

'The Spirit Of Service'

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For Calvin Redekop, two influences served as the catalyst that sparked change.

The "push factor," as he described it, occurred in 1951 while serving on the Mennonite Volunteer Service Program in Europe, during which time he witnessed the resumption of the Selective Service System after a five-year standstill post World War II.

The other contributor, or the "pull factor," as he explained, was setting his eyes on a countless number of displaced refugees during this service.

That is when an epiphany set in.

"I said, 'why can't we use some of our volunteer service manpower that these young guys provide and use them in refugee housing?'" recalled Redekop.

Shortly thereafter, Redekop and fellow serviceman Paul Peachy, who both worked under the Mennonite Central Committee, developed "The PAX Program," a project for conscientious objectors who sought to serve their country through peaceful means, rather than violent confrontations.

On April 26, nearly 65 years after its implementation and 39 after its conclusion, PAX was recognized by the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence for its objectives and impact on society.

During a ceremony held in the Islands Room of the Festival Conference and Student Center at James Madison University, Redekop, now 89, stood before a crowded room of 300 people - many of whom were PAX participants spanning many countries - and accepted the Gandhi Center's Community Service Award, which is bestowed upon those "whose work in the community exemplifies the spirit of service and nonviolence," according to the Mahatma Gandhi Center website.

"It's an acknowledgement for its time in history," said Ervie Glick, who served in PAX from 1960-62, calling the program a "phenomenon" which was right for its time. "It had a significant impact in contribution to building peace in a variety of settings around the world."

'Starting A Movement'

From 1951-76, PAX participants engaged in a number of projects in order to help build post-war Europe.

Jim Bowman, for example, was drafted by the Army in 1966 in conjunction with the Vietnam War. Bowman had conscientious objector, or CO, status due to his beliefs and sought alternative service.

After considering a number of options, he chose the PAX program and spent three years engaging in refugee rehabilitation, feeding and resettlement programs.

"It was constructive," said Bowman, a Harrisonburg resident, before noting how the program "caught my imagination, interest, and beliefs."

"[CO's] looked for ways to be constructive in our service as opposed to what we called a destructive option, which was the military option," he added.

Glick said the program gave hundreds of CO's the opportunity to serve their country in a manner with which they were comfortable: a manner that enabled them to assist refugees around the world.

"Many of us wanted to do something for our country," said Glick, a Harrisonburg resident.

After three years of service in Germany rebuilding houses for refugees out of the Soviet Bloc, Glick became fluent in the language. When he returned to the states, he became a high school German teacher in LaGrange, Ind., before spending many years teaching the language at the college level, including stints at Eastern Mennonite University and JMU.

"PAX had a huge impact on my life," added Glick. "The leadership that came out of these guys when they came back ... it changed the Mennonite Church and opened their eyes to the rest of the world."

In addition to the tangible improvements made around the globe, the program was highly regarded by a number of officials over the years.

Lewis B. Hershey, an Army general who served as the second director of the selective service system, visited a PAX site in Germany shortly after its inauguration and noted the program "needs no critique; it's perfect," according to Redekop. It is also widely believed that Robert Shriver modeled the Peace Corps after the PAX program in its early developmental stages.

After PAX ended, many Mennonite Colleges began hiring professors that served with the program and soon, according to Glick, these colleges developed international study programs that required students to study abroad.

"Since then, many colleges have followed suit," added Glick, before summing up the program, its initiatives and impact on society in a single sentence: "PAX can be credited for starting a movement."

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- Caption: Jerry Benson (left), provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at James Madison University, presents the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence Community Service Award to Calvin Redekop (center), one of the originators of PAX, while Terry Beitzel, director of the Mahatma Gandhi Center, watches. Redekop accepted the award on behalf of PAX and Mennonite Central Committee. (Courtesy Photo)  http://www.dnronline.com/files/uploads/article_images/555f816a-c390-4f50-be51-23380abab5fe/555f8178-9848-4dbb-97d1-234e0abab5fe.jpg /IMG>

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