

George Hrbek: A Life In Photos

This is a companion piece to [George Hrbek: The Selma Minister Who Built a White Antiracist Spiritual Community in Chicago](#), by Lynn Burnett. All photos and documents were generously offered by the Hrbek family, unless otherwise noted.



George's parents – George Edward Hrbek and Bertha (originally Bozinka) Kubelka Hrbek – on their honeymoon. Catskills Mountains, 1930.



George, age 5, in Warm Springs, Georgia.

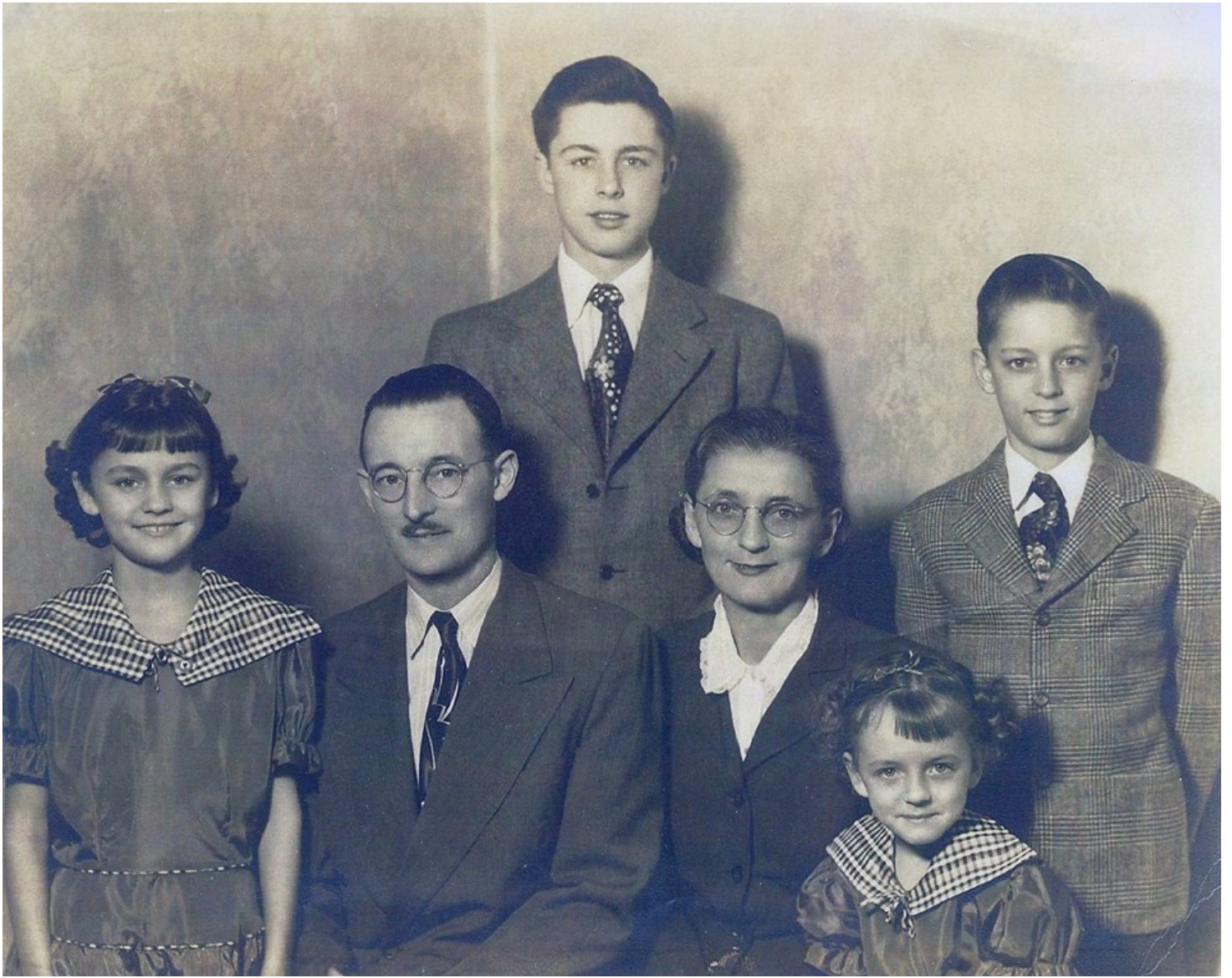


George (left) with his father (standing), grandfather Kubelka, and his baby sister Janet. 1936, Catskills Mountains.

“When I was six years old, after we came back from Warm Springs Georgia, we lived in a place called Roselle New Jersey... my dad chucked it, and said ‘We’re moving to the Catskills.’ He hired himself out as a farmhand. And we lived on five acres of land, in a house that had no indoor heating accept the fireplace. We had to travel about sixty yards to haul water from a spring. My dad milked the cows, fed the chickens, plowed the fields, and so on. I went to a one-room school house with seven kids. It was a great adventure for me! And then my dad said, ‘Ok, I’m ready to go back!’ And he went back to architecture.” (About this brief period, George’s mom said that his father needed to get away from some of the stresses of life, and that going out into the country and farming was his dad’s therapy.)



From left to right: George with his brother, cousin, and sister Janet.



Family portrait taken while George (standing) was in high school in Alabama, age 16. From left to right: his sister Janet, father, mother, brother Howard, and youngest sister Althea. Althea died when she was six. It was a tragedy that rocked the family.



*George (standing), with his mom to the left, and his brother.
(George doesn't recall who the woman in front of him is.)*



George(on left) with a college roommate, 1950.



George "The Frog" Hrbek, on the college basketball team, 1950.

"I was a point guard on the team, not an exceptional scorer, but a fairly good play maker and even better at defense. Indiana was a great State for basketball. Every game at home was packed and loud. I have many stories, but the one I like to tell is that our coach knew Adolph Rupp, coach of the #1 team in the country. We were a very small college. When Kentucky was scheduled to play Bowling Green in Ohio, that team the day before cancelled because the majority of their team came down with the flu. Rupp called our coach saying his team needed to play a game and asked if our team could come to Bowling Green to play Kentucky. And we did! What a thrill for us to play a team with 3 All Americans and 4 players that had good careers in the NBA. We lost 112 to 56. But my big moment was when I made a half court set shot just before the buzzer ended the first half . . . Because of my jumping ability and form, the fans started calling me 'THE FROG.' That stuck for my whole 3 years playing."



George (top) during a trip to Canada with the college choir. 1951.

"I was only in the choir for a year. The highlight was a 10 day choir trip to Canada, Niagara Falls and 5 Midwestern cities for concerts, where we performed for large audiences at Lutheran Churches and venues."



Road trip to Selma, spring of 1954, with John and Joe Ellwanger and other classmates. Joe is at the far left, George is second from left, John is fourth from left. The Ellwanger's played a pivotal role helping George settle into his ministry and connect with Black organizers in Selma.



George, during a summer job in 1954, working on a cattle ranch in North Dakota.



1956. George (third from right) on faculty at a Lutheran Parochial School in inner city Saint Louis, after he was expelled from seminary. He taught there for two years, both as a teacher and basketball coach, before returning to seminary.

“While I was teaching 3rd & 4th grade at Zion Lutheran Church parochial School in St. Louis post expulsion from Seminary (near end of school year) the senior Pastor of the congregation had a major heart attack. The associate Pastor asked me to stay on as a student intern (vicar) to assist with pastoral ministry. I told him Seminary would never approve. He responded, ‘Don't worry. I will show the Seminary who the power In the Church is.’ About 10 days later I received a communication from the Seminary that I had been reinstated and my vicarage approved. I served Zion in that capacity for a year and returned to the Seminary for my final year.”



George, with his sister Janet (playing the ukulele), wife Gert (seated to the right in the checkered shirt) and cousins Jeannie Fields, Helen Krall, Martin Krall.

Brother, Sister Begin Careers In Church

A young Birmingham brother and sister have chosen the field of religion and education for their lifework.

Miss Janet Hrbek will begin teaching at St. Paul's Lutheran Parochial School in Cullman beginning in September. Her installation will be held Aug. 24.

Her brother George T. Hrbek will be ordained and installed in St. John's Lutheran Church, Selma, Sept. 14.

Both are the children of Mr. and Mrs. George E. Hrbek, 1549 Cleveland-av, sw.

Miss Hrbek was one of 105 graduates who received degrees during the 65th commencement exercises at St. John's College, Winfield, Kan.

She is a member of the Trinity Lutheran Church here and is a graduate of West End High School where she was a member of the Y-Teens, Future Teachers of America, Promoters, and a cheerleader.

At St. John's Miss Hrbek was active in student affairs and selected as homecoming queen attendant and second runner-up in the Miss Winfield pageant.

Mr. Hrbek was one of 151 graduates from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

Upon graduation he had completed eight years training for the ministry in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

He is now eligible to accept his appointment to the pastorate of St. John's Lutheran Church.

Hrbek attended school in New Jersey and West End High School.

While at Concordia he served as managing editor of the school paper and taught in the parochial school at Zion Lutheran Church, St. Louis.

He served the church as student pastor in 1956.

A member of the Trinity Lutheran Church here, he is married and has one child.



TO BE ORDAINED —
George T. Hrbek.



TO TEACH — Janet
Hrbek.

Vote Of People Needed— Legislators Says N

BY CLARKE

Elwood Rutledge, attorney, who is a nominee for the legislature from the Third District, he plans to introduce legislation to abolish the powers of Alameda County.

"I firmly believe that the abuse of local legislative powers is a serious problem in the Rutledge. "Duly elected officials have no right of office and no right to be made in the legislature and school system without a vote of the people."

"Under the present rule, men are in a position to have absolute control of the field."

"I plan to introduce legislation which will provide for the people in the field affected when legislation to

Article about George and his sister Janet, as they both began their respective careers.



George and Gert, celebrating the opening of his Selma church in 1959.



George, during his Selma years.



