

WALTER KIRWIN
Interviewed by
Horace Sheldon
on February 2, 2001

ABSTRACT:

Walter Kirwin chaired the ARCO Foundation for a number of years until his retirement. This experience in the role of charitable foundations was followed by his work as the Executive of the Volunteer Center of Los Angeles, a non-profit agency, which he served for five years. This interview shares his views about the mission and functioning of both kinds of organizations. The interviewer, Horace Sheldon, also had been involved in voluntarism and corporations. As Director of Industrial Relations for Ford Motor Company, he was involved in the beginnings and operation of the national Center for Voluntary Action, following the request of former President, Richard Nixon. He is now himself a volunteer and in that capacity, conducts oral history interviews for the California Social Welfare Archives, located in the University of Southern California School of Social Work.

SHELDON: Until recently you were head of the Volunteer Center of Los Angeles.

How did you come to occupy this important role in Los Angeles?

KIRWIN: Thank you. First of all, let me say it's an honor for me to be asked to do this interview. I hope that the information that I can provide will be something that is valuable to you all.

I was born in New York City and spent my early years in the suburbs of New York. I went to Iona College in New Rochelle and graduated in 1960 and entered the Marine Corps. I spent four years in the Marine Corps. When I got out in 1964, I joined what was then the Atlantic Refining Company in Philadelphia; one of the companies that I had written to while I was in the service. So, I went to work in the City of Philadelphia. Several years later, there was a merger between the Atlantic Refining Company and Richfield Oil Corporation. That's what brought me to the West Coast. The headquarters

of ARCO were moved from the East to Los Angeles, and I moved along with the position.

In the early part of my career - I spent 31 years with Arco - the first half of my career was in retail marketing, then several years after I came out here, I had the opportunity to go into public relations. During the time that I was in public relations, I became manager of external affairs, and in that capacity, I headed up and helped put together, along with my staff, Arco's Volunteer Employee Program, which turned out to be a real model of corporate volunteerism. I think that part of the reason for that is that certainly, my staff had it organized very well. There was recognition, there were interesting activities, we adopted the first school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, which again was a model. We had lots of employees to "time off" from their work to go and work with the kids in the school. Subsequent to that, there were other activities that the volunteers got involved in. But there were several thousand employees involved in that project.

SHELDON: That was a real model of corporate involvement in community.

KIRWIN: It really was. The reason for that - the biggest part of the reason for that -- was it had the support of management. Robert Anderson, who at the time was the President of Arco, or Chairman of Arco, and Thornton Bradshaw, who was the President, was really very supportive of all this activity. That really goes a long way. When you see these men involved with community, employees say, "Well I want to do these things, too." Following their example, Watt Cook, who was the President, was involved with Junior Achievement. He was another individual who gave a lot of support and encouragement to employees to participate in activities outside the office. One of the

advantages to the employees was that many of them got the chance to leave our workspace and travel for the company and get out and see new things. A lot of employees didn't get that opportunity. About this period of time during the week when they were able to leave their work space and go out and do something entirely different, many supervisors told me that their employees who were involved with the volunteer program, came back with a lot more enthusiasm for their job.

SHELDON: This is very impressive in terms of corporate involvement. You mean Arco set up an arrangement in which an individual employee would, in effect, take time off from his regular day to devote himself to volunteering?

KIRWIN: That's correct. There were a certain number of hours, and this goes back a little bit, but I'm going to say, several hours a month, at least an hour a week. A lot of them would do it on their lunch hour. They'd go down to the school from about 11:00 o'clock to 1:00 o'clock and wouldn't take their lunch hour, just to do it. But this was a release-time activity that had the blessings of management. It really worked out very well.

One of the other things that we were able to do that was helpful was that an employee who spent a certain number of hours a month as a volunteer was able to get money from the ARCO foundation that would match his hours. There was a program where employees would get a matching grant if they gave \$1,000 to a school or an organization where they volunteered; they'd get a matching grant. But this was the first time, to my knowledge, that there was a monetary award to an organization for an employee's time. It was a certain amount of hours; I forget what that was. Maybe five to

ten hours. I'm not sure. There was a criterion, and it had to be certified in writing by the organization. So that was very helpful.

SHELDON: That's very impressive.

