

Organizer's Edge ▶

Paulette Ford: Lessons from a Life of Leadership

All of us will die. Yet when Paulette Ford died a few days after I had seen her and she seemed like her usual self, it was a shock.

Paulette Ford was a public school teacher, a wife, the mother of five children, and for decades the volunteer leader of the Camfield Tenants Association, an organization that led the re-development of its hundred plus apartments of affordable housing in Lower Roxbury, Boston.

While we celebrate Paulette Ford's life, bless her memory, her love of her community; let us remember some of her wisdom as an organizer and leader.



At the recent inter-generational conversation, Paulette said:

"I knew everyone's stories." This allowed her to bring people together, especially when conflicts arose within the group. She kept everyone connected over the many years it took to re-develop Camfield.

She developed and nurtured close relationships with the elected officials at the Federal and State level and their staff, to keep the Federal and State agencies responsible for the re-development honest and moving. This gave her and Camfield the power to develop Camfield in a way the residents wanted. And the devil was often in the details.

She became expert in many subject matters: including lease arrangements, siding and water infiltration, HUD and city rental policies, roofing and window installation. She paid attention to details that mattered to the residents throughout the many years designing and building. She kept her sense of humor and her eyes on the prize. For example, most residents wanted washers and dryers in their own apartments, not in a common basement with pay laundries. When one of the HUD architects said she was afraid some of the women would use this to "take in laundry," after the architect left the meeting, the women on the committee, all of whom had college degrees and were raised in Boston, started laughing loudly and joking in a "Southern accent" about how they were all going to start taking in laundry.

Her unexpected death at an early age leads me to emphasize the importance of passing on these lessons and developing the young leaders who can maintain and strengthen the organizations and victories that the older generation built.

May Paulette Ford's memory be a blessing to all who knew her, especially her loving family, and to all who did not know her, may we learn from her example.

Feedback Welcome

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

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Who else you will hear from.....

We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

Jessica Tang: Boston Teachers Union, AFT

George Luse of the Mass Teachers Assn,

Scott Reed with the PICO Network, ,

Cathy Howell, in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,

Caesar McDowell of the Interaction Institute for Social Justice,

Diana Bell of Community and Labor United,

David Hernandez of the California Education Assn,

Attica Scott, State Rep Louisville, Kentucky

Bob Van Meter with the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Boston,

Walter Davis, of the Tennessee, Health Care Coalition.

Debra Askenase, of Community Organizing 2.0,

Deb Fastino, of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,

Rebecca Gutman, with SEIU-1199,

Tim Dean, of SEIU-1199,

Mary Ochs, long time organizer in Los Angeles

and others, hopefully, including YOU

Other Useful Links

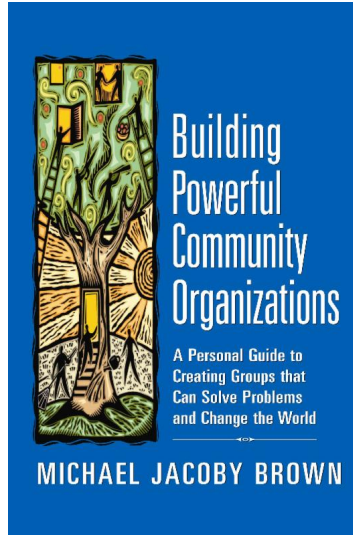
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Michael Jacoby Brown Training and Coaching | mjbrown246@gmail.com | <http://www.michaeljacobybrown.com>
10 Brattle Terrace | Arlington, MA 02474