REPUBLICAN POINT OF VIEW is expressed by State Sen. Dewey Bartlett, right, GOP nominee for governor, to Rev. George Hrbek, pastor of the Our Savior Lutheran church here, during a "Mainstreet Bandwagon" rally staged Monday afternoon at local Republican headquarters. Bartlett was among nine GOP candidates for state office which arrived via a chartered bus, with Gov. Henry Bellmon. Behind Bartlett and Rev. Hrbek looms a giant political poster of Jim Smith, candidate for sixth district congressman. (Staff photo)

George, while pastoring in Selma.



George, meeting with college students at the Mansion, 1968.



A gathering outside the Mansion. George is in the middle, wearing sunglasses. Polaroid photo courtesy of Mansion participant, Susan Shemitis Goldberg.



George Hrbek's mentee, Bill Weed, who inherited leadership at the Mansion shortly after this photo was taken. Polaroid photo courtesy of Mansion participant, Susan Shemitis Goldberg. Over the years George and other Mansion members tried to reestablish contact with Bill, without success.



*Gert at the Mansion. She played an integral role building the community there.
(Photo from the 1969 Vanguard article by George, in full below.)*

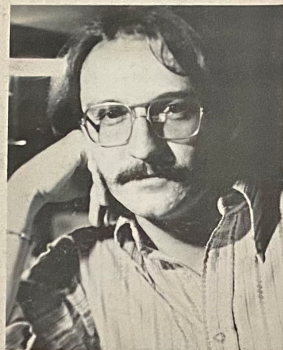


Wedding of Mike Koch and Kathy Day.

Photo by Bruce Misfeldt

*Mike Koch published "Incite!" out of the basement of the Mansion.
Here, George officiates his wedding, held at the Mansion.
(Photo from the 1969 Vanguard article by George, in full below.)*

CHARLES H. NUMRICH, assistant director of public relations, Augustana Hospital and Health Care Center, Chicago, Illinois, is a graduate of both Concordia Junior College, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and attended the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Prior to assuming his present position, Charles H. Numrich was special assistant in public relations for the hospital, and theater director and playwright for the Hyde Park Lutheran Church where these plays were written and produced. He is a native of Aurora, Illinois, and has been strongly involved with church life and church drama since youth.



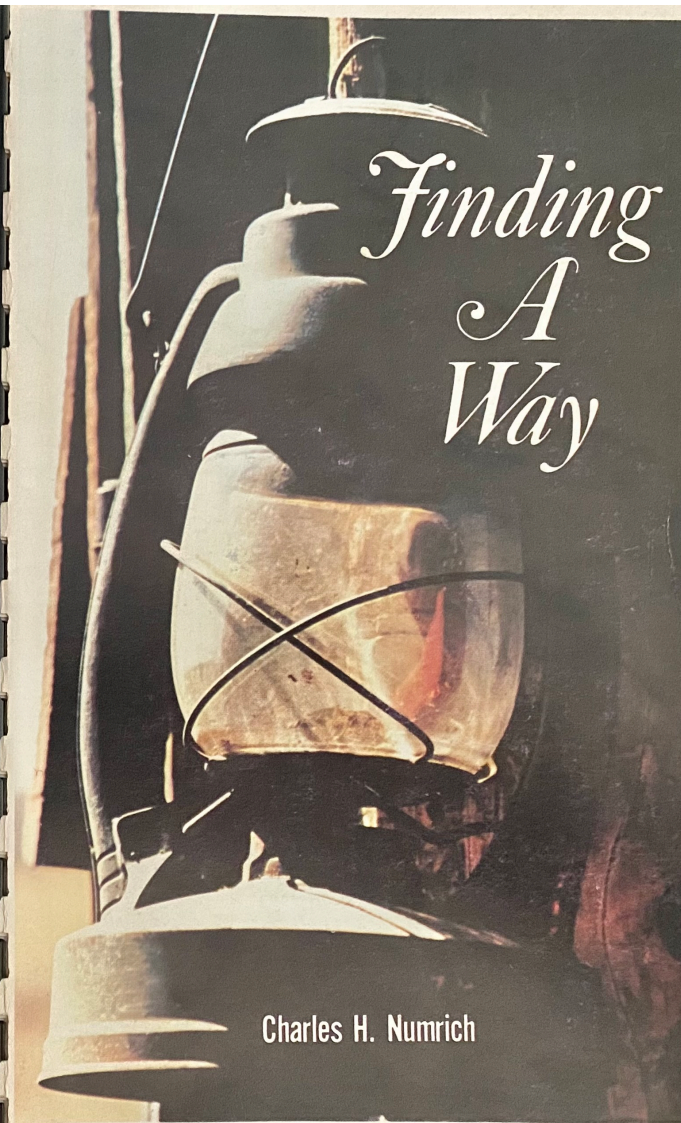
FINDING A WAY: The Plays of Hyde Park Lutheran Church, 1971-1973 contains nearly thirty brief, original "sketches" that were produced during that congregation's Sunday services. Many of the plays grew out of a sermon discussion group, from which the pastor carved his sermons and the author and theater group carved the plays.

FINDING A WAY does not dramatize biblical stories exactly as they appear in Scripture, but dramatically interprets the texts. "The amount of communication to and among our members as a result of this theater program was phenomenal," Mr. Numrich writes.

FINDING A WAY present plays for from one to ten persons . . . plays which may be learned and carefully rehearsed, or plays which may simply be read by volunteers. The plays may be adapted to almost any setting and used at almost any time. There are three indexes — biblical, topical, and Unified Lectionary — to help you select just what you want for a given occasion.

The C.S.S. Publishing Company, Inc. . . .

39
\$3.49



A collection of the plays put on at the Mansion, by Charles Numrich.

More was birthed
than beating pulse,
a physical entity
simply described
by shade of skin,
weight, height,
IQ, 20-20 vision,
delicate ears tuned
to earth's sounds,
lithe arms and
gracefully mobile legs.
Breathed into was Life,
an inheritance imperishable,
full participation
in the
yearning, weeping,
loving, laughing,
dreaming of the eternal,
earthy,
creative,
pilgrim
I AM....

A delicate but robust Gift
deserving of a moment of
whispered, awe-filled
gratitude
(at least)
each day.
But, perhaps, this
once-a-year
remembering
calls for a
trumpet blast of praise
and a quiet embrace
of all those
through whom
I AM has been present.

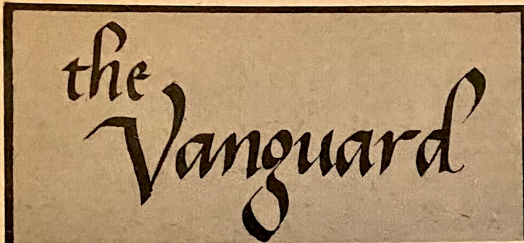


george

An example of George's poetry.



George, third from left, at an anti Vietnam War protest. 1969.



Vol. 16, No. 8 Lutheran Human Relations Association of America November, 1969

Who Speaks For Freedom?

Moratorium Challenged

"I feel very uneasy about the reading of the names of all the U.S. fatalities in Vietnam," observed Hazalah Williams, black clergyman from Oakland. Rev. Williams was addressing a "moratorium" assembly in Valparaiso University's Chapel. He made the remark as the subdued voices of students continued the 24 hour-long recitations of names of the war dead.



Rev. Hazalah Williams
Photo by Eric Mache

Williams explained his misgivings, noting that the names of the non-military victims of the war as well as the names of the non-American military fatalities went unmentioned. "It's as if all we cared about was getting out and saving our own people who are over there," he insisted.

"We haven't bothered," he continued, "to notice who the oppressed people are and who are the oppres-

Williams then proceeded to outline the necessity of pointing up repressive institutions and patterns wherever their presence is discerned.

He challenged his audience to consider the likelihood of American willingness to espouse the cause of the repressed in South Africa. He was skeptical of such possibility on the basis of his observance of the failure of America's championing

CHICAGO PROJECT

LHRAA Board Affirms Ministry

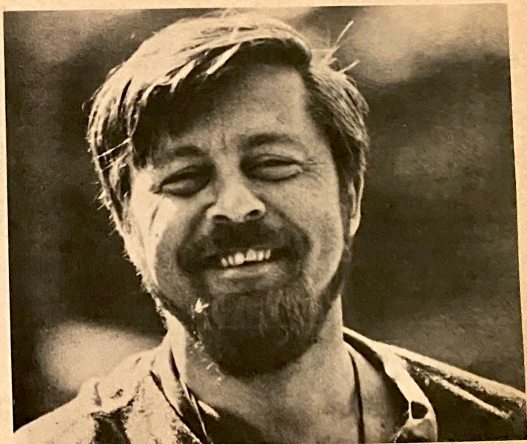
About three years ago, the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America responded to a request from Lutherans in the Chicago area for a new kind of ministry. The program anticipated for this ministry was ambitious: "to initiate, coordinate, and encourage efforts to inform, challenge, and prepare the church for service and social action; to help the church implement its resolutions; to provide wherever possible cooperation with groups; . . . ministering to the needs of men; to devise programs to foster intercommunity understanding and cooperation; to equip and harness people for work that needs to be done; to interpret community problems and changes to the church and its leaders."

One LHRAA board member observed "If all the original apostles had descended on Chicago, they couldn't possibly have achieved all that."

LHRAA-Chicago Project is now being evaluated to determine whether it should continue, expand, or end.

At the request of LHRAA, the Lutheran Council-USA has made an evaluation of the project, commending it and recommending its continuation. The Northern Illinois District (LCMS) has undertaken its own assessment of the project.

The Board of Directors of LHRAA has enthusiastically affirmed this ministry and now is asking for continued support. The Board will also explore the possibilities of recommending similar projects in other metropolitan areas.



Pastor George Hrbek

Photo by Bruce Misfeldt

To date, the project has been funded by LCMS (\$20,000), Northern Illinois District of LCMS (\$10,000) the American Lutheran Church (\$9,000), Wheat Ridge Foundation (\$5,000), the Lutheran Church in America, Illinois Synod (\$500), and the Chicago chapter of LHRAA (\$500).

