

In celebration of
Gayle A. Hobbs



LINCSM
Local Investment Commission

March 25, 2024, Kauffman Foundation Conference Center

Program

Opening Remarks – Ken Powell

Welcome and Introductions – Clyde McQueen

Video Presentation

Testimonials –

*Robin Gierer
Marge Randle
Terry Ward
Bill Dent*

Statement by Bert Berkley (See page 12)


Read by Brent Schondelmeyer

Thanks and presentation of gifts – Janet Miles-Bartee

Artist's statement – Swede

Closing remarks

Reception



*Photography – Paul Andrews
(For free downloads of event pictures, see page 17)*

Violinist – Dana Mengel (see page 16)

Sculpture Artist – Swede (see page 15)

Video by Bryan Shepard, Joe Robertson



Courage under fire

By Joe Robertson

In the beginning, the directions led to a sparse state office unit in a strip shopping center off of Kansas City's Prospect Avenue.

Visitors opened the door to nothing but a card table and striped-vinyl lawn chairs for furniture.

This was the early 1990s, and this was the scene awaiting many reform-minded public officials and community leaders when they joined the procession of people who were told –

“You need to go see Gayle.”

A social services revolution was brewing, and this simple office was where Gayle A. Hobbs cooked the plans.

“She had a whiteboard,” remembers Robin Gierer, then a senior executive in the Missouri Department of Social Services. It was scribbled with “words in circles and bubbles connected by lines, going everywhere.”

Services. It was scribbled with “words in circles and bubbles connected by lines, going everywhere.”

All Gierer knew was that he'd been sent by then-Missouri Department of Social Services Director Gary Stangler to find Hobbs so he could learn about this nascent "Local Investment Commission" concept bubbling in Kansas City.

"LINC," they were calling it.

Hobbs, in her whiteboard work, was shaping the LINC idea about building localized, citizen-driven government resources, Gierer said.

"And honestly, I didn't know if this stuff was going to work or not."

When Marge Randle, then a supervisor in the state's Family Support Division, made her first visit to see Hobbs, Randle remembers asking: Just what is LINC, anyway? "And Gayle started laughing," Randle said. "I don't think Gayle even knew where this was going."

Hobbs was running with the brainchild of Kansas City businessman and civic giant Bert Berkley, LINC's founder.

Berkley's idea – born from his work on a Stangler-created business leader roundtable – proposed that citizen leadership at the grassroots should drive the allocation of state social service resources to meet the unique needs of their communities.



It's stunning now, Berkley said, to know the diverse and challenging course that LINC would travel over the next 30 years, and all the lives that would be changed, even saved.

People would come from across the nation and foreign countries to "see Gayle" and witness the Caring Communities movement that LINC and many community partners put into motion – with visitors as prominent as President Bill Clinton.

A culture, forged in neighborhoods and marked by creativity and grit, within a decade would see LINC deploying a workforce in the hundreds, radiating from a vibrant network of community schools.

"Not in my wildest dreams," Berkley said, did he see all that coming.

But what Berkley knew at the beginning, before he met Hobbs, was that the revolutionary road he imagined for LINC would require leadership with courage and a warm heart.

He had to find that first staff member, the right executive director.

‘Trust me’

Young Gayle Hobbs hadn’t even finished the second grade when her mother saw the future.

A boy named Roy Lee, one of Hobbs’ classmates, apparently needed shoes. And young Gayle – the family story goes – delivered the news of Roy’s plight to her parents in their Northwest Missouri home with such earnestness and urgency that the mother knew her daughter would make a life of helping people.

“I kept, literally, harassing my parents to buy Roy Lee shoes,” Hobbs said.

Soon, adventure in service was defining her life.

She was the high school student who, when competing in a United Nations program, wrote up a plan to end world hunger.

She was the graduating senior who, for her gift, asked her parents to loan her the car so she and a friend could take a road trip retracing the steps of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders through Selma, Birmingham and Montgomery.

She was the trailblazer who began her career on behalf of youth, working in a government services system – the Missouri Division of Youth Services – that was in need of an overhaul.

Phyllis Becker, who would later rise to director of DYS, saw it coming.

Becker was a disillusioned frontline DYS worker in the early 1980s when Hobbs – rising into the role of a regional supervisor – came sweeping in for a regular staff meeting at a Kansas City group home.

Becker was on the brink of quitting that day, frustrated and disillusioned with a system too focused on managing and punishing youth.

