

REMARKS TO AYR BOARD AND COUNCIL AT JANUARY, 2010 MEETING IN ORLANDO

LEN WILSON AYR PRESIDENT SELECT

I would like to thank all of you for the honor and privilege of being chosen to succeed Julius next year. The YMCA organization has been so important to me, Joyce, and my family during my 42 year career, and I look forward to the opportunity to give back the best I can in the coming years.

This has been a great meeting. My mind is reeling with all the work accomplished during the last two days and by the vision of the AYR strategic plan and work goals that you have chosen. I look forward to getting to know each and every one of you better, for I am impressed with your energy and dedication for AYR. I hope Joyce and I will again be with you in San Diego next September as we dedicate AYR leadership to the primary task of serving local chapters for the next three years.

During my days here, Jo Bagelmann noted to me; that we, the Y retirees, are the “rememberers,” As we get to know each other better, we share our stories and the history of the YMCA in our days. We should continue our efforts to help one another remember how our careers were built on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. My career was aided by many people in this room, others in local associations and our YMCA professional society.

I would like to spend just a few minutes telling you a little bit about my background and I look forward to learning your YMCA stories.

I was a Y brat. Joined the Y at 13 and got a part- time Y job to earn my membership dues. Worked as a day camp counselor and guided a Hi Y club while in college. After college and a tour with the US Navy, I took a summer job running a boys’ camp in Norfolk, VA. That job transitioned into a Boys’ Work Secretary’s position and the rest is part of a great journey that went from a job to a career to a calling. I met Dale Packer when we were both in the same professional Y chapter in the Kentuckiana Cluster. After eleven years in Louisville, I became a CEO in Red Bank, NJ and met some lifelong Y friends in the Jersey cluster of APD. More friends and great colleagues, many in this room, while I was MRC Director in Philadelphia and than East Field Executive for the YMCA of the USA. I do realize that in careers, as well as retirement, the Mississippi often divides us from getting to know one another.

In 2006, after an intense five years in Jerusalem, Joyce and I came back to the states, and I was ready for retirement. Although I enjoyed the fellowship and friendships of my local AYR chapter, I was enjoying the break from managing and was guarded about taking on any local chapter leadership. It is somewhat ironic that one who was guarded about

taking on a chapter leadership role now stands before you eager to get to work helping all our local chapters.

Joyce and I have enjoyed working as editors of the newsletter *Bridges* for the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (WFYR). I think we should consider the slogan they used on their shirts during the recent World Alliance Conference in Hong Kong. "Retired but not tired." When the call came last summer to consider a major AYR leadership role, their motto took on new meaning for Joyce and me.

After learning more about the problems facing Y retirees around the world who exist with limited, or no retirement incomes, I appreciate that we are indeed fortunate to have sufficient and secure incomes during our remaining years. We are also fortunate to have our retirement fund and national organization providing support to our activities. So, when it comes to AYR, I cannot subscribe to the glass half full analogy. We are vested Y retirees, surrounded by former colleagues and friends, and our AYR cup overflows with blessings.

What other organization in this country can equal the potential of having its retirees banding together for fellowship and giving back to each other, their communities and local YMCAs ?

Each of our chapter members needs to feel a special kinship and bonding at meetings and activities. We owe it to them and the future of AYR. Let's hone our recruitment techniques but let's perfect our retention capacities. Let no member drop out because we did not hear their concerns or give them a chance to be connected or involved.

We have just witnessed how well chapters can perform when challenged to raise funds for E.A.F. We are also experiencing the generosity of Y retirees supporting vital World Service projects. Both causes remain special to each of us, but I believe we are succeeding because Dale Ventres and Peter Post know an important YMCA management adage.....What gets measured gets done. In my career, in your career, we have seen the power and need for E.A.F. and World Service assistance. Let's pledge continued growth in both areas. Let's strive for 100% participation goals. Retirees need to feel pride in their giving along with appreciation for their support. They also need to feel proud of their Chapter's accomplishments.

Let's find ways to measure and proclaim AYR recruitment and retention success. Chapter Presidents realize that meeting and activity success leads to "word of mouth" marketing essential to increasing our membership base. AYR leadership needs to focus attention and resources for increasing the appeal and fellowship of local chapter meetings.

When we schedule local meetings, let's include some elements for fellowship and sharing. After all, we were, and still are, some of the best group workers in the country. We need to practice our craft. I personally subscribe to some of the practices utilized in AYP Learning circles as a model for AYR groupings.

Again, I want to thank you all for providing the vision surrounding the strategic plan you have adopted. It can propel AYR toward a better future. Thank you all for sharing concerns and best practices. AYR needs to distribute them to our back home chapters.

Thank you for your back home support of the upcoming AYR Reunion in San Diego next September. That gathering can help jump start our work toward ambitious goals to be measured and celebrated in 2011 -2014.

I expect to give a full measure in my new role and I hope each of us can pray to give more than we expect. As I ask you to pray longer for AYR, I am reminded of a story about John R. Mott.

Mott came to Philadelphia to meet with John Wanamaker, the first paid Y staff person and subsequently a very wealthy businessman. Mott had come to ask Wanamaker for a significant donation for a YMCA in Korea as part of the Buildings for Brotherhood campaign. Wanamaker had already decided on a generous gift. Mott asked him to join him in prayer before giving his gift. When Mott was presented the check, he asked Wanamaker if he could pray a little longer. Wanamaker relates the passion and commitment of Mott as he prayed again and again until he reached an amount triple his first generous gift. Wanamaker tells that his meeting with Mott helped him recall all the YMCA had given him while he was part of it. He remained a generous supporter of Y causes his entire life.

Let's continue to remember and let us each pray again and again that we give enough back to keep our AYR cup overflowing with blessings for our members.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve and work with each of you, and our fellow retirees back home – retirees...past....present...and future.