

# Andover Townsman, Andover, MA

March 14, 2013

## Andover stories column

*Andover Stories*

**Norman Viehmann** Andover Historical Society

---- — This is the first of two parts.

Andover's ABC (A Better Chance) program is entering its 46th year at Andover High. It provides equal educational opportunity for exceptional disadvantaged students. Andover's ABC students are accepted as part of the community without second thoughts. It hasn't always been that way. ABC's beginnings were far from simple.

In 1956 students who lived less than one mile from Andover High School walked to school. The speed limit on Elm Street was 20 mph. All Andover telephone numbers began with GR5 (Greenleaf5). Hundreds of engineers and scientists moved their families to Andover and surrounding towns in the years following 1956 when Bell Telephone Laboratories and the Western Electric Company completed their massive facilities in North Andover. Within six years more than 10,000 were employed at the site. Raytheon also expanded.

The increased population drew more doctors, lawyers, dentists and retailers. The new families began to make an impact in their communities. Andover's first nursery school opened at the Free Christian Church in 1958, the result of efforts by two young mothers, Elaine Viehmann and Connie Durham. They hired Bernice Warshaw who directed it for more than 20 years. Foreign student programs were initiated in 1963 when a Bell Laboratories engineer, Bob Klie, organized Andover's American Field Service (AFS) chapter. Horace Seldon, minister of Free Church, resigned to found Community Change, an organization dedicated to assisting Boston area communities in addressing racial discrimination.

Back then, Jewish families who sought homes in Andover were shown properties in small selected areas. There were no, or at least very few, blacks seeking homes. Awareness of discrimination grew in the white community as men like Adam Clayton Powell, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King made headlines and appeared on magazine covers. The civil rights movement blossomed. Voices spoke out in Andover pulpits. The liberal minded began to respond to the call for equal opportunity for minorities. Members of younger families, many of them from Andover's religious communities, became proactive.

Andover's Activists

"Honey, Jane and I have decided to go to Washington to the demonstration next week" was heard in more than a few of families among the hundreds who had moved to the Andovers during the expansion of the plant in North Andover. Wives attended rallies in Washington, a few young men joined marches in the deep South. Civil rights dominated the messages from many pulpits. Accounts of meetings appeared in the local news and letters to the editor.

The Boston City Missionary Society started a summer program for children who lived in the black community at Columbia Point in South Boston. Homes in Boston suburbs volunteered to host a child for a week. The kids from 17 families in on our cul-de-sac accepted our "camper." One couple in particular clouded the air with their outward racist feelings, which were not uncommon in the summer

of '63. At that time the Andover Council of Equal Opportunity (ACEO) was organized. Under the leadership of Dick Marciano and others they sought to promote the acceptance of people of color in the community. Its active membership spanned Andover's congregations. At West Parish, Bruce Van Blair inspired the founding of REACH (Realty Equality in Andover Community Housing), which sought to develop equal opportunity apartment housing in an area by the Horn Bridge. The project was dropped when it was found that more than 100 housing units were required for financial viability. Then The Fishermen were organized to promote initiatives that would further equal opportunities for members of minorities in the area.

In 1965, Josh Miner, new director of admissions at Phillips Academy initiated efforts to found Outward Bound in the U.S. This effective program has changed the lives of more than 600,000 youth and now serves 70,000 students and teachers a year. The Fishermen provided a scholarship to Outward Bound for a Lawrence youth as part of its efforts to address inequality of opportunity in the greater Lawrence community. The support of the needs of local youth and families by dozens of non-profits, volunteer organizations and churches has become a hallmark of Merrimack Valley communities since the social awakening began with the civil rights movement in the '60s.

Andover was ripe for a well-defined program that addressed civil rights. The members of ACEO had not found a way to go beyond promoting an open housing market in Andover. The need for a way to introduce black families into the community was apparent in the fall of 1966 when a call came to Bruce Van Blair concerning a program for qualified disadvantaged high school students, "ABC."

Events originating in 1964-65 at the national level of ABC led to the inquiry about an ABC program for Andover. At that time 19 private secondary schools, including Phillips, had become hosts to some six hundred ABC students. An affiliate of the ABC, the Independent Schools Talent Search Program, publicized ABC at high schools populated by disadvantaged minority students. Their representatives provided opportunities for motivated students to apply. By 1964, six thousand qualified students had applied. There was capacity for only 600 at the 19 private schools. It was decided to introduce the ABC program to public schools such as Andover High.