“She must have seen something in my eyes,” Becker said.

Because Hobbs, when she was done speaking to the group, paused on her way out to catch a meaningful moment face-to-face with Becker.

“It will get better,” Hobbs said. “Trust me.”

It turned out that Hobbs was pushing the department in new directions, “shaking everything up,” Becker said. She saw Hobbs in a relentless mission to help remake DYS, “changing the narrative about how we see these kids and families.”



This was what the new DYS believed:

The children in their care were kids caught in circumstances. They were not “thugs” and “delinquents,” Becker said. Going forward, their group homes would be furnished with actual couches and chairs, not hard plastic bolted to the floor. The youths’ parents would be treated as partners – experts in the lives of their children. DYS would tap the resources of their community.

Stangler saw what was happening too.

As the director of the Department of Social Services, Stangler seized on the rapid changes happening in DYS as a model for the rest of the state’s services.

“I called them my Marines,” Stangler said. “They were small and innovative and doing new things.”

Could Hobbs be just what Berkley was looking for to run with LINC?

Stangler told Berkley she looked like a reformer – with state experience, politically savvy.

Berkley had a litmus test ready when he met Hobbs.

LINC’s mission would require a skilled and bold staff. Reshaping public services and getting quick results would demand agility and toughness and it had to start at the top.

How would you fire someone? Berkley asked.

Others who he'd considered for the job, when asked that question, hemmed and hawed, Berkley said. They cautioned that it was difficult to fire people in public service.

But not Hobbs. Berkley recalls that she said, "You build a case and get rid of 'em."

"If you want the job," Berkley said, "it's yours."

Holding the heat

6 a.m. Saturday morning – generally not a time people choose to be working.

This was the early 1990s and Jim Nunnelly, a public health administrator by trade and a community organizer in Kansas City's mostly Black east side, was rising early to join the regular sounding-board sessions that Hobbs was holding in the lobby of the PennTower building.

The early weekend hour provided a time when everyone involved could be available, Nunnelly recalled.



It felt a bit like safe cover, too.

That's because leaders in the mostly minority communities that LINC aimed to serve didn't know yet what to make of what many suspected was just another non-profit coming with another prescription for perceived neighborhood ills, Nunnelly said.

But Nunnelly could see that Hobbs and the LINC Commissioners that Berkley was putting together wanted LINC's work to rise with, and from, the community. They wanted Nunnelly's voice, and he was willing to share it.

"I was criticized at first," Nunnelly said. "Or at least I was talked about."

These were tricky times, said SuEllen Fried, one of the original LINC Commissioners, recounting those days.

Fried remembers being at a community gathering in a Kansas City school as Hobbs was presenting some of the early ideas for anchoring services in the neighborhood schools, and it was a rough gathering.

“The idea was genius,” Fried said. But the audience was rejecting it. However, it was in those honest public meetings that LINC sharpened its mission to be *in* the community and *listening*.

“Gayle said we need to give voice to the voiceless,” Fried said. And Hobbs was capable of standing in the breach, absorbing the wants and needs coming at LINC, and taking action.

“Most executive directors just want to take on things they can handle,” Fried said. “They don’t want so many pieces. But Gayle wasn’t like that.”

Nunnally saw it too, in those early Saturday morning meetings and in the community.

“LINC was doing the work others didn’t want to do or couldn’t do,” he said. “Gayle was the kind of person who could hold the heat.”

Hello Mr. President

It was one of those eye-rubbing, head-shaking, hard-to-believe moments.

But it was true, Clyde McQueen said. The president of the United States was sitting right there at the work table in McQueen’s Full Employment Council office in Kansas City. Bill Clinton – asking questions, drilling into details.

“The President, in your place, for two hours, not scripted at all.”

In 1994, LINC, in one of its early ventures, had teamed up with McQueen’s FEC and Marge Randle’s DSS division to revolutionize the way Kansas City was helping individuals on welfare successfully attain education and employment.



This Kansas City approach, adapting rapidly through trial and error, was changing the landscape for welfare – incentivizing employers to hire men and women from welfare who were being trained for work – not just with basic skills, but soft skills too, with case management support to help new workers start careers that stick.

By 1996, President Clinton had made welfare reform a major platform and he was looking for models of success. He came to Kansas City to see it for himself.

“These people in Kansas City know what they are doing,” the president said. “It’s miraculous what they are doing.”

