NBC Haunted House. As he was helping in its daily operation, Maryann would be seen selling treats in the game room! What a team!! Last summer's Family Fest was visited by Rich and Maryann. They were always interested in knowing how things were going. I was fortunate to report to them that it was a "record year".

Rich always led by example, even in small tasks like doing the staff schedule, compiling articles for the weekly Monkeyshine newsletter, or creating hand made signs. While he liked to lead, he always listened to the members of his committees to build a consensus. In fact, it was difficult to say "NO" to Rich. In the mid 1990's he recruited me to the Board of Directors, and a few years later to the Family Fest Committee. He believed in the concept of "pay back" and many of the NBC's Leader group and staff would return and become big supporters of the Neighborhood Boys Club, which is now the Neighborhood Boys and Girls Club.

Richard was always searching for the ideal faith based religion. He was born a Catholic, baptized a Lutheran (to marry Maryann), and soon thereafter discovered the Unitarian Faith. By chance, ducking a snowstorm, Rich and Maryann visited the 2nd Unitarian Church on West Barry St. in Chicago. What they found was a congregation that had very limited families and a church building in great need of repair. As pigeons flew around the church, Rich and Maryann found a "need" and a spiritual "path". They joined in with weekend pot-lucks and worked hard on the building and grounds maintenance. This grassroots group developed a new and larger congregation.

In 1996, Richard retired from the NBC after 36 years of exemplary service to the organization and community. For Rich this meant more free time to pursue his aspirations and other goals. Richard had always seen the value of meditation and furthered his interest in Buddhism. He joined the "The American Buddhist Association" in Uptown. He took classes from famous religious leaders in France and the U.S. As you might expect, Rich followed his "path" and was soon the President of the Buddhist Association. He described himself as a "Unitarian Buddhist" and continued to help develop a distinctly American brand of Buddhism.

In the late 1990's, Rich embarked on his plans to develop a nonsectarian Buddhist retreat center, located 2 hours north of Chicago on a converted farm in Plymouth, Wisconsin. Rich always loved the outdoors, so this was perfect. The amazing feat was that Rich, who was always a true recycler, planned to raise the \$30,000 down payment by seeking his friends' support to collect cans to recycle. Through the help and devotion of many friends, "The Bright Dawn Home Spread" was dedicated on June 8th, 2002. Richard would spend considerable time from May thru October leading retreats and spiritual treks, while transforming the farm buildings. During the retreat center's off season, Rich continued to learn and teach Buddhism.

Rather than dwell on the unknown of why Rich was taken while still doing so much good, I want to be thankful for being his friend and of the thousands who truly benefited from his mentoring, teaching, and example. I will miss seeing him drive through the neighborhood in his "Signature Van" and hear the shouts from NBC members; "Hi Rich, Remember Me?"

Bill Abplanalp shared NBGC memories at the service...



R...C...B... Bill Abplanalp declared in a booming voice to imitate Rich Brandon, as he began his eulogy. While Bill had talking notes, most of his words came from the heart. As was true for a generation of boys in the neighborhood, Bill met Rich as a seven year old, marveling at this tall, upright and proud man. Rich would learn to pronounce each member's name correctly and then would not forget for decades.

Bill remembered Rich as a visionary, creative, free thinker and always open to new ideas. There were many new activities formed under Rich, including Paul Bunyan (log dragging, rolling, toppling, sawing and the blue ox hunt), a bowling league, the Wheelman's (bicycle) Club, a joggers club, team overnights, Columbus Day Ice Cubes (ship sailing), Washington's Birthday Pie Eating Contests, Lincoln's Birthday activities, smell-a-vision, Haunted Houses, Bears Bashes, Mardi Gras Costume Parades at the Family Fest, Flicker Ball, the 12' Leather Ball, "capture the flag", pumpkin carving contests, archery & B-B Gun classes, gymnastics, karate & judo classes, a Leaders floor hockey league, the Texas Mongoose and snipe hunting. Knowing Rich meant knowing his family, including the many pets: dogs, cats, fish, turtles, hamsters, rabbits, hermit crabs, white mice, snakes, a raccoon and, of course Pinocchio the monkey. Bill admitted, sharing Rich Brandon memories could go on and on, and was sure stories would be told for a long time.



Bill spoke of NBGC losing a legend, how proud and privileged he was to have known him for over 50 years. Bill shared what was in all of our hearts; Rich has been an inspiration, a friend and a mentor to thousands of youth throughout the decades at NBGC. He touched so many lives in such a positive and gentle manner. He had an optimistic attitude on life and shared his enthusiasm with everybody he met. A very religious man, Rich was encouraging, upbeat, confident, decisive, calming, helpful, soothing, supportive, comforting, uplifting, reassuring, cheerful, poised, convincing and inspiring.

In closing, Bill said, "If a man's greatest accomplishment is to influence the lives of others, then Rich surely was a GREAT MAN. The NBGC motto is "For Better Men and Women"...Rich was the best of them all."



Founded By Robert Buehler and Richard Valentin in 1931 for Carl Buehler

Growing up with Richard Brandon as your dad. Wow!

The following was shared by Melody Blackburn, one of Richard's daughters: When people learned that he was my dad they were in awe. "Really, Rich is your dad?!" They would say, "I went to the club as a kid" and they always had something good to say about him. I was proud that he had a positive impact on so many. Everyone loved and respected my dad.

The NBGC was always a big part of our family life. Dad worked many hours at the club. As a child I remember him coming home for dinner at 6:00 every day. He would eat, take a nap then head back to the club to work more. He was dedicated to what the club stood for. Creating better Men and Women and to have lots of fun too! He taught important life lessons through his actions. He respected everyone and enjoyed learning and working as a team with others. He was positive, easy going, kind hearted, friendly to all and a super hard worker. Even after retirement, he visited and would lend a helping hand.

During the carnival he dedicated even more of himself. In the old days Dad made all the signs for the carnival. His beautiful handwriting was his special trademark. I have very fond memories of working setup and cleanup with him. If you were his kid, you were there helping. We restocked the booths with prizes, loaded beer bins, picked up trash and swept. We also played hooligan and other games and spun the tilt-a-whirl for each other while we worked. He had many amazing people that were always there for him and the club year after year. It was a big family pulling together and working together. One of Dad's great joys in life was teamwork!

Other great memories I have of the club were the cheerleader toboggan outings. Sledding, snow, hot cocoa and the big fire pit were great. The yearly family picnics were always a big gathering with good family fun and good food. I can still see my dad leading the games like shoe scrabble, three legged race, sack races, and softball games.

After Dad's surgery, I came to visit often and took him to radiation treatments. The treatment center was downtown. He enjoyed these outings in the city that he loved. We had some great talks sitting by the lake watching the northern geese in the snow. On one of these days we stopped by the NBGC for a visit. Staff members Bonnie, Billy, and Tom were there and he shared some stories and laughs with them. He gave me a tour of the club opening the doors to every room. He showed me the new gym and the hall of fame. It was close to the Thanksgiving games, so we looked at the old posters of pictures. That is so great that the club still has these posters. It was obvious that he was very proud and happy with the work being done. It is still a place that is creating better Men and Women. NBGC was family to him. Thank you to everyone that shared and worked with him.



Rich supported the NBGC leaders from all generations

Memorial Donations in the Stewardship of:

Bright Dawn Home Spread
4524 N. Richmond St.
Chicago, IL 60624
www.awakenedone.org

Or

Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club
2501 W. Irving Park Road
Chicago, IL 60618
www.nbgc.org