The Rev. George Hrbek was engaged as Project Director. The English District (LCMS) provided the parsonage of Hyde Park Lutheran Church for the Director and his fami-

ly, and Rev. Hrbek agreed to serve as pastor for this congregation.

LHRAA agreed to set up the Project provided that it would be inter-Lutheran; the financing would be assured; and the Director would administer the program, with responsibility to LHRAA which would, in turn, be responsible to the funding groups.

At the present time, the Project has 3 full-time staff people; the Project Director is on the teaching staff of the Lutheran School of Theology.

See also, pages 3, 4

November, 1969. The Mansion (here called by its official name, The Chicago Project), was under evaluation. George argues for its continuation on the following page.

abandon this ministry?

Unique Project Serves In New Ways

by George Hrbek

It is difficult to find words to describe our venture. We are a part of this age of complexity and ambiguity.

Chicago Project sees itself as a Christian community attempting to be on the frontiers of social revolution. We have tended to raise more questions than we have provided answers. We live in tensions with most movements to the extent that we are trying to be an agent of reconciliation.

A new age has burst in upon us. It is strange, sometimes overwhelming, sometimes frightening; pain-filled, but also filled with possibilities. We have few guidelines to relate to the common struggle of all men for freedom and human-hood. We are attempting to participate in that struggle with the gifts and witness we have through work, in words, and in breaking of bread. We have sought partnership with all who are working for a fully human life.



We do not think that our "model" will necessarily work for anyone else. We have to admit that we have little interest in making photocopies of ourselves. We would like to be ourselves, and do the creative work the Holy Spirit moves us to do and participate in God's process of reformation.

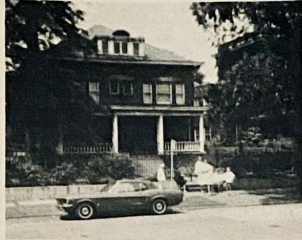
We are not super prophets nor instant experts nor apocalyptic horsemen — just people struggling on the road trying to proclaim and live the word — and trying to be open to the sounds, the sights, the activity, and the events of God.

We try to share what we find. We journey into the unknown. We risk leaving the familiar. We try to hang loose. We are searching, always becoming, always questioning.



Wedding of Mike Koch and Kathy Day.

Photo by Bruce Misfeldt



The "Mansion" — 5046 So. Greenwood.



Mrs. Hrbek and guest.

Our faith in Jesus, the Messiah as Way, Truth, and Life shapes our style, sparks our concerns, determines our decisions. In Him lively hope is born in us — and a new human existence is revealed. He is Savior, the firstborn, the New Man, in such a way that has consequence for the whole of creation. In Him there is resurrection of wholeness and the end of all "religion." Because of Him we are bold enough to believe that we are Church, the life of the Spirit in the world.

Therefore we seek to love — ourselves, our fellow men, the living God who is love. We try to express this not only in words but also, and perhaps primarily, in action by sharing, by seeing the "otherness" of the person, by meeting the other where he is, by recognizing that he is not a thing to be manipulated.

For us loving is a struggle because it means dying, forgiving, forgetting, listening, confronting, liberating, affirming, and sometimes taking sides. We also know that without love it is empty and vain for us to deliver our bodies up to eradicate racism, to end war, or to give all we have to free the oppressed.

We have the faith which affirms resurrection in Christ and makes sense of living. We seek the faith which enables us to transcend the petty experiences, which divide us and blind us from total vision. We move toward the ultimate meaning, toward the mark to which Christ calls us. In Him we share the expectancy of the Kingdom. In Him we have a vision of the present in a state of pregnancy, a vision of God who is present and active.

Our discipline cannot be adequately described by words like "humility," "obedience," or "renunciation." Perhaps it is better described by the word "creativity." We seek to participate with God in His creation of the new. If the Holy Spirit is the revelation of creativity, we do not want to blaspheme the Spirit with our deadness and immovability.

To be creative we must be young, not chronologically, but spiritually. Therefore we seek to throw off the shackles of fear and anxiety bred by this culture's style of security. We seek the carefree life, the youthful lightness of the Gospel. We seek to be people, a pilgrim people who have nothing to lose by change, nothing invested, so that we can be open to and explore creative opportunities. We believe God is calling us and waiting for us to do the creative in our ministry to and with a broken world.

We foster an informality, an easy friendliness, a capacity for ready, even if at first superficial, ties. We take people as they come and seek to relate without traditional social props and distancing mechanisms.

Chicago Project tries to provide a setting where people can struggle with the need for change, the questions of change, the consequences of change in the name of and in the spirit of Christ. It tries to be a setting for the experience of change. For us this means education without a termination.

In so far as we have been able, we have joined in solidarity with those who we believe, are laboring to create a more just and humane society and world. So with words and work we have:

1. supported the Black and other liberation movements in their determination to restore identity to the oppressed and share in the power and affluency of the U.S.
2. supported the student movement in its struggle to end the complicity of the educational system with war, imperialism and racism; in its struggle with bureaucratic values and corporate interests; in its struggle for a curriculum which is meaningful and socially relevant;
3. supported those efforts attempting to deal with the attitudinal problems of the white community, helping whites to see their "slavery," to question their values, and to seek alternatives; and to communicate clearly that the root cause of the immediate problems of our society lie in the structures and attitudes of the white community where the power lies;
4. supported the democratic restructuring of social institutions, that is, industrial complex, community power, political decision-making, mass media, etc.



During the past two years and four months we have:

1. involved over 300 high school and college youth in weekend live-in seminars;
2. conducted 6 VBS schools involving over 100 elementary school children from Chicago's white communities with over 30 children of the same age from Chicago's black community;
3. helped set up 18 seminars dealing with racism;
4. accepted 48 speaking engagements;
5. provided resource help for 6 congregations, meeting with Boards of Elders, Parish Education, Social Ministry, etc.
6. conducted two 8-week summer caravan programs sponsored by the BYPW-Missouri Synod, involving 22 high school youth;
7. grown from a worshipping community of 12 to over 60;
8. baptized 7 children, confirmed 2 adults, officiated at 5 weddings, 2 funerals;
9. provided counseling for 48 people;
10. contributed \$700 ball bonds; \$540 for LCMS Housing Program; \$700 for World Mission of LCMS; \$300 for Lutheran Charities; \$250 for Lutheran World Relief; \$300 plus for individuals in need; \$50 to the Chicago Peace Council;
11. been a clearing house and information center for countless individuals who have sought to express their Christian commitment by involvement in social ministry and action programs and movements;
12. provided a Christian community experience for 41 people who have lived-in at the Project mansion for 2 months or longer since the beginning of the Project; at the present time 13 are living in the mansion;
13. been instrumental in the decisions of 3 of the Project community members to prepare for professional church work;
14. provided meals and a place to sleep for 62 transients;
15. become a recognized Lutheran presence on the frontier of the social revolution and a point of contact for agencies, organizations, and movements seeking support and participation;
16. served as a bridge between the white and black communities, initiating and providing the opportunities for continuing dialog;
17. conducted a seminar retreat for all Lutheran pastors of metropolitan Chicago to discuss responsible ministry in racial crisis;

And we could go on. . . in fact, that's what we're hoping to do. . .



Eucharist

Photo by Bruce Misfeldt

1969: George's friend Ted Elbert argues for the continuation on the Mansion. Ted and his wife Joan had introduced George to Fred Hampton, and George's connection with Fred may have played a role in the church pulling support for the project.

LHRAA — CHICAGO PROJECT

Layman Pleads For Endorsement

Mr. Elbert is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Melrose Park, Ill., and is on the Chicago staff of NBC-TV news.

I understand the Board of Directors of the Northern Illinois District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is now considering whether or not to continue funding the Chicago Project of the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America.

First, let me explain my involvement, background and knowledge of the project. My wife and I have been members of LHRAA for the past several years. As president of the West Suburban Chapter, she was asked to welcome Pastor George Hrbek to the area so we met him the first day he arrived and have closely observed the Chicago Project, which is in reality Pastor and Mrs. Hrbek, ever since. This may not make me an impartial observer but it does give me the advantage of an intimate acquaintance with it that none of the officials has who will be making the ultimate decision.

I imagine the officials will want to see statistics (church boards normally function that way). That would be the wrong way to evaluate the Chicago Project, because Pastor Hrbek has brought a new dimension into the church. Actually, it's an old method used by Christ that got lost in the intervening years. I'm referring to the attitude that people are human beings and not statistics. I'm referring to the attitude of the parable of the one lost sheep, not concerning oneself with the 99, which would look much more impressive in the statistical report.

See also, pages 1, 3

How do you count the number of young people renewed in their Church life by their association with Pastor Hrbek and the Chicago Project?

How do you count the number of city and suburban adults who have been on the verge of dismissing the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as an agency not interested in the admonition in James 2, 14-17?

How do you count the number of non-churched people who have seen the Chicago Project and Pastor Hrbek as one of the only Lutheran Church agencies still interested in fellow-man?

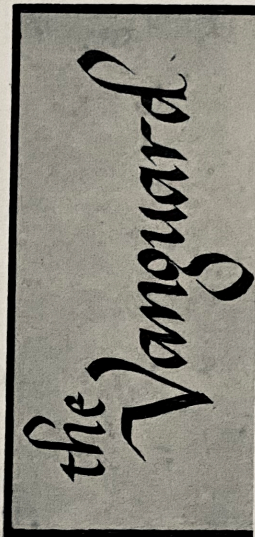
How do you count the number of inner-city pastors who have been strengthened in their work by their association with Pastor Hrbek?

How do you count the number of suburban adults who were moved to action by something Pastor Hrbek said in one of his numerous speeches at suburban churches?

How do you count the number of persons rehabilitated after a stay in the Chicago Project home of the Hrbeks?

