

# RD OF DIRECTORS

## JOHN O'BRIEN BOBBY ROWAN



**J**ohn O'Brien was the assistant superintendent at the Georgia Mental Health Institute when he met Patricia Powell. Trisha worked at the Association for Retarded Citizens on



**W**hen Bobby Rowan served on the original Board of Directors, it was only a few short years after his service in the state Senate. "Most of my legislative activity involved special education

**"The real issue is whether you'll be with somebody with a disability.."**

**"Patricia and Joe . . . parted the way, and so they influenced me a great deal."**

Project Rescue at the time. "John came over and we met and got to know each other," Trisha said. "Later, when we got the federal contract for the Georgia Advocacy Office, John was hired as a consultant and then joined the Board."

John is well known throughout the world for his teaching and writing. The following quotes are taken from a 1978 presentation in which he discussed the start of the Georgia Advocacy Office.

"Awhile ago, a great number of people all around the state joined in the process of trying to think through what this [protection and advocacy] mandate might in fact mean. We wondered, 'What could be done with this opportunity?'"

"There was no coherent theory of advocacy, so one of our first acts was to go to the only person in the world that we thought could figure that out for us and ask him to do so. Wolf's book [[A Balanced Multi-Component Advocacy/Protection Schema](#)] was commissioned by us. Before that, there wasn't anything."

"We focused our efforts on individuals and their social networks. The problem [for individuals with disabilities] has to do with deviancy-making and segregation. The real issue is whether you'll be with somebody with a disability, not [whether you'll provide a service]."

and funded programs," he said. "I was asked to be on the Board, and, of course it's something that I was glad to do." Bobby is also a member of the present Board of Directors.

An important issue for Bobby in the early years of GAO was the schools' resistance to providing an education to students with disabilities. "Believe it or not, even in '77 there was a resistance to providing [education]. But everybody can learn, everybody has a right to learn, and nobody deserves to be discriminated against."

Bobby credits Trisha, Joe and Piper Powell as being his role models. "Obviously, Patricia [influenced me] and her husband, who was a great friend of mine. And their daughter Piper is just a great addition to my life as somebody to know and watch progress. Patricia and Joe, or BJ as I called him, were really on the cutting edge of courageously doing something. They parted the way, and so they influenced me a great deal."

"Patricia ran a happy office. She was very tenacious, and the staff was very tenacious and courageous. But it was happy. People laughed and were pleasant and had fun. They were real friends. It showed it was the kind of office that made people - I'm talking about the real inner circle of people - it made people really want to work with Patricia and work with the Advocacy Office."

Vision, founders, teachers and leaders



to be celebrated on Friday, November 22, 2002 at the DeKalb County Courthouse

## The GAO Advocate

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### The Georgia Advocacy Office

100 Crescent Centre Parkway, Suite 520  
Tucker, GA 30084  
404•885•1234 voice/tdd  
1•800•537•2329  
770•414•2948 fax  
<http://www.thegao.org>  
info@thegao.org  
Editor: Olwyn DeMarco

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# The GAO Advocate

The Georgia Advocacy Office . . . securing protection and advocacy for individuals with disabilities or mental illness throughout the state. . . celebrating our 25th anniversary

