

50 Years of Involvement Keep George and Marian Toren Close to the Mission and People of SPACC

by Kristi Anderson, Development Director

“Pretty capable people.” That is how the Torens describe the many people they have worked with over their 50 years of involvement with the Saint Paul Area Council of Churches. It is easy to see that the Torens themselves are pretty capable people. Their list of involvement and leadership in this community’s religious organizations is long and varied.

Through Church Women United, a partner in ecumenical work with the Council, Marian chaired the World Day of Prayer event, May Fellowship event and the Interfaith Tea. In addition, she was chairperson of the women’s group at her local church. Marian was the first woman moderator of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC). Running against a clergy person, she was the first person ever to be re-elected to that position as well!

Marian says of her involvements, “One thing leads to another. My curiosity, my awareness of many

problems – I was a teacher – all these influenced me greatly.”

Not long after joining Peace UCC and already serving on the churches’ leadership council George inquired about the \$1000 designated in the annual budget for SPACC: “What does SPACC do?” Their reply, why don’t you go find out. Once George sat down with Harold Bradshaw then executive director of SPACC, the die was cast. Harold took to George and George was invited to start attending meetings. This quickly led to Art Sternberg asking George to get involved in a new campaign calling on individuals to give \$15, a large gift for the times and a new approach to individual giving.

By the early 60s, George was serving on the SPACC Board of Directors. When Arthur Scott stepped down as Executive Director in 1987, it was George, who had been an active board member and was then serving as President of the SPACC Board of Directors who stepped in

as Executive Director. In the position, George was unpaid, saving SPACC a lot of money in a time of financial difficulty. George reminisced, “One of the best things I ever did for the Council—I was authorized to make an offer to Tom Duke. I was influential in twisting his arm to take the job. Of course, I had a full time job at 3M [Ph.D. organic chemist] and I was more than eager to get someone else on board at the helm of the Council.”

Now in their eighties, George and Marian show no signs of slowing down. Marian recently was asked to chair the committee planning Saint Paul United Church of Christ’s 130th anniversary. She attended her first meeting a month ago. And at the SPACC Annual Assembly in 2008 George was elected, once again, to serve on the SPACC Board of Directors. He is a member of the Class of 2011. He was just finishing up the maximum three terms, Class of 2002, 2005 and 2008, on the SPACC Foundation Board of Directors, where he served as Secretary two years.

On making SPACC a beneficiary in their estate plans, Torens replied, “We’ve always worked to do our part. The Council has been blessed with a lot of good people whose work brought forth very good results. There will always be a spectrum of concerns that this organization is tackling. Our estate gift will support new ministries long after we’re gone.”



George and Marian Toren