If the officials were looking for another unimaginative endeavor "guided by the old rules," the Chicago Project obviously is not it. But if they are interested in exploring new ways to spread the Gospel and share the love of Christ in today's Jerusalem, the Chicago Project must be continued. Unless this project is encouraged and others showing concern started, we'll all be weeping over the city.

Peace,
Ted Elbert



Published by the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America.

EDITOR PRO TEM.: Mrs. Anne Springsteen

LUTHERAN HUMAN RELATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

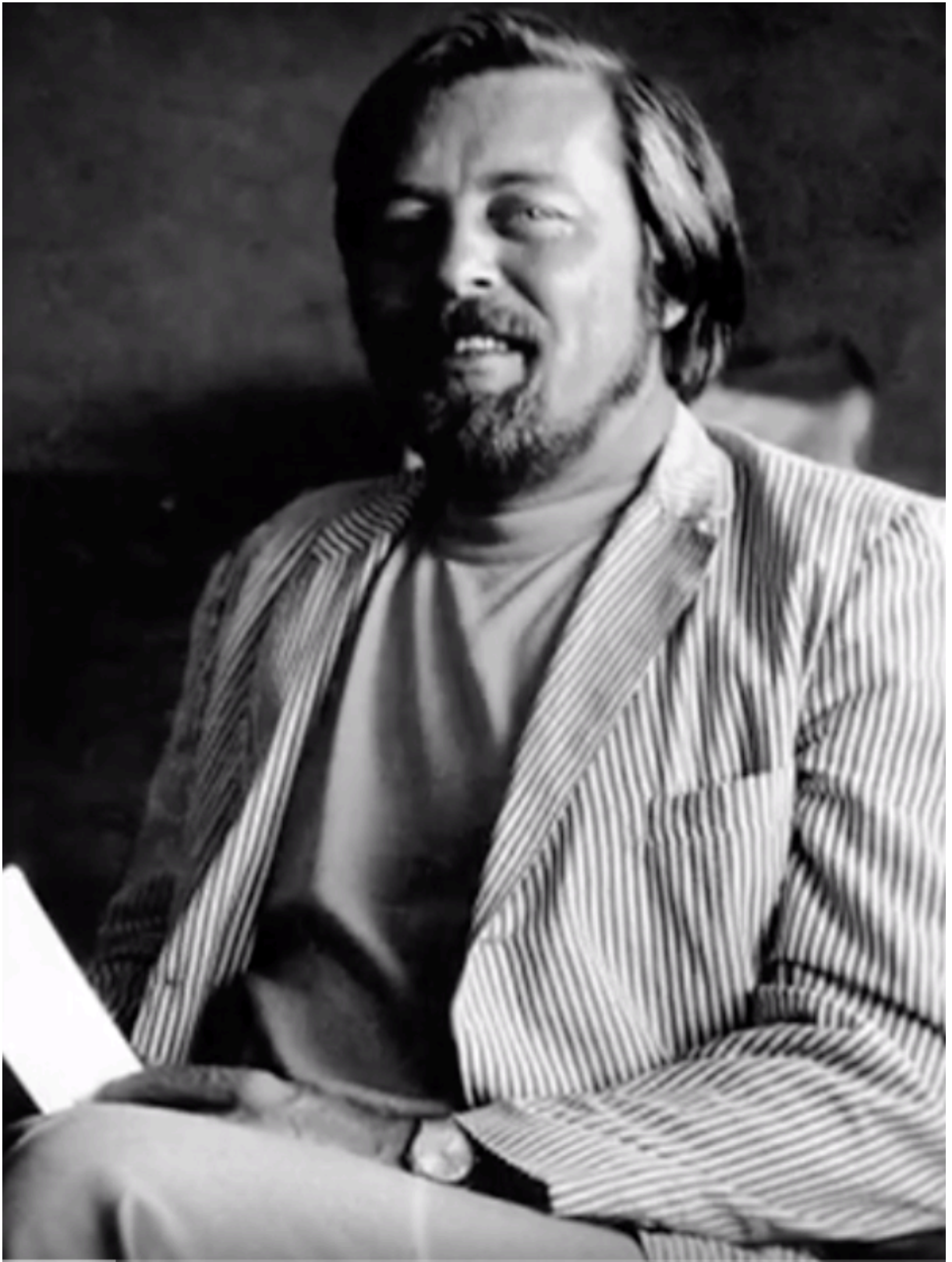
Executive Secretary
Rev. Kari Lutze

Assoc. Ex. Secy.
Rev. Kari Thiele

VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY, VALPARAISO, IND.



Photo by Bruce Misfeldt



George, 1971, shortly after arriving in Cleveland.

CLEVELAND PRESS
12/14/73

Mrs. Allende here, tells of Chile terror

Chile's new military junta is so ignorant it burns books by William Shakespeare as well as by Karl Marx, and destroys works on cubism in the belief they have something to do with Cuba, Mrs. Hortensia Allende told the City Club Forum today.

Speaking calmly in Spanish before an overflow audience, the widow of President Salvador Allende charged U.S. connivance in the overthrow of her husband by a cabal that she said had expelled thousands of students and professors, and made university deans of "illiterate army officers."

She accused U.S. corporations of plotting to overthrow her Socialist husband, and implied it was no accident

Picture on Page A 4.

that American naval vessels were in Valparaiso harbor at the time of the military uprising.

These events, Mrs. Allende said, were tied to a pattern of prior events that had seen American influence exerted to deny desperately-needed loans to her country, and to discredit her husband.

International purse strings have opened up since the uprising, she asserted, adding:

"The traitors are sending delegations to the U.S. and other countries to present a false picture of events in Chile." She urged her listeners to resist such propaganda and to protest against what she called the "flagrant flouting of democracy principles" in her country.

Dignified and well groomed in a print dress and knee-high boots, Mrs. Allende spoke in restrained tones of the "hatred and cruelty with which the military junta has suppressed democratic elements."

She said thousands of supporters of her husband were being tortured and murdered in concentration camps but predicted liberty would rise again in Chile.

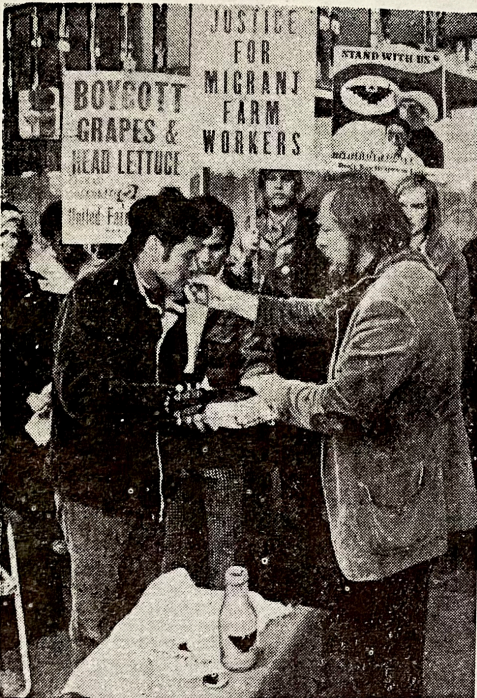
Mrs. Allende will address a public meeting in WHK Auditorium tonight.



MRS. ALLENDE HERE — George Hibek (left) of Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians and Methodists organization (CLEM) escorts Mrs. Hortensia Allende, widow of Chilean President Salvador Allende, to her speaking engagement today at the City Club Forum.

FAST OF HOPE CONTINUES:

UFW SUPPORTERS CARRY IT ON



MEDINA ENDS FAST — A tortilla, the food of the farm workers, ended a 14-day fast during which labor leader Eliseo Medina (left) lost about 25 pounds. Offering Medina the tortilla is Rev. George Hrbek of the Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry.

For over a year and a half, thousands of farm workers have been on strike because grape and lettuce growers refuse to recognize and negotiate with their union, the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO. The strikers have been beaten and jailed, and three UFW members have been killed. The latest death occurred just a few weeks ago, on September 15, when an 18 year old UFW member was shot to death by a Bakersfield police officer.

Eliseo Medina, a 28 year old farm worker from California, fasted in front of the Fisher-Fazio store in Severance Shopping Center for 14 days, drinking only water. His Fast of Hope was undertaken to bring to the attention of Carl Fazio, board chairman of Fisher-Fazio Foods, the plight of the nation's farm workers and to urge him to remove non-UFW table grapes, head lettuce, and Gallo wines from his shelves.

Many UFW supporters are now taking up the fast and are pledging to go without food for 24 hours, maintaining the vigil in front of the Fisher-Fazio Severance store. We hope that you, too, will join in this campaign for justice by:

BOYCOTTING.....non-UFW grapes, head lettuce, and Gallo wines wherever you shop.

WRITING.....Mr. Carl Fazio, 3105 Topping Lane, Hunting Valley, Ohio 44022. Urge him to remove the grapes, head lettuce, and Gallo from his stores. Send us a copy of your letter.

DONATING.....to the UFW strike fund. Your contribution will help farm workers win justice.

- I have written to mr. Fazio
- I would like more information about the farm workers.
- I can help leaflet about the boycott.
- I would like a speaker to come to my church, union, school.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Zip _____



United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO
2705 Detroit Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44113
216/696-2686

LABOR DONATED

Cleveland, 1974. George Hrbek offering a tortilla Eucharist to farmworker movement leader Eliseo Medina, to break his 14-day fast. George and Eliseo had worked together supporting migrant rights in Altus, Oklahoma during the mid-60s.

Clergyman arrested at fund ball is fami

By GEORGE B. PLAGENZ
Religion Editor

It isn't anything new for Rev. George Hrbek to be around when there is trouble with the police.

The Lutheran clergyman, who charges that the police in an handled him during the raid on the Community Bail Fund Ball on the Near West Side two weeks ago, was the pastor of a church in Selma, Ala. which was raided by police in 1960 after Hrbek integrated the church.

In 1968 Hrbek and several other clergymen were walking the police lines one night in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention — "to see if we could soften the attitude of some of the police" — when violence broke out between police and several hundred radical youths.