## Our 25th Anniversary Issue

A Look Back at Our Beginnings Through the Eyes of the Founders

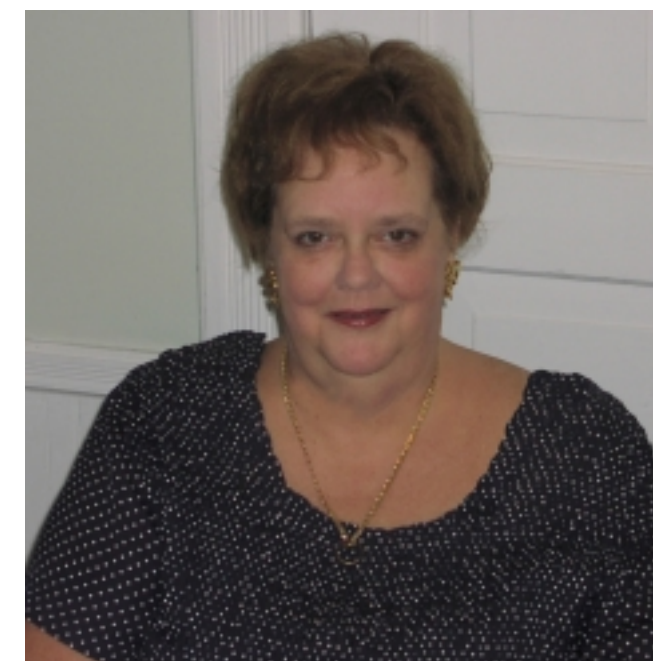
by Olwyn DeMarco

## PATRICIA POWELL

**I**f you ask any of the founders of the Georgia Advocacy Office who they looked up to 25 years ago, who influenced them, who their teachers were, they will all include the same individual in their response: Patricia Powell.

Trisha would be the last person to say that her role as founder and first Executive Director was particularly important.

"Wolf [Wolfensberger] said, 'It's long after we're gone - 100 years - when we know our effect,'" said Trisha. She prefers we remember Joe Powell, her husband and father of their daughter, Piper. "Joe was so much a



part of the beginning," she said. Joe recently passed away. In the planning stages, Trisha and Joe and all the founders had two main hopes. "We wanted to offer a

chance for Georgia to have the wonderful opportunity to know people with great gifts who were disabled. We also hoped it would be transforming for the people of Georgia."

When asked what interested her about the GAO, Trisha said, "Getting to know people like Wolf Wolfensberger, Will Campbell, John Lewis - brilliant, exciting, moral leaders. It's a gift that is priceless."

**Trisha would be the last person to say that her role as founder and first Executive Director was particularly important. "Wolf [Wolfensberger] said, 'It's long after we're gone - 100 years - when we know our effect,'" said Trisha.**

Inside: Remembrances of Tom Kohler, Laughlin McDonald, Shirley Miller, Elizabeth O'Berry, John O'Brien, Bobby Rowan, David Truran, Patrick Wiseman, and Wolf Wolfensberger.

# THE ORIGINAL BOA

## LAUGHLIN McDONALD SHIRLEY MILLER



**L**Laughlin McDonald, Director of the Southern Regional Office of the American Civil Liberties Union, was invited by Patricia Powell to serve on the GAO's first Board of Directors in 1977.



**T**he Board of Directors was fortunate to have Shirley Miller as its first president. While serving on the Board, she was appointed to the President's Committee on Mental Retardation

**"Everybody was very excited about the new project and trying to determine what its goals should be and how its efforts should be directed. There was a sense of opportunity and mission and purpose."**

"Everybody was very excited about the new project and trying to determine what its goals should be and how its efforts should be directed. There was a sense of opportunity and mission and purpose," Laughlin said.

"The ACLU has similar concerns, so it was a good fit for me," he added. "I think people ought to be free, ought to be equal, people should have equal opportunities."

Laughlin recalls an exchange he had with Trisha Powell in which they discussed how the newly established office should look. "She did not want it to look like some forbidding office arrangement where people hid behind these desks. She liked the notion of an open sort of table because that would suggest the openness that she hoped would be characteristic of GAO," he said. For 19 years, until her last day at the Georgia Advocacy Office, Trisha's desk was a table with a glass top.

"That's an interesting insight into what people wanted the organization to be," Laughlin said.

**"At any time if there was an obstacle of any kind, we just pushed on, not letting anything delay what we were collectively determined to put into play."**

by President Carter. "I learned a lot on that committee as we traveled and worked around the country, and I brought some of what I saw in other places home with me," she said. "I learned enough to maybe understand what Laughlin McDonald was telling us with his legal expertise as the Board worked to put together the organization for the [Georgia] Advocacy Office."