LINC and the FEC were a good match, McQueen said. Both were doing work in the community that formerly had been confined to divisions of government, learning from each other.

“To be flexible, we could challenge things that don’t work much quicker,” he said.

But that didn’t mean it was any easier.

He said it to himself and he said it to Hobbs whenever meetings got tough: “You’ve got to stay at the table. When it gets the toughest, that’s when you don’t run.”

“That’s why we’ve been able to move the needle,” McQueen said.

The needles that LINC would move in the years that followed, by their variety, showed its timely ability to take on new, rising issues.

LINC worked to reform the foster care system, brought Medicaid services into schools, built its Caring Communities network, rallied the community in a legal struggle around HCA’s purchase of Health Midwest that brought a settlement in the hundreds of millions of dollars that launched today’s Health Forward Foundation.

The strength of LINC in its growing staff was propelling these missions and more, Fried said.

“Gayle collected an incredible staff of like-minded people, enormous in scope,” she said. “I’d never seen such a hard-working staff. They lived it, breathed it, believed it.”

The results were rewarding “the big leap of faith” that DSS and other state entities took in committing to the LINC idea, said Steve Renne, the deputy director of DSS under Stangler.

Renne was handling DSS’s budget, overseeing this unheard-of shift of historically rigid state funds into flexible streams with community control, through community schools and site councils.

Gayle gave the movement “traction,” Renne said. “Gayle was the missing ingredient, the secret sauce we needed.”

Keeper of the flame

As the 1999-2000 school year was approaching, the Kansas City School District and its community were staring into an abyss of missing services for its children and families.

A long-standing federal desegregation lawsuit had ended and with it so departed the court’s control of public funding.

The district believed it could no longer support before- and after-school programming. And when local leaders and the Mid-America Regional Council surveyed the landscape for someone with the capacity to take on the giant role, they looked to LINC.

LINC had firmly established its place in modeling community schools in Kansas City and Independence, but this

would require amassing a staff of hundreds to serve thousands of children, their families and neighborhoods.

LINC's work in the 90s of bringing health and social services into neighborhood schools had already attracted the attention and collaboration of Marty Blank and the Institute for Education Leadership.

LINC was showing the way, Blank said, modeling for the nation the power of community schools. Kansas City hosted the first national conference of community schools in the mid-1990s, Blank said, because he and others knew Hobbs and her team could pull it off.

"Gayle was a very savvy person," Blank said "She had credibility from the grass roots to the grass tops."

Now, with the entire Kansas City district's before- and after-school programming under its responsibility, the full breadth of community schools was possible.

And Hobbs and LINC's leadership made sure, Gierer said, that size didn't compromise values.

"What Gayle brought LINC over and over was to create the culture of the program in a way that always focused on who we were serving," he said.



The program locked in "the Big Six" core expectations of the program. The values permeated through the staff. Everyone's mission was anchored, Gierer said, like all of LINC's work, in being "very respectful of the people we served."

LINC's reach was inspiring others engaged in the work, said Bill Dent, the executive director of FACT, the Family and Community Trust in Missouri.

FACT's league of 20 community partnerships across the state – including LINC – has grown in a similar mission of blending public and private resources, always trying to cut through the bureaucratic "red tape" to empower neighborhoods, he said.

"Gayle was the exemplar of servant leadership and a mentor to myself and others," Dent said. "She was the keeper of the original flame of caring communities."

Aaron Deacon, now a LINC Commissioner, was a foot soldier in the work of digital communities when he fell in with others in 2012 to overcome Google Fiber's inequitable plan to offer free broadband access to schools and libraries.

He saw at close hand how LINC leapt in with other community forces to get, and even fund, the prerequisite percentage of home-by-home Google registrations to get the free services so Kansas City's neediest schools and

neighborhoods weren't left behind.

Now Deacon is the founder and director of KC Digital Drive, a non-profit working to elevate the opportunities and eliminate digital barriers for everyone in Kansas City.

"I saw in LINC how people can respond to challenges and make things happen," Deacon said. "That LINC's leadership – Gayle, Landon (Rowland), Brent (Schondelmeyer) – could build an organization that could do that was inspiring to me."

"I said, 'We can do this.'"

Flesh and bone

Nunnally asks the question:

What does it really mean to be kind?

He saw the question taking shape all those years ago during those early Saturday morning sessions. And he saw LINC's powerful answer day after day, year after year.

Kind words are hollow, he said, unless you can say, "I'm going to be here for you and you can count on it."