The Lutheran pastor was caught in the middle but wasn't injured.

"When you are not satisfied with the way the system deals with poor

people," says Hrbek, "and you upset the powers that be, you've got to be prepared for a certain amount of trouble."

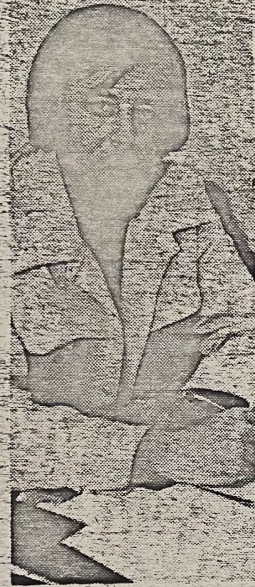
It was Hrbek's dissatisfaction with the way the system deals with indigent ex-prisoners which brought him to Cleveland from Chicago in 1971.

He worked with people being released from the Workhouse to see that they had the proper support — in the way of housing, employment, legal aid, etc. — to enable them to regain a useful place in society.

Out of this assignment for the city Welfare Dept. grew the Probation Friend Program (PFP) which enlists volunteers to work on a one-to-one basis with convicted felons who are out on probation "to reintegrate them into the life of the community."

Hrbek was director of the PFP for two years. He still works with the program while conducting a community ministry for the Lutheran Center, 4100 Franklin Ave.

This is the same area



Rev. George Hrbek

where Father Robert Begin and the Thomas Merton Community operate. It was this group which organized the Community Bail Fund to raise bail money for arrested persons with no resources. Hrbek lent his support to the program.

That is how he happened

to be at the fund benefit ball which ended in a police raid. The sponsors, including Fr. Begin, were charged with selling liquor illegally.

Hrbek says he was arrested when he objected verbally to a pregnant woman being jostled and shoved down the stairs by three policemen."

The police then grabbed Hrbek, "twisted my arms behind my back and pushed me out into the street toward a patrol car."

When Hrbek told the police they didn't have to be so rough, one policeman slapped me, the other hit me in the back and they both pushed me down in the street, kicked me and threw me into the back of a waiting patrol car."

Hrbek was placed in a cell before being released at 3 in the morning. He was arraigned the next week. His trial comes up later this month.

While there was liquor at the party, no liquor was sold, Hrbek says. A donation bucket was placed on the bar for those who wanted to contribute — "no

different from the way many civic groups and political organizations and even some churches operate a benefit affair."

What Hrbek wants to know is, "Why was the Community Bail Fund singled out? As a citizen concerned about the quality of life in this community, I believe these questions need to be answered and dealt with."

Ordained in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Hrbek, 43, is one of the supporters of former Concordia Seminary president John Tietjen in the synod dispute with Dr. J.A.O. Preus, synod president.

In Feb. 1972, 23 synod pastors from this area sent a sharply worded letter to Preus, charging him with "leading an unwise and unwarranted attack on the seminary." Hrbek's name was at the very top of the list of signers.

A native of Birmingham, Ala., Hrbek grew up in a non-church family. A Missouri Synod pastor in the city who used to "burn the streets, relating to us kids who were often getting into

1974 article about a police raid on a fundraiser "to raise bail money for arrested persons with no resources . . . Hrbek says he was arrested when he 'objected verbally to a pregnant woman being jostled and shoved down the stairs by three policemen.'"



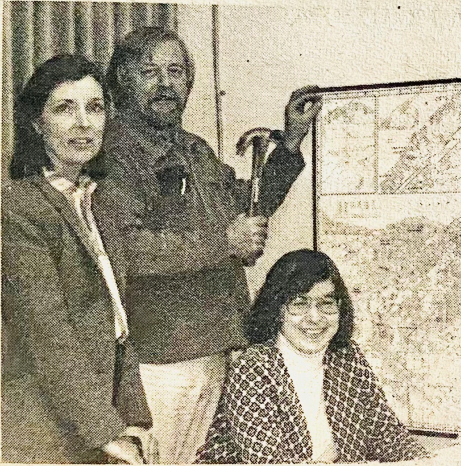
George receiving the Liberty Bell award from the Cleveland Bar Association, circa 1981. His wife Stephanie is on the left.

Ombudsman program serves citizens

A new service here—Citizens of Cuyahoga County Ombudsman—officially began Jan. 27.

Rev. George Hrbek has been named Ombudsman with Deaconess Deborah Nebel and Marilyn Withers as staff.

Lutheran Metro Ministry had been asked by the County Commissioners back in July, 1978 to establish an ombudsman program.



MOUNTING A CUYAHOGA COUNTY MAP on the wall was one of the final tasks in getting their office ready for the new Citizens of Cuyahoga County Ombudsman. From left are Marilyn Withers, Rev. George Hrbek and Deaconess Deborah Nebel.

Metro facilitated the research and provided staff for the plans and implementation.

"We hope to enable citizens of Cuyahoga County to negotiate with the systems designed to serve them," explained Rev. Hrbek.

The Office seeks to help County residents to untangle government red tape and will receive citizens' complaints and problems regarding the mandated county government services.

More than 1 million citizens in Cuyahoga County rely on or are affected by County government units. These range from the justice system, health care and welfare to street, sewer, park maintenance and tax assessment.

The Ombudsman Office will deal with questions, requests for assistance or complaints with any of these services.

Citizens may call the Ombudsman Office at 961-5500, write or come to the Office located at 3800 Bridge Ave. on the near West Side.

Ombudsman staff are committed to improving communication between citizens and the several government units and to assist with settling any conflicts in an impartial, non-adversary way. Confidentiality will be maintained.

Plans are to recruit six volunteers to assist.

The Office also will monitor county services, providing feedback on how effectively

the units are serving, said Rev. Hrbek.

An open house in mid-February and a continuing public relations thrust through media, posters and brochures will inform the community about the Ombudsman Office.

The only other Ohio ombudsman program operates in Montgomery County.

The concept originated in the Scandinavian countries where an ombudsman, a public official, is appointed by the king to investigate citizens' complaints against the government or its officials.

During its first year of operation, the local Ombudsman Office is funded by \$24,000 from the County, \$8,600 from Partners in Mission, a St. Louis-based ministry program; and \$3,000 from the American Lutheran Church.

Additional funding is being sought from area foundations and from religious, charitable as well as government sources.

The Ombudsman Office is projecting a 1981 budget of \$100,400.

The go-ahead for the Office came June 30 when County Commissioners voted to endorse, fund and participate. "This is an historic event in the life of this County," Commissioner Edward Feighan said of their decision.

Commissioners allocated \$10,000 to implement the Office during the last six months of 1980.

Continued on Page 10

1981 Cleveland Lutheran Messenger article about George being named Ombudsmen.



A homeless advocacy meeting George helped organize, along with the mayor of Cleveland in November, 1982. George is second from right. Image by David Beach, The Plain Press.

Youth theatre has a 'Godspell'

By JOANIE HOOVER

"Ah-one, ah-one, ah-two, ah-two, ah-ready, here-we-go" chants choreographer Stephanie Morrison-Hrbek as she takes youthful cast members of "Godspell" through a rehearsal.

Twenty-four neighborhood youth ages 11-16 are hard at work in preparation for the tenth anniversary of Near West Side Community Youth Theatre's opening night, Friday, August 7.

Director Lauren Persons made a bold move in concept from the traditional way "Godspell" has been presented. Gone are the white-faced troupe of clowns. Instead, the tellers of the gospel of St. Matthew are wisecracking students in a set with oversize school lockers and giant blackboards.

The role of Jesus Christ is played by a 16-year old young woman, portraying an offbeat teacher. She turns around students' ideas of God and watches their love come alive.

John the Baptist, too, has undergone a transformation, a custodian baptising kids out of a mop bucket.

The cast had a lot to say about what the show means to them.

Mindy Deupree, 12, says "We're learning more about God by thinking through the parables. We learn to love this woman who is teaching us."

Adds Jolene Adkins, 11, "And not only her, but each other. It's gonna be hard not to cry."

The final week of rehearsal approaches, culminating a six week summer of five day rehearsals from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. This week will find the cast in evening rehearsals as well.

Says Mindy, "I always feel like I want to

break, but sometimes, the more I do, the better I feel about it."

Cast member Ariana Mahaney feels sometimes rehearsals can be confusing, what blocking scenes, dancing and having musical rehearsal going on at the same time. However, she wanted to do the show so badly she gave up a summer job.

Meg Vine, doubling as John the Baptist/Judas finds the transition of character difficult.

"I feel like I'm betraying my best friend. When I'm on stage I think of really being that person. It makes me sad."

Julia Behrend, 12, in her third NWSCT production says, "I'll keep coming back here until the day I'm 16."

Co-director Stephanie Morrison-Hrbek reflects on the differences between this and the "Godspell" presented 10 years ago.

"It's totally different. I wonder how I ever did it without Lauren and Bob. (Lauren joined NWSCT in it's second season and musical director Bob Davis in the third year).

Stephanie continues, "The organization is bigger, expectations are greater. It has become much more complex."

"We have double the cast size of 10 years ago. We want to take seriously the process, i.e., dealing with kids, concerns and needing to interpret them in relationship to the play. We've been working on interpersonal relationships a lot this summer."

Tomasita Rivera, the 16-year old playing Jesus says when she was chosen, "I was shocked. I said, 'Why me? I'm a girl.'"

But as she began to see how the script had been "de-sexed," (all exclusive language changed to inclusive), Tomasita said "I don't see why not. If a woman can be president, why can't a girl play Jesus?"

Curtains open at 7:30 pm. in a special Alumni Night reception on Friday, August 7. For this benefit night only, tickets will be \$15.



Performer goes to USSR

Who says the peace movement is dead?

Hopefully young people like Sherr

Rexall
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1987 article celebrating the ten-year anniversary of the Near West Side Community Youth Theatre.



George, during a 3 week trip to Israel and Palestine. 1988.