"I remember very, very fondly, of course, Patricia Powell and her contributions and her good steady hand and good common sense. I think that as I look back on it that we Board people - Bobby Rowan and John and Laughlin - there was never any doubt that it was going to happen. At any time if there was an obstacle of any kind, we just pushed on, not letting anything delay what we were collectively determined to put into play."

"I'm very, very proud of [the GAO]. I've been very happy through the years as I've followed the work, the way that is has operated and the service that it's provided. I've been very, very pleased to have had a small role in the beginning."

## SOME EARLY CONTRIBUTORS

### TOM KOHLER



From the very beginning I could feel that I would be unlearning what I had been taught in social services and in lots of my life. I began learning a whole new way of thinking," said Tom Kohler of the beginnings of the Georgia Advocacy Office.

"People at the GAO seemed to know that fundamental change in the patterns of people's lives and in the public policy that maintains segregation would be a tough battle. It has proven to be that."

"The architecture of the organization was so carefully designed. How often do you get to work somewhere where the value base is clear, explicit, and being consciously deepened and sharpened within the organization and within you? GAO was that place."

In 1978, Tom was hired to be the coordinator of the brand new Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy program. He is still the coordinator. "We figured out how to do citizen advocacy during the first ten years, but not much quicker than that. The experience of meeting individual people and learning how to listen to and hear their true story is at the heart of this work. Doing it will change your heart."

"One of the big a-ha's for me has been the very profound and deeply personal ways that citizen advocates acknowledge a strong and important force in their lives: the person with whom they're matched."

"It has proven to be a very provocative 25 year personal journey," he said. •

### ELIZABETH O'BERRY

Elizabeth O'Berry says one of the more naïve things she has said in her life was in response to a question from Patricia Powell in 1976. "Trisha called up and asked if I wanted to help her write a plan for protection and advocacy for people. I said, 'Why not?'"

Like Trisha, Elizabeth plays down her role in GAO's beginnings. She said that her role was "supporting, being enthusiastic, and following the plan."

"I remember getting disavowed of everything I had learned up until then, either by Wolf, Trisha, John O'Brien or John McKnight," said Elizabeth. "I was most interested in citizen advocacy. Seeing people and hearing about people coming to love each other was pretty great."

Elizabeth feels she has learned something from everyone she has taken the time to get to know. "But I have to say the children who lived in the Stacy Smith Home taught us just about everything we needed to know before we even got started. They gave us the real important questions," she shared.

"Things have changed tremendously [in 25 years]. But I think what works is the same, and we really did learn it when we were young. Tom Kohler says it very simply, 'Everyone matters.'" •

### DAVID TRURAN



"I was aware of the formative stages of the Georgia Advocacy Office in 1976 and 1977," said David Truran. "At the time, I was working in the community system in DeKalb County and had many wonderful discussions with GAO state staff (Trisha Powell and Roberta Malavenda, the first state citizen advocacy coordinator) regarding implementation of community supports in the Atlanta area."

"There was an admirable energy and solidarity between all of the people working to make life better for people with disabilities on all levels: personal, local, governmental, and societal. Wolf Wolfensberger's Advocacy/Protection Schema

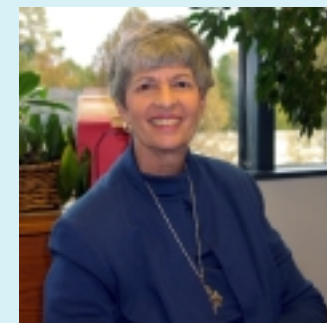
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## THE VISION OF THE GEORGIA ADVOCACY OFFICE

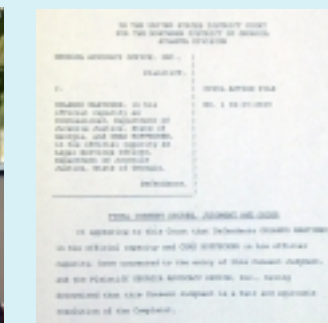
A Georgia where all people have value, visibility and voice; where even the most difficult and long-lasting challenges are addressed by ordinary citizens acting voluntarily on behalf of each other; and where the perception of disability is replaced by the recognition of ability.