"Gayle" believed all along that "the capacity was in the community" to meet a crisis. "She had the can-do people."

The "beauty of LINC" shone, he said. The kindness of LINC was its dedication to action.

Stangler, in retirement, can look back at a long legacy of ideas he championed and programs he launched in his years of directing state departments.

But in government, the shifting whims and tides of politics wash over it all, year after year.

"Most creations," he said, "are like castles in the sand."

He loved Berkley's idea for LINC and was determined to back it from his high post.

"I had the rhetoric," he said, "but it was Gayle who was the spirit. She put flesh and bones to it."

This is one of those castles that stands, he said. And it is because of more than the ideas.

"It's because of the people."



Remarks by Bert Berkley on the occasion of the retirement of Gayle A. Hobbs, President of LINC



March 25, 2024

It all started with a phone call.

“Mr. Berkley, this is Gary Stangler, I am the head of the Department of Social Services, for the State of Missouri. I would like to come by and see you.” “What do you want to talk about?” “Mr. Berkley, I would really appreciate it if I could explain that when we are together. May I drop by?” “O.K.”

So, Gary Stangler “dropped by” and explained that he was putting together a small group from across the state to take a look at his department to determine how it could be run better. He called it the Business Roundtable.

I was impressed. Any department head of a state department who wanted to be told how to improve his executive ability was a rare

individual and I saw an opportunity to be helpful as well as being able to learn from the experience. I said I would join him.

The Business Roundtable with representation from across the state then started learning about everything the department did. We did not just get lecturer, we went to the site where that particular state responsibility was being carried out. For example, we went to a children’s hospital in St. Louis. I held a 3 ½ pound baby girl in my arms. I met the mother. I learned that help had to be made available to that mother and child and all like them.

I learned that when it came to child abuse, too much time was being spent filling out reports, rather than concentrating on the prevention aspects of protecting the child.

We found some little thing to change for the better at practically every location.

But the question was how could the department be run better? One evening, I attended a civic dinner at which SuEllen Fried was in

attendance. She was the former National Chairman of the Coalition for the Prevention of Child Abuse. Every time I saw her, she would ask how the Department of Social Services was doing and I’d give her the same answer, “O.K., but we’d like to do better.” This time SuEllen said something different.

“One of the things we are thinking about doing with funds for the prevention of child abuse is to allow the people in each community to decide how the money will be spent.” “SuEllen, you may have just opened the doors.”

For the next two weeks, every night I spent 2-4 hours working out the forming of an organization in Kansas City: who might constitute the Board of Directors, what committees would report to the Board, who might be a committee head, what staff would be needed, what skills should the staff member have, what decisions should come to the board, all with the understanding that decisions on the approval of spending money in Kansas City would be made by the Board of Directors.

I regularly go to Des Moines on business. Des Moines is the Capital City of Iowa. I made a date with the head of the Department of Social Services, State of Iowa.

I told him I had a new approach to how a State Department of Social Services might be run and spent time explaining each aspect. The Secretary listened attentively and when I finished, he complimented me on my new idea of having community members made decisions on how money would be spent, then, figuratively, gently patted me on the head and in firm tones said my idea would never work because the decision makers were not trained. It would be possible that not a single person would have an undergraduate or graduate degree in Social Work.

I visited my daughter and her family in Boston a few weeks later. I went through the same procedure with the head of the Department of Social Services, State of Massachusetts. He did not compliment me. He just said firmly it would not work because of lack of master's degrees by those making decisions.

My next move was easy. I called Gary Stangler, head of the Department of Social Services, State of Missouri, and asked him to stop in and see me the next time he was in Kansas City. He had a speaking engagement two days later. When he came in, I said, "Gary, I have something I'd like to try out on you." I then went through every detail. When I finished Gary said, "Good idea, let's try it." I am convinced Gary was the only Social Services Department Head in the 50 states who would have said to try it.

I've been told many times that LINC would never have been formed had it not been for the unique positions in which Gary and I found ourselves.

The next step was understood by Gary and me. We needed an executive director. Gary suggested that we select someone who had experience working in state government, since operating funds, both federal and state, would come to Kansas City through the State Department of Social Services. I agreed.

Gary selected five candidates for me to interview. He made it clear I would have the final decision as to whom would be hired for the job, but if nobody fulfilled my requirements, I need not hire any of the five. There were others who had acceptable qualifications.