Rev. George Hrbek, Stephanie Morrison-Hrbek and their sons Noah and Seth.
Photo by Dennis Sadowski

George Hrbek: THE OMBUDSMAN'S ODYSSEY

By Dennis Sadowski

Common sense dictates that when someone offers you a job you're not supposed to laugh at them.

George Hrbek, acting director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Human Services, might tell you otherwise though.

That's because he laughed—at a public official no less—and still became acting director of the department. In fact, he's about to get a promotion.

Hrbek says he laughed when County Commissioner Mary O. Boyle asked him to take over at human services when Gladys Hall resigned last Au-

gust. "I told her 'This is the best humor I've heard in a long time,'" he says.

That's because Hrbek, of West 31st Place, considers himself to be outsider and not politically motivated. As the county ombudsman since 1981, he was a watch dog and a troubleshooter, not a government bureaucrat. His job was to challenge and push county officials when regular people had problems.

Nevertheless, Hrbek, who is also pastor of Calvary Lutheran Church in East Cleveland, eventually accepted Boyle's offer. "I think what they
continued on page 8

MetroHealth Neighborhood

Hrbek's Odyssey

continued from page 1

(county officials) see in me is that while I've been a vocal advocate and involved in demonstrations (against them), I like people." Hrbek says.

"What's important is that I like people."

— Rev. George Hrbek

Today, after six months on the job, Hrbek is about to help lead the department in a new direction, one, he says, that should be more responsive to people's needs. (See related story.)

Despite being in government, Hrbek has not lost his idealism. And he still considers himself an outsider. Others as diverse as County Administrator David T. Abbott and Rev. Robert Begin, executive director of West Side Ecumenical Ministry, share the same opinion. But they say what makes Hrbek

good for the job is his skill in bringing people together toward a common goal. In this case, getting the Department of Human Services to truly meet the needs of county residents.

Bringing people together, and even helping them change their thinking, has been a lifelong endeavor for Hrbek. He has been involved in social causes since graduating from the Lutheran seminary more than 30 years ago. His history includes working for civil rights in the deep south, organizing migrant farmworkers in Oklahoma, and fighting hunger in Chicago before coming to Cleveland in the early 1970s.

Hrbek's sense of fair play evolved in Birmingham, Ala., where his family had moved from their native New York City. His father made it a point to discuss social issues and popular concerns with his family after supper each day.

The elder Hrbek's concerns were rooted in the experience of his parents, who came to the U.S. from Bohemia (now part of Czechoslovakia) in the late 19th Century because of religious persecution.

The family conversations initially had little impact on the young Hrbek. It was only in his late teens that Hrbek developed a sense of social justice. It became real on a crowded Birmingham bus.

That's where the 17-year-old Hrbek challenged an older white man who forced two black women to give up their bus seats. The man had moved the "Blacks Only" sign back one row and told the women to move.

"I moved the sign back to where it was and I told the guy to give the seat back to the two women," Hrbek recalls.

An altercation ensued, the bus stopped, and Hrbek was kicked off. "That encounter is what probably helped set the course for me," he says.

By high school graduation, Hrbek decided to enter the seminary, much to the dismay of his father and grandfather. In 1958, his first assignment was to establish a Lutheran church for whites in Selma, Ala. The town had two black Lutheran churches, but few whites worshipped at them.

Back then, Selma was a quiet town where most whites still did not think much of blacks. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. had not yet arrived to make the town the focus of the civil rights movement.

Hrbek went about building a congregation and raising funds to build a church. He also built quite a reputation in town. The Jaycees named him Man of the Year. The Alabama Bankers Association invited him to address its annual convention.

But, behind the scenes, Hrbek was working on civil rights issues. He met secretly for months with two other white ministers and six black professionals in Brown Chapel (which King would later make famous).

The plan was to have blacks walk in procession into the new church as part of the congregation on dedication day. The group was to be led by Rosa Young, an 80-year-old educator who helped establish a black Lutheran junior college and high school in town.

The plan did not go over well with town officials. Police entered the church during the service and asked why black people were there. They left quietly upon seeing several respected white residents were there.

The mayor called Hrbek the next day protesting the young minister's actions. "I told him to 'Take your argument to Jesus. It's Jesus' church,'" Hrbek says.

But Hrbek continued. He demanded a public apology and a gift for the church—a baptismal font. The church got the font a few days later. The apology never came.

That was the first of several altercations with the town's residents, and in 1963 Hrbek moved his family to an all white church in New Orleans. Within two years he resigned in protest because of racism in the church. Out of a job, he sold office supplies to support his first wife and four children.

In 1964 a call came from a church in Altos, Okla. Hrbek thought it would be a good to return to a small town setting with less pressure and few issues to worry about.

But he soon found himself organizing migrant farmworkers who came to southwest Oklahoma to harvest pickles and cotton under inhuman living and working conditions. "I discovered you can't escape it," he says.

After three years, Hrbek moved his family to Chicago to work on the Lutheran Church funded Chicago Proj-

ect, a program assisting blacks in obtaining basic services. Project leaders also began meeting with a young Rev. Jesse Jackson, who was starting Operation: Breadbasket.

But, never one to ignore injustices, Hrbek and others in the project began questioning institutionalized racism in the Lutheran church. Church officials slowly cut project funding, but Hrbek took a job loading trucks on the night shift to keep the project alive. The Hrbek family was forced to move into public housing.

About this time the church also attempted to defrock Hrbek. The charge: heresy. The charges were dropped, however, when the long black man on the board hearing Hrbek's appeal stood up and said, "I've been looking for somebody like you all of my life."

Job offers began pouring in. Hrbek says one of the most interesting came from Rev. Richard Sering, director of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry in Cleveland in 1971. It involved establishing a support program for people released from prison. The program preceded the Community Re-entry Program, now based at LMM.

He also was involved in the Probation Friends program and was arrested with Begin during the infamous police raid on the Jail Bond Fund fundraiser.

Gradually Hrbek began troubleshooting problems for welfare clients. That led to a study and then the formal opening of the ombudsman's office on March 5, 1981. Since then Hrbek has prodded county officials and employees to improve services, solve problems, and treat people fairly. He got to know the human service department quite well over the years, and that's why Boyle called him last August.

Despite the added responsibilities of the new position, Hrbek says he is not about to give in to long hours and undue pressure. His second wife, Stephanie Morrison-Hrbek and young sons, Seth and Noah, will see to that.

Morrison-Hrbek is director of the Near West Community Theatre and keeps her husband involved as much as possible. Of course, young boys can keep anyone busy. And if that's not enough, his four adult children, two in Cleveland and two out of town, help show him what's truly important in life.

Hrbek says his new job won't change him and that he plans to remain an ombudsman, but from within the human service department. He wants to continue to ensure that community people have a strong voice in the agency, no matter what the bureaucrats say.

"It's like what my oldest daughter once told me. 'It's not important who doesn't like me or who likes me. What's important is that I like people.'"



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Hard time on the home front

PD/ROADELL HICKMAN

George Hrbek of Northeast Ohio Housing Now, noting that federal expenditures for housing dropped from \$37 billion in 1980 to \$8 billion in 1988, said marchers to Washington, D.C., would insist that Congress restore \$25 billion to the housing budget. **Story on Page 2-B.**

Speaking out against the affordable housing crisis brought on by the Reagan era.

I distrust religions that give all the answers (and sometimes even the questions). I have spent a considerable amount of time contemplating and reflecting on life's big questions....."What's the meaning of life?", "What is good? Evil?", etc. etc. And I have contemplated the biblical and Christian Churches answers. While I respect the witness of the Christian Church as it has wrestled with these questions through the ages and given answers, I think what I want is more than answers. What I want is a faith that gives me the courage to live with life's questions.

How do we deal with the negative realities of life?.....centuries of religious persecution, famine, war, racism, the Holocaust, terrorism, economic exploitation, Sept. 11.....? Our culture embraces a Gospel of the upbeat. We are determined to be optimistic. Therefore, we gloss over or don't know what to do with a Sept. 11. How do we take in the negative, face it squarely and not be debilitated by it. If we refuse to enter into reality, enter into the despair, then we live on a surface plane on which a rosy optimism exists, but not hope. I believe optimism does not impel us to engage the world.. It protects us from facing the reality and engaging the reality. Hope is born in the bosom of despair. Hope does not deny the reality, does not escape to the world of easy answers, but engages the world, the complexity and confesses by action new possibility, a different reality.

Jesus' Good News provides no easy answers, no escape from the ambiguity.....from the cross.....It does spark hope, courage to live with the questions and engage the world with the vision of a new way, a new day.

Some reflections George offered after 9/11.

Activist will keep on stumping for causes at Cleveland shelter

GRANT SEGALL
Plain Dealer Reporter

The Rev. George Hrbek uses two pet phrases in recounting decades of activism.

Folding his arms, smiling broadly, he says a couple of times, "All hell broke loose."

Then come lively tales about decking segregationists, weathering raids, buying lunch for a cop who had kicked him, brainstorming daily with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, touring migrant camps with Cesar Chavez, breaking up Cuyahoga County's human services bureaucracy and building one of Cleveland's leading social agencies.

Folding his arms again, smiling gently, Hrbek says a couple of times, "Dick used to love to tell this story."

The late Rev. Richard Sering brought Hrbek to Cleveland to help found and lead Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries. The ministers became a beloved team: the slender, self-deprecating Sering and the husky, bluff Hrbek, who has kept the accent and humor of his native New York.

Over 36 years, the \$12 million LMM has grown to serve some 25,000 of the town's neediest people, from nursing-home residents to ex-felons.