*This vision continues to direct the daily work of the Georgia Advocacy Office staff and its subcontractors, eight citizen advocacy programs around the state.*

### A Win for Kids: GAO Suit Results in Consent Decree, Upholding Access



Joyce Ringer, Director of the Georgia Advocacy Office



The Final Consent Decree, Judgment and Order

It was my pleasure today, November 5, 2002, to sign a Consent Order representing the Georgia Advocacy Office, along with representatives of Georgia's Department of Juvenile Justice. The Consent Order was presented to Judge Forrester at the U.S. District Court.

The agreement is a fine one for Georgia's youngsters with disabilities or mental illness in DJJ custody. It provides for the active monitoring of conditions in those facilities by advocates of the GAO.

We would not have been able to reach this agreement without the able and consistent legal representation of Gregory M. Taube of Nelson, Mullins, Riley and Scarborough. Our heartfelt thanks to him and members of his staff, and to Angela Lavori, GAO contractor, and Stephanie McKay, GAO staff. Their efforts have helped make it possible for children who are at risk of abuse and neglect to have access to advocacy. •

**"We work for the day when the 'professional advocate' is unnecessary and all Georgians view themselves as protectors and advocates."** Joyce Ringer

### An E-mail Sent from a Macon Citizen Advocate to the Citizen Advocacy Coordinator



Ned Dominick

From: Ned Dominick, Macon, GA

To: Connie Flair

Date: 2002/10/29 Tue PM 6:15

Subject: Brother Lewis!

Edward Lewis\*, what a wonder you are! Connie Flair introduced me to young Edward Lewis, aged 23, last year about this time. I had been asking God to get me back into some action for some time, but I had no idea that He would use this young guy to do it.

Connie introduced me to Citizen Advocacy last fall hoping that I would hook up as a classic advocate. Being the slippery sort that I am, and having no interest in folks who have issues such as those requiring advocates, I told her that I would only be of use as a "crisis advocate" for a short term situation. This slowed Connie Flair not one bit, and almost immediately she had the "crisis" needing the advocate! She then introduced me to Edward Lewis, who was in intensive care following neglect in his group home. Not only did he nearly die due to neglect at the group home, the Medical Center was doing its best to finish him off there. As his father was getting worn out, I entered the picture to help defend Edward.

At that time, my relationship with Edward was measured by the standard of achieving eye contact with him as he was on a ventilator and also had no capacity for speech, even when healthy. As the weeks turned to months in ICU, I became committed to Edward. He still rarely made eye contact, but for some reason I found myself willing to "go to the mat" for him.

Edward endured unspeakable pain and discomfort during this period. We found that in order for him to go home he would need unusual levels of care since he now required tube feeding and other scary procedures just to live day to day. This would cost more than his waiver would provide.

So the "crisis advocate" and Edward's wonderful dad attempted to obtain a higher waiver, which was denied. I looked into the politics of the situation and found out that there was a Regional Board that has oversight for this program. To make a long story short, I arranged to become a member of the Board (thank you, God), and strangely enough Edward's waiver was increased and he was able to go home!

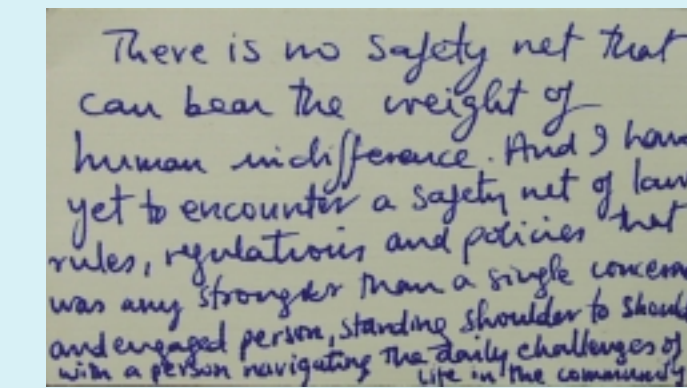
Since that time, I have gotten to know Edward in a much more personal way and have also learned to appreciate undervalued people in a way I never would have imagined. He is a neat and courageous young guy who deserves life.

