

History of the Southwest Germantown Community Development Corporation (SGCDC)

SGCDC was founded in 1976 in response to neighborhood deterioration in the southwest corner of Northwest Philadelphia. Philadelphia was still reeling from the movement of industry out of the city in the 1950s and the subsequent white flight to the suburbs. In particular, the Bethlehem steel plant in Southwest Germantown had closed, causing lasting unemployment in the area. Residents reacted to the abandonment and vandalism of the neighborhood's stock of aging single-family houses by forming SGCDC to support sweat-equity rehab, in cooperation with the City.

With a small foundation grant and access to abandoned houses, Shelley Joffe worked half-time to help families acquire and rehab houses in the neighborhood. She hired me in 1978 to be the economic development planner under a new grant. She then left on maternity leave and Bill Harrington was hired as the new Executive Director. He had a masters in nonprofit management from Wharton. Together, we built SGCDC from a volunteer organization into a multi-faceted neighborhood revitalization effort, with community control and staff expertise.

It was the era of Johnson's war on poverty and SGCDC became a conduit for governmental funding to reach an impoverished neighborhood. Jane Shull, Ed Schwarz and others helped to emphasize grassroots community self-help approaches, also starting a community credit union to address redlining of the neighborhood. Later, when I left SGCDC during the Reagan era, I went to work with Jane and Ed.

The SGCDC programs began with housing services. Staff provided pre-purchase counseling for acquiring abandoned houses, as well as delinquency counseling to prevent further abandonment. Home maintenance supports like workshops on repairs later expanded into an extensive home weatherization and energy conservation program, with the emphasis still on self-help. Youth employment counseling was soon added to address extreme youth unemployment. Finally, economic development was added, with a business developer on hand to assist local aspiring entrepreneurs. SGCDC acquired a number of storefronts on the local commercial strip as well as part of the old steel mill as an industrial incubator.

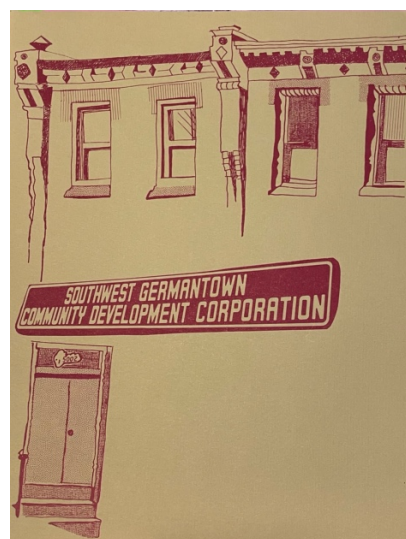
A major HUD grant expanded the credit union's self-help home-improvement loan fund for low-income residents. Other grants established GRACE (Germantown Residents Acting to Conserve Energy), which hired staff to weatherize houses, present workshops and promote recycling. Eventually, it ran City weatherization and low-income energy-assistance programs in the neighborhood.

My primary task was writing funding proposals for all these programs. That involved interviewing current program staff and others to design new and expanded services as well as drafting and submitting the grant applications. As neighborhood planner, I tracked changes in the neighborhood of about 19,000 residents. I also did financial planning for the organization, juggling funds to keep things going across funding gaps and to anticipate future financial needs. Financial support came from: 5 nonprofits, 12 corporations, various programs of 2 federal

agencies, 2 state agencies, 6 city agencies (largely conduits for federal funding like HUD and CETA). Here is a breakdown of the grants awarded during my fundraising:

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Federal	0	0	140,492	170,560	92,940	55,426	58471
State	0	0	39,582	63,758	49,583	136,635	31748
City	329,741	587,196	517,626	341,589	420,769	228,881	233166
Foundations	39,670	21,565	84,300	20,246	110,530	116,600	207430
Corporations	0	100,000	1,000	8,750	83,925	48,135	50823
other	2,544	22,484	91	17,195	91,292	80,889	40745
	371,955	731,245	783,091	622,098	849,039	666,566	622,383

Each year, I produced an annual report on SGCDC's accomplishments. Doris did the artwork for most of the reports.



There were attempts in other neighborhoods and in many American cities to establish CDCs to revive neighborhoods under local democratic control, with community control of institutions. SGCDC was the leading CDC in Philadelphia and one of the most successful in the country. It demonstrated how neighborhood-based efforts could address local social problems with appropriate governmental support.

When I left SGCDC, I joined Jane and Ed's Center for the Study of Civic Values, to spread the lessons of community leadership. While there, I visited Mondragon, a world-class example of worker-controlled institutions (see my report in *Essays in Social Philosophy*). I worked on a spreadsheet model of the costs and trade-offs for building a new nuclear reactor, shortly after the Three Mile Island accident. I also started my Community Computerization Project, to help nonprofit organizations take advantage of the new personal computers. I helped computerize the SGA Credit Union. Later, I spun this off as an independent nonprofit and worked there until going to Colorado.