A portion of my interview of each individual went something like this: You have a staff person who does not get things done. You have had department heads work with him, your deputy worked with him to no avail and now you have been working with him for two weeks and you are convinced he will not be of value. What do you do? Then each of the first four candidates would say something like, Mr. Berkley, it is obvious we should get rid of him, but it is very difficult to release a state employee." And I would reply, "Oh, yes, I forgot."

The first four interviews were over a period of time as each candidate had to come here from Jefferson City. The fifth candidate worked for the Department of Social Services but was domiciled in Kansas City.

Her name was Gayle Hobbs. We went through the beginning questions and then it came time for the question about the associate who was not doing a satisfactory job. “You have been working with him personally for two weeks, and you are convinced he will not be of value. What do you do?” “I get rid of him.” “That’s interesting, how do you do that?” I build a case, and I get rid of him.” (pause) “Ms. Hobbs, if you want the job, it’s yours.”

That was the beginning of a storied 32-year career by Gayle which allowed LINC to be a model for other LINC’s across the State of Missouri. In addition, how information was gathered and then distributed locally became the method used by the state to accomplish the same objectives for the State of Missouri and the nation.

LINC continued to receive recognition after recognition for the valuable work it does. One of the strengths of Kansas City is that it has a functioning organization, LINC, to help those in need.

The LINC organization has a part- and full-time staff of 580. There are thousands of community volunteers who work year-round. The annual budget is \$42 million.

LINC is one of the reasons Kansas City is a livable city.

The success of the organization is due in large part to Gayle Hobbs and the outstanding associates who made up the staff.

Thank you, Gayle, for your kind of admirable, excellent leadership. It has made a positive difference.

Thank you. Thank you VERY MUCH.

- Bert Berkley, Founder of the Local Investment Commission



The artist and the art Swede (Phillip Hickok): Alchemy Dreams

Glass is the river in which I channel my self-expression. It is my passion and driving force of creativity. The work I create is greatly inspired by nature, space, and states of consciousness. How we view the world and the state of being deeply fascinates me and is therefore reflected continuously throughout my work. Whether it be depression, bliss, dreams, or horror, the different facets of my being seep through my work.

Through the Alchemy Dream series, I explore the clairvoyance and wonder of the dream state. The forms are organic and fluid in order to lend themselves to the time relativity and obscurity of the sleeper's world. In addition to the fluid forms the colors play an important role in creating a world of depth within the vessels. Created by mixing minerals together to create chemical reactions I am intentionalising these reactions in order to produce auras and hues that seep into one another. Layering and twisting throughout the piece these colors provoke the viewer to imagine an interior world within the piece.



Images and text from swedesglass.com

The artist and the art

Dana Mengel: Captivating music



Photograph by Dan White; Text by Brent Schondelmeyer. From Click: Two Decades One Community

Music is everything. The youngest child in a prodigious musical family, Mengel began performing and composing at an early age. An endless parade of piano students instructed by his mother filled his home with music. Formal education was inconsequential. “What would I do with a diploma?” He hears the music in his head, creates it on a computer, but has yet to figure out email. “I love living a simple life because it keeps me close to the music.”

The artist and the art

Paul Andrews Photography

I have been a commercial photographer in Kansas City for over 15 years. My work specializes in creative and environmental portraiture and I derive my creativity from the people I photograph. Everyone has an interesting story to tell and I seek to collaborate with my subjects to help tell theirs.

While my work focuses on creative portraiture, I also shoot commercial advertising as well as editorial and lifestyle photography. I have been a photography educator for several years and I enjoy sharing my enthusiasm for photography with those willing to learn.



Image and text from paulandrewsphotography.com

To download free images from today's event:

Scan the QR code →

or go to:

paulandrewsphotography.zenfolio.com/linc2024



For Gayle: Gifts from the Heart

Landon Rowland, LINC's original Commission Chair and inspirational leader, was photographed by Charles Porter at one of Rowland's last public speeches Oct. 18, 2015.

This is one of Gayle's favorite portraits of Landon.



Sculpture artist Swede's work, *Alchemy Dreams* (see page 14), reflects Gayle's energy in the world.

The work is inscribed on the bottom with Gayle's name, her years in service, and our thanks, "In gratitude from LINC."



For Gayle: Gifts from the Heart



For a stylish send-off, Gayle is receiving top-of-the-line representations of LINC blue.

She'll have a LINC long-sleeve polo, Eddie Bauer vest and zipper fleece jacket, and a Yeti tumbler.