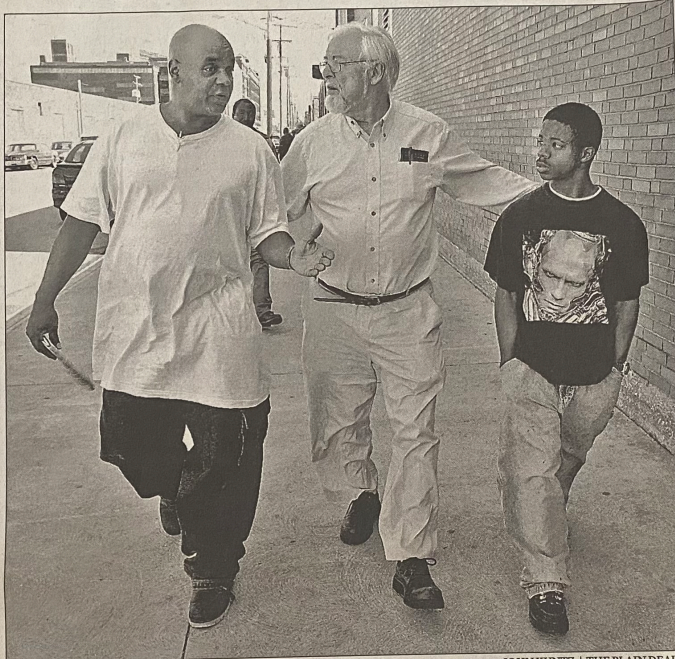
In 2001, when Sering was diagnosed with cancer, he asked fellow sports buff Hrbek to be his "relief pitcher," taking over gradually, then going it alone.

That's what happened. In July, Hrbek stepped down from 21 months as LMM's interim director, giving way to Carol Fredrich, a longtime social worker and administrator, who will be formally installed Friday.

Now, instead of retiring at 70, Hrbek is helping LMM turn around 2100 Lakeside, a troubled public shelter for homeless men on Lakeside Avenue.

"He's always laughing and joking with the guys," says Thomas Parker, a former Lakeside client, now a Lakeside supervisor. "He's a blessing."

"He's a big bear of a guy, really warm and open and embracing, but he's got a steel backbone,"



JOHN KUNTZ | THE PLAIN DEALER

The Rev. George Hrbek, center, a leading national activist for five decades, is helping to run 2100 Lakeside, a homeless shelter. Among his clients are Lorenzo Brown, right, and a man who gave only his nickname, Howley.

says Dave Abbott, Gund Foundation director and former county administrator.

"He's been a tower of justice," says Charles R. See, who runs LMM's Community Re-Entry Program.

The fun-loving minister plays the ukelele in talent shows and croons "Shine On, Harvest Moon" at a yearly harvest festival in Ohio City, where he owns an 1862 home.

Hrbek (pronounced HER-beck) has helped to launch many novel programs, from the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless to the Near West Side Theater, now run by his wife, Stephanie Morrison Hrbek.

Several of Hrbek's myriad du-

ties were called interim but lasted years. He and Sering were just going to spend a summer launching LMM, but never left. Hrbek was just going to help the county start an ombudsman program, but stayed 10 years, some of them as interim director of human services, and helped split the huge department five ways.

"We can deliver those services more efficiently now," County Administrator Dennis Madden says.

On the side, Hrbek spent some 15 years as interim minister of East Cleveland's Calvary Lutheran, which he still attends.

The '60s activist is decades apart from what he calls today's judgmental, jingoistic televangel-

ists. He says they play up "the stable and the cross" but ignore Jesus' interim mission: building a just, loving world.

Hrbek, distantly related to Minnesota Twins baseball star Kent Hrbek, was shuttled in childhood between New York and the South with his father, an architect. He went to church only to box in Friday night "smokers." But he became intrigued at 16 when a local umpire turned out to be a Lutheran minister.

Hrbek was schooled and ordained by the Lutherans' Missouri Synod, though he later jumped to the more liberal Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In 1960, he was sent to Selma,

Ala., to open a white church. He met Selma's Rosa Young, a pioneer of black schools. The two conspired to integrate the church.

The police raided the first service. Hrbek invited them to join it. They retreated in confusion.

Soon someone burned a cross on Hrbek's lawn. Three men jumped Hrbek in a school passageway. He punched one, ran into the auditorium and kept a date to give the invocation for an assembly featuring two notorious segregationists, future Gov. George Wallace and Birmingham Safety Commissioner Bull Connor.

Hrbek claims he also felled Joseph Smitherman, soon to start 36 years as Selma's controversial mayor.

"I had not yet perfected the response of nonviolence," says Hrbek, chuckling none too repentantly.

Reached by telephone, Smitherman vaguely recalls the minister but denies any spat.

Soon Hrbek moved to New Orleans. His new congregation voted to keep out blacks. A worshipper summed up the mood by crying, "I hate love!"

Hrbek resigned in protest. He briefly supported his family by selling office supplies. Then he retreated to a small church near Altus Air Force Base, Okla. He found himself protesting the Vietnam War with disillusioned veterans and founding a ministry for migrant workers.

At one migrant camp, he watched a resident shimmy up a pole to replace a long-dead bulb in a security light.

"The crowd just cheered," says Hrbek. "A whole other light bulb went on." The inspired residents went on to win schoolbooks and tornado shelters.

In 1967, Hrbek started a social justice program called "The Chicago Project" in the former mansion of killer Nathan Leopold. The place became common ground for rival civil rights leaders, from Jackson to the Black Panthers' Fred Hampton.

But conservative Lutheran leaders killed the project, summoned Hrbek and threatened to

defrock him. He denounced them for 2½ hours.

Hrbek briefly helped churches in Germany work with immigrants. Then he returned to Chicago without work and moved his family into public housing. Before he could unpack, Sering called and brought him to Cleveland.

Here, Hrbek started a city jobs program but quit when it proved to be mostly a jobs program for political cronies. Back with LMM, he helped launch countless projects with various links to Lutheran Metropolitan, from Community Legal Services to a public ombudsman for nursing-home residents.

LMM's flow chart shows clients on top and leaders on the bottom. For years the leaders literally worked at the bottom: the basement of LMM's cramped old home on West 25th Street. But Hrbek raised them to the third floor because the cramped building has no elevator and no one else wanted to climb that high.

At the homeless shelter, Hrbek has clients clean and patrol the property and the neighborhood. He is also building programs to help them find permanent homes and jobs.

With a straight face, client Donald Goolsby says, "We're going to keep him."

Hrbek isn't sure how long he will stay. But his health is strong, and he expects to keep stumping for his causes one place or another.

On the side, he golfs, writes poems and visits family around the country. He has six children, nine grandchildren and a great-grandchild due in January.

As fast as LMM grows, the clients needs seem to grow faster, with the economy stratifying and public help shrinking.

Still, Hrbek remains upbeat. "Sit down and talk with the guys here," he says at the shelter. "You listen to the stories and you marvel at the resilience of human beings. How can you not have hope?"

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: gsegall@plaind.com, 216-999-4187

ROOF LEAKS!



Sex offender's property line is... han

2005 profile of George, by Grant Segall.

GAY PEOPLE'S Chronicle

Ohio's Newspaper for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community • www.GayPeoplesChronicle.com

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BRIAN DEWITT



The LGBT Heritage Day award winners pose after the ceremony with the presenters of each award. From left in front are Rev. Don King, Jess Sellers, Leslye Huff, John Corlett and Sue Doerfer, holding the award for Jeff Ramsey, who was unable to attend. Behind them are presenters Rev. George Hrbek, Rob Rivera, Nickie Antonio, Max Blachman and Matt Zone.

George (Top left) presenting an LGBT Heritage Day award, 2010.



George's parents, circa 1981.

George Hrbek is a doer, C

By Clettus Atkinson

Post-Herald Columnist

Where's George?

Well, if you mean Mr. Hrbek, he's in New York at the moment, visiting his 96-year-old mother. And when he returns to his home in West End, you might find him at any of a dozen or so places. He gets around.

Let's see. Try Harrison Park, where he teaches crafts to teens. Or any of six nursing homes. He's a regular visitor there. Or he could be at Draper Prison, where he heads the ministry for the Gideons. Or at his church, Trinity Lutheran. Maybe he'd be in his own back yard, among thousands upon thousands of aluminum cans, from which he fashions salable objects.

Once you track him down, talk to him, it's worth it. You can't help but think here's a man of 74 who's had a serious heart attack, and yet he moves about like he was 40 and didn't have a care in the world.

George Hrbek is tall, slender, has thin gray hair, is intense, restless. But he can laugh, and he's talented. Deeply religious, too. He and wife, Bertha, are Southerners by choice. She grew up in New York, he in New Jersey. Chance sent them to Birmingham in 1936. Twelve years later they moved here for good.

People and Things



George and Bertha's grandparents were Czechoslovakians. "My father is from Bohemia, my mother from Austria-Hungary," George says. "They all came to New York in the 1890s. My father went to Jersey, opened a pearl button shop, hired all his relatives. After plastic came in we barely made a living."

George became an architectural draftsman — right in the middle of the Depression. So, where were the jobs? He looked and looked. No luck.

Then a friend told him he could probably find work at Warm Springs, Ga. It was 1935 and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's association with the Georgia spa had made it into a resort. "I wrote," George says, "and was hired." He left New York in August, and his grandfather warned, "Don't drink their water."

George was 29, had a family. "In Warm Springs I surveyed underground systems for springs, helped build the polo facilities. I got to

know the president well" (oh, if you're ever around Mr. Hrbek, just don't say anything bad about FDR).

It was in 1936 that George first saw Birmingham. "I was sent on loan to a government organization, was overseer of a housing project. He, his wife and two children boarded on the Southside. "I was making \$150 a month. We were here almost a year, then went back to Warm Springs. I made \$50 a week there."

In 1937, George claims, "my wife got homesick and we went back to New York for 11 years." During that time, he got into the building and remodeling business. "All because I volunteered once to help stop a leak in the roof of St. Patrick's Cathedral." He laughs, but says it's true.

The Hrbeks came here in 1948, to the same house they live in now, on Cleveland Avenue Southwest. George was still an architectural draftsman, and didn't retire until he was 70, four years ago.

Retire? He has a monthly schedule written out. It's broken down into days and hours, even minutes. Every morning he's home he walks out, gets the newspaper. Then I make my breakfast, study scripture, read devotional material, pray. Then I'm ready to start the day."