The long and the short of it is that I have learned that inside that Edward is a living and vibrant personality, and my relationship with him has propelled me into all kinds of new things. I have also seen that God has used this young guy to shake the entire division in the State with more shakin' to follow!

I am so glad that I have met Edward Lewis. Life has been on the fast track ever since! •

\*Name has been changed to honor individual privacy

### In the Words of Clarence J. Sundram



From 1977 until 1997, Clarence Sundram was the director of the NYS Commission on Quality of Care, New York state's protection and advocacy organization.

When Clarence visited with Georgia's citizen advocacy coordinators last year, he wrote the following on the back of his business card (see card above):

**"There is no safety net that can bear the weight of human indifference. And I have yet to encounter a safety net of laws, rules, regulations and policies that was any stronger than a single, concerned and engaged person, standing shoulder to shoulder with a person navigating the daily challenges of life in the community."**

## SOME EARLY CONTRIBUTORS

acy/Protection Schema was our main book and it included a perspective on everything. We knew the obstacles were formidable, but those were gutsy times."

"Early on at the GAO, my work included helping parents who believed that their kids could really make it in typical school settings. My experience before coming to work for the GAO as a citizen advocate really helped me understand the simplicity and power of individual typical community folks acting in concert with their resources. These relationships and networks are the core of real change and the only hope for the present and future - all else must support it." •

### PATRICK WISEMAN



"A couple of things of significance to me happened over the summer [of '78]," said Patrick Wiseman. First, Patrick conducted a study on how local school districts planned to implement IDEA (then

called the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act) and presented his results to a group. "The group included Don Trites, who at the time was the Executive Director of GAO," he said. "I met folks at GAO then, that summer."

"Another significant thing that happened to me in that summer was, John O'Brien did an introduction to PASS (Program Analysis of Service Systems). The notion that you could measure how well people were implementing values seemed to me to be just an interesting thing to think about."

Later, Patrick was hired by Don Trites to be the legal advocacy coordinator at GAO, a position he held for two and half years. While he was on staff, he focused on education issues. He left in 1984 to teach law at Georgia State, a position he still holds.

"I kept in touch with GAO. And I continued to be interested in what they were doing. At one point I said to someone, 'It's about time I was invited to join the

Board of GAO.'" Patrick served on the GAO's Board of Directors from 1986 until 1999, serving as president for much of that time.

Patrick credits John O'Brien and David Truran for influencing his thinking when he was new to advocacy. "They got their hooks in me that first summer!" •

### WOLF WOLFENSBERGER



Wolf Wolfensberger was involved with the GAO from day one. "I knew Wolf from way back. He was hired as a consultant [for GAO]," said Patricia Powell. "He wrote A Balanced Multi-Component

Advocacy/Protection Schema for us. We drew heavily on him."

Elizabeth O'Berry added, "In the late 1960's in Nebraska, Wolf worked to develop community services. He wrote PASS (Program Analysis of Service Systems) to evaluate community services. He invented Citizen Advocacy."

The following is an excerpt on citizen advocacy from A Balanced Multi-Component Advocacy/Protection Schema, written in 1977.

"...if individual citizens do not bind the wounds of the sick, do not give bread to the hungry, do not console the broken-hearted and visit the imprisoned, do not liberate the captives of oppression and do not bury the dead, then nothing will work. If everything has to be bought and people will no longer freely relate to each other, and especially to handicapped persons, one can spend \$30,000 per person per year as they do now at Willowbrook (an infamous New York Institution for the retarded) and the service will still be a snakepit. No amounts of laws, agencies, money and paid staff can replace what Peter Maurin called 'personalism.'"

Dr. Wolfensberger will be among the honored guests at the Georgia Advocacy Office's 25th Anniversary Celebration on November 22, 2002. •