

## Drop Inn Center inspired life of service

Written by

Jessica Brown  
jlbrown@enquirer.com

4:00 PM, Jul. 17, 2011|

**SPRINGDALE** - Steve Elliott traces the beginning of his long, successful career as a service learning teacher and consultant to a single moment in an Over-the-Rhine homeless shelter.

It was the mid-1980s. Elliott, a Finneytown High School teacher, and his colleagues went to observe the Drop Inn Center. They'd been taking a service learning course at University of Cincinnati. Visiting the center was part of their homework.

"I didn't know the Drop Inn Center," Elliott said. "I knocked on the door and it opens up and there were people sleeping in the hall and people sleeping on the benches. We walked in about 10 feet and a gentleman who was sleeping on the floor with a long ponytail said, 'Who are you?'"

Elliott told the stranger that they were there to observe.

"He said, 'What do you think this is, a museum?'" Elliott said. "He said, 'I think you need to leave.'"

The moment shook Elliott. He realized how

little contact he'd actually had with people like this man. It was outside of his comfort zone.

"I needed that experience," he said. "I needed to broaden my horizons about human beings who I normally wouldn't come into contact with."

Elliott adopted a new outlook on service: You don't do a community service project just to get a wall painted or food served. You do it to learn about the people you are serving. You do it to learn and to grow as a person.

"We don't measure the number of things we paint, we measure the people we meet. Because that's what you take with you," Elliott said. "Their life experiences are different than ours. That's what changes you."

It's a philosophy that Elliott, 67, passed on to countless students during his 32-year career at Finneytown High School, where he served as a social sciences teacher,

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home with ADT!**

Click Here to Learn More!

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

The advertisement features a dark background with a silhouette of a person looking through a doorway. The text is white and blue, with the ADT logo and 'AUTHORIZED DEALER' text in a blue box.

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# CINCINNATI.com

basketball coach and athletic director.

He shared it with countless more students after retiring from Finneytown in 1998 to become a service learning consultant for the Mayerson Foundation, a nonprofit that provides grants for several causes including service learning.

In that role, he helped dozens of school districts organize their own service learning programs and held annual workshops and service projects for students across the region.

Elliott retired from the Mayerson Center in May, closing the book on a career that some say changed the landscape of youth community service for local schools.

Mayerson trustee Donna Mayerson said Elliott changed the direction of the Mayerson Foundation's service learning program. Before Elliott's arrival, the program held celebrations to thank groups for their community service.

"It wasn't moving in the right direction," Mayerson said. "It was thanking them, but not impacting them."

So they turned to Elliott to reshape the program.

"Service is a reciprocity of service. Not that top-down 'I'm going to do good for you' approach," Mayerson said. "He understood it was all about relationships."

Those who took Elliott's classes or worked on projects he organized say the

experience left a big impression.

"It changed the trajectory of my career path" said Ross Meyer, 28, of Hyde Park (Finneytown Class of 2000). Meyer runs the Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network, a job training program.

"He developed within me a really deep sense of social responsibility."

Rob Herman, 42, of Symmes Township was one of the first students in Elliott's service learning courses.

"Growing up in Finneytown you didn't always see all sides of how other people may live," he said. "It certainly opened up my perspective and mind. I can feel it today in the way I approach things."

Elliott's desire to engage students in service learning stemmed from that encounter at the Drop Inn Center and his own background.

Elliott grew up in Lebanon and is a

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# CINCINNATI.com

graduate of Bowling Green State University..

"I think it probably goes back to how sheltered or naïve I might have been growing up in a small town and going to a pretty homogeneous college for the most part," he said. "I was being challenged. It was time for me to grow."

Elliott took his own advice to heart. He went back to the Drop Inn Center and got to know that man who'd challenged him that day. The man's name was Buddy Gray, an Over-the-Rhine activist. They pair became friends until Gray was killed in 1996.

He said the main thing he hopes students get out of service learning is learning how to look at life from the perspective of someone who's not like them.

"The world is full of a lot of people who aren't like us, that don't think like us or have the same opportunities. And we need to not judge others."

Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood has perhaps benefited the most from Elliott's work. Over the years, he brought thousands of students there to volunteer.

Many of the students had never been to the troubled neighborhood before. Now some of them are young professionals who are working or living there themselves.

"He's a great humanist. He has a great heart," said Bonnie Neumeier, co-founder of the Peaslee Neighborhood Center in Over-the-Rhine and good friend of Elliott's.

Although Elliott has retired from service learning, he hasn't given up his service hat. He remains involved with several non-profit organizations. He serves on the board of Our Daily Bread food pantry and is involved with Village Life Outreach, which works to address poverty in Tanzania. He's headed there with the group in October.

## Steve Elliott file

Age : 67

Residence : Springdale

Family: wife Jan; five children

Education : Lebanon High School; bachelor's in education, Bowling Green State University; master's in education, Xavier University.

Work history : Finneytown school district 1966-1998. Consultant for the Mayerson Foundation's High School Service Learning Program through May 2011.

Advertisement

**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

# CINCINNATI.com

**Hot Stock Pick -** [Get Listed Here](#)

**Ads by Pulse 360** **OBJE**

New Issue, Obscene Jeans Inc  
Explosive Investment Potential

[www.ObsceneJeans.com](http://www.ObsceneJeans.com)

**Ohio: Refinance at 2.6%**

\$160,000 Ohio Mortgage \$659/mo. 2.9% apr. Get a  
Free Quote!

[Lendgo.com/mortgage](http://Lendgo.com/mortgage)

**Ohio Drivers. July 2011.**

If you live in Ohio, you need to learn about this loophole  
to get insurance for \$9!

[ConsumerAutoSource.com](http://ConsumerAutoSource.com)

Advertisement

**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™