The day lasts until late that night,

and is always on the go

puts him in contact with everyone from teen-agers to prisoners to patients to churchgoers to school officials. "I work at least 40 hours a week for the Lord," George says. His travels take him about the state—to churches and prisons — and once a year he attends a Gideon convention. The last three have been in Minneapolis, Miami and Chicago.

George has written a Christian biography of his "life with the Lord." He says, "I was baptized in 1943, after my son became an acolyte." That son, George T., is a Lutheran minister in Cleveland, Ohio. Another son, Howard, is a chemical engineer in South Carolina, and a daughter, Janet, became a teacher, now works for a group of local doctors. Another daughter died at age 6.

George's "zeal" keeps him going. He puts everything he's got into whatever he does. Including his work with cans. His back yard is a wonderland of objects he's made from aluminum cans, pop tops and the plastic rings that hold six-packs together. He has fences built of can tops, a snowman, a decorated tree, flowers, wreaths, furniture for dolls, bannets, chairs, platters, a hula skirt, a coat, a hat — the products pour from his fast-moving hands. His crafts have been displayed at the

State Fair and other events.

He also collects hubcaps, repairs tricycles, wagons and other toys and gives them to needy children. His daughter, Mrs. Eugene L. Griffin, says, "His values are not materialistic. He's always been an inspiration.

He has no selfish motives. He's just a good person who cares for others."

In late August, the Hrbeks will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary at Trinity Lutheran. And you can bet that George, busy as he is, will work that into his schedule.

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NEWS STAFF/JERRY AYRES

Son of Man works on tiny chair made from aluminum cans.

Five Points South's 'Son of Man': Simple is best

By **GINNY MacDONALD**
News staff writer

He may truly be the enigma he calls himself.

But the 94-year-old is a fixture around Five Points South. Several mornings a week he unfolds his green canvas chair and begins his work.

That work, besides praising the Lord, is taking aluminum cans and painstakingly cutting and twisting until they become tiny chairs.

With his beard, twinkling blue eyes and flannel plaid hat, he sets up shop from 8 until 10:30 a.m. in front of the Original Pancake House.

He won't give his name. He says he's the Son of Man, "just as Jesus Christ was called."

The regulars around the pancake house know him well.

"He really is the Son of Man,"

a passerby says. "And a blessing, too. I have several of his chairs."

He said the cans he works with symbolize rebirth when they become tiny, glistening chairs.

"This little can has life," he says.

And as he snips and bends, the cans do take on a new life.

He gives the tiny chairs away, extolling their takers to remember that they are a reflection of God's love. Takers are asked to make a donation to the Gideons.

The man will identify himself only as a retired architect who moved to Birmingham in 1935.

He says his work with the cans represents what he has found out in his 94 years — that the simple way of life is best.

"The Bible in plain words tells us what's good for us. This is good for me," he said. "I'm in the world, but I'm not of it."



Frank Hrbek

Frank Hrbek at 90; Will Be Cremated

Funeral of Frank Hrbek, 90, will be at 11 a. m. tomorrow from Berger Funeral Home, 4543 Kennedy blvd., North Bergen, followed by cremation at Garden State Crematorium, North Bergen.

Mr. Hrbek died Friday in North Hudson Hospital from complications following a short illness. He had resided at 4512 Liberty av., North Bergen, for the past 60 years, since coming to the United States from Czechoslovakia in 1909. He was a retired button manufacturer and an active member of the Foresters of America.

He is survived by two sons, George and Arthur; six daughters, Mrs. Frieda Svek, Mrs. Loise Franz, Mrs. Frances Hufnagel, Mrs. Dorothy Lynch, Mrs. Albina Charman and Mrs. Ruth Jacobs; a sister, Mrs. Jenny Hubner; 20 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren.

Frank Hrbek

Button Maker...Writer...

Avid Reader of History

Whenever Frank Hrbek rustled his sleepy children out of bed at six in the morning to take a look at the North Bergen sunrise, they'd groan. But, like most people, they were won over by his enthusiasm. "It's beautiful along the East Boulevard," he would say, and his children would wake up.

AND THAT was the way it went all of Frank Hrbek's life. Not for one minute would he let his mind go to sleep — or those of his children.

Up until he died Friday at the age of 90 at North Hudson Hospital, he was always reading and planning projects.

Born in Zirovnice, Czechoslovakia, he came to the U.S. with his family as a boy of 14. Right away, he and his brother set up a pearl button factory in North Bergen.

WHEN high button shoes went out of style in the thirties, he was forced to sell out, for plastic buttons were replacing the old-fashioned kind.

But his fifty years with the button factory were only a fraction of his life. A writer at heart, he flooded Czech newspapers throughout the United States with articles, mainly about immigrants' lives in the new country. At one time, he set up a Czech magazine, which flourished briefly, and he also tried his hand at opening a restaurant in Union City. Though both of those efforts were short-lived, Mr. Hrbek took it with an easy-going good grace.

HE PLIED the newspapers with even more articles and did not stop at controversy. Just before his death, he was working on a story about the benefits of smoking.

For, even though his doctor told him to cut out smoking, Mr. Hrbek had his own ideas.

"I never think well without my pipe," he said, and proved his point by going through more books in a week, pipe ablaze, than he could be supplied with by the local bookmobile.

MR. HRBEK, a passionate reader of politics, history and nearly everything, was so fond of books that he used to walk down the street with a book in his hand, reading along.

He insisted that both his children and grandchildren read and go to museums, and he used to take them on trips to New York for that purpose.

Mr. Hrbek was a 50-year member of the Foresters of America and also belong to the Sokols club of North Bergen.

In 1902, he married Frieda Mikolanda, a Vienna-born girl, in Union City. He finally settled at 4512 Liberty Avenue, North Bergen.

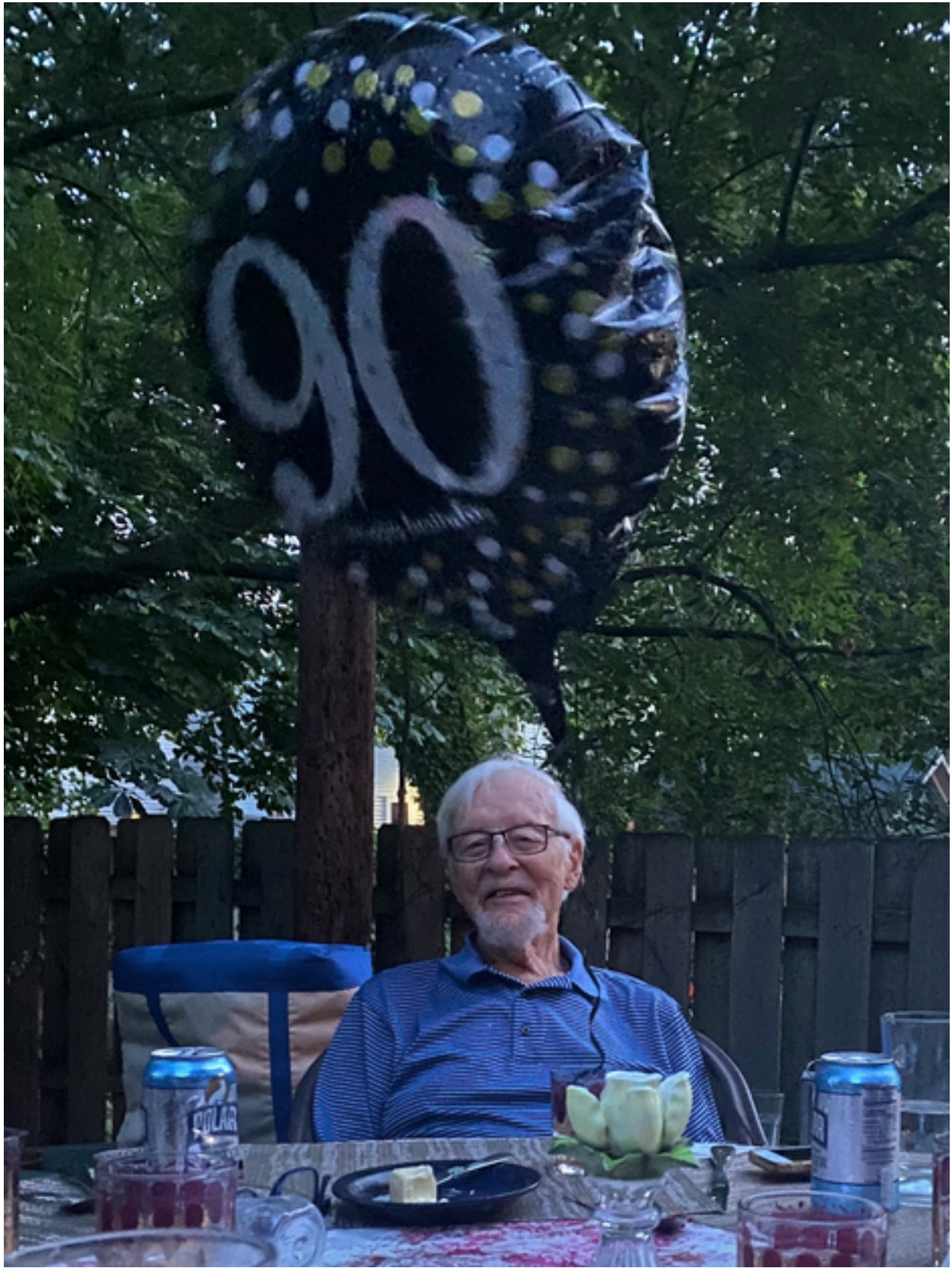
Services were held today at the Burger Funeral Home, North Bergen, with cremation in Garden State Crematory.



George and his mom.



"My son Tom gave me this shirt on my 88th birthday.... I wear it often, especially at gatherings."



June 20, 2021: George Hrbek, celebrating his 90th birthday!