Next Week: The town rallies support.

# Andover Townsman, Andover, MA

*March 21, 2013*

## A Better Chance Andover, Part II: Town rallies support

*Andover Stories*

**Norman Viehmann** Andover Historical Society

---- — This is the second of two parts

Each summer during its early years, new A Better Chance students prepared for the cultural changes that lie ahead during a two-month program at Dartmouth in Hanover, N.H. before moving on to private secondary schools. It was logical to select Hanover High for ABC's public school trial. Tom Mikula, a math instructor at Phillips Academy in Andover was selected to lead the Hanover program.

Due to the mixed racial population at Dartmouth, Hanover was adjusted to the presence of minority students. Housing them in town did not become an issue. With the Mikula family as house parents and Dartmouth students as tutors, the Hanover pilot program met expectations by June 1966. Then the Rockefeller Foundation announced a \$60,000 grant to a town that would sponsor and initiate an ABC program in its public high school. The grant would help cover the cost of providing a dormitory.

Mikula was given responsibility to enlist a community that would host the second public school ABC program. He called his minister in Andover, Bruce Van Blair, to convene a meeting where the ABC program could be introduced to the town. An invitation went out to all Andover congregations via the ministers and the rabbi to attend a meeting at West Parish Church for the creation of an Andover ABC organization.

Andover Startup — Overcoming Unspoken Prejudice

AFS organizer Bob Klie had kept in touch with efforts to educate and act on equal opportunity for minorities through members of ACEO, Bruce Van Blair and others. Klie was there at West Parish to introduce Mikula on the October night when he came to explain ABC and the Rockefeller grant to the The Fishermen and interested members from Christ, Free Christian and South churches, and Temple Israel.

Klie was elected chair. He wasted no time in organizing the initial seven member board of directors. Bill Washburn, Leonard Kent and Klie recruited an Advisory Committee of 50 prominent Andover citizens. These citizens were key to developing a broad base for financial support and for community understanding of the value of ABC to Andover students and the town as a whole. The board was expanded to include sub-committees for student selection and host family relations. Students would stay with their host family every weekend.

The board's next task was to get School Committee acceptance of 10 out-of-town students to the new high school, due to open in September 1967. Headlines in the Townsman, Eagle Tribune and the Boston Herald reveal the issues and anxieties surrounding the approval. The proposal was brought to the February 1967 meeting of the School Committee.

Perhaps fearful that the Town Meeting would not accept the program, two School Committee members who were strong supporters argued that the board should exercise its legal right and approve acceptance

of the program's ten out-of-town students. Chairman Louis Galbiati advised that ABC's ultimate success in Andover depended on acceptance by the townspeople. He was joined by two other members of the committee who together voted to not consider the motion, and to recommend that it be brought to Town Meeting for approval.

Although a disappointment to many supporters, this may have been a very wise decision. Dr. Galbiati obtained consent of the school board to present its recommendation in Town Meeting that the town accept the program. Articles appeared in the Boston papers heralding Andover's opportunity to set an example to other Massachusetts towns in accepting a program that was an effective way to address racism. The ABC Board and Advisors pulled out all stops to promote the program townwide.

### Town Meeting Vote

Town Meeting met on Saturday, March 11, 1967. Attendance during the morning session when the money articles were discussed was 530. Attendance increased significantly by the time the ABC article came to the floor in the afternoon. The town attorney explained that the article was for opinion only, that the authority to approve the added students rested with the School Committee. Galbiati told the meeting that the School Committee was unanimous in support of the program and explained the board's belief in the importance of the town having the opportunity to express its feeling. The teachers association supported the program. The town manager spoke in support. Many prominent individuals and former town officials spoke in support

Then someone rose and moved that the vote be by secret ballot. Emotions surfaced as the discussion of this motion went on. It was argued that people needed to feel free of the pressure they had received from the pulpits. Fears of rejection motivated many supporters. Finally the question was moved. Groans were heard when the secret ballot motion passed. Finally a loud cheer rose with grateful surprise when the one-sided vote to accept was announced, 532 to 119. A day later the Boston Herald announced, "Andover 4 to 1 For ABC".

NOTE: The initial board of directors: Bob Klie, chairman; Ms. Max Russell, vice chairwoman; Jan Scheerer, secretary; Joyce Andrews, treasurer; James Simmons, Way and Means; William Washburn, Community Relations; and Norman Viehmann, Building Committee.