KIRWIN: It was really an excellent program. We had, again, a lot of support from management, and a lot of money was put into the program. One of the reasons that this was done was because Robert Anderson and Thornton Bradshaw felt that it was a way to get foundation money into the community in a way that you couldn't do otherwise. In other words, the employee was involved in a project - not necessarily at school, because there were other projects they were involved in all across the country. That was one way to get money into those organizations that wouldn't have been possible by just having a direct grant from a foundation. The recognition program was worth it too. We had dinners, we had.....

SHELDON: Tell us about that recognition program.

KIRWIN: Each one of the subsidiary companies would have their own recognition luncheon. The volunteers would be recognized through a vote from community leaders. Then the winners from those organizations, from each one of those subsidiary companies, of which there were 8 or 10, would be invited to Los Angeles. They would bring their spouse and have a big dinner here with the chairman. It really showed that ARCO recognized their contribution to the community. I don't know if, what with the acquisition of British Petroleum, those things exist anymore, but for awhile, there.....

SHELDON: I was going to ask you what happened to that program.

KIRWIN: At certain levels there was a requirement that management people would be involved in community affairs as part of their performance analysis. And that was

somebody, somebody whom I don't know if you know about, who was instrumental in getting that done. Have you heard of Ruth March?

SHELDON: No.

KIRWIN: Well, Ruth was a citizen of Los Angeles who had a lot to do with volunteers. One of the things she also did was to actually get the United Nations to do an International Year of the Volunteer, although she didn't know it at the time. She has since passed away. You might want to take a look at the library and the USC School of Social Work, because the archives there have her materials about this program.

SHELDON: Oh, really?

KIRWIN: Yes, and I had it at the Volunteer Center, and I said, "Look,

SHELDON: It is to the California Social Welfare Archive that this tape will go.

KIRWIN: Okay. Well, if you look down there, you'll find these books that talk about her involvement and what she did to promote volunteerism. I understand from the brief reading I did of it, she was instrumental in getting corporations to have volunteer activity on the part of the employees as part of their performance review. So you might want to take a look at that. Her name was Ruth March.

SHELDON: Ruth March.

KIRWIN: Yes. In fact, she is going to be honored in an upcoming event. I don't know what the date is, but I could find out and let you know. She has a sister here who is going to accept the award. They are going to give her a posthumous award.

Anyway, that was a brief history of my activities at ARCO. That program lasted. It was still in effect when I retired in 1995. It was still a very strong program then. I think that.....

SHELDON: I've lost track of what happened, but British Petroleum merged or took over?

KIRWIN: Yes, it was really a takeover. The problem at the time was that ARCO was very dependent on the price of crude oil for its profitability. Everything else was okay. They'd make money a little bit here, a little bit there. You'd lose a little bit here, a little bit there. Pipe lines, transportation, retail. But the real crux of the problem was the low price of crude. There just was not enough there to sustain the organization. So Mike Fallen, who was then President, let it be known that he thought it would be a good idea if somebody came in and took over, that it would be lucrative. I guess British Petroleum was one of the organizations that looked at it. They had previously acquired AMCO, and BP was the partner of ARCO. There was an association there, a familiarity that made it work. So, they've taken over, but the sad thing is, as with other organizations whose headquarters are no longer in Los Angeles, there's not too much interest in the part of the company to

SHELDON: That's happened so often.

KIRWIN: Yes, I don't want to disparage them. BP is headquartered in London, but organizations like Bank of America, headquartered in San Francisco, and other organizations that have left. ARCO was the last Fortune 500 company that was headquartered in Los Angeles.

SHELDON: Is that right?

KIRWIN: With that, went the Foundation. There's no more ARCO Foundation. At one time, the ARCO Foundation - and I don't know if this number is right - but I believe that it was responsible for grants totaling - the budget was about \$30 million dollars. That's a

lot of money, and it's no longer there. British Petroleum's interest now is in other places. Now, they may still do some things here, and I don't want to disparage them. They may do some good things. I think they support the Music Center and some other things. But the kinds of things that a local organization, a locally-based organization can do, are not going to get done.

SHELDON: I know exactly what you mean from my background at Ford. We had an active community relations program. We did a little bit of the kind of thing you're talking about in terms of recognizing participation by other people. We had a community service awards program called the "Bell Ringer Program." We had a bell that was presented to winners, and the major Ford communities where we had plants around here.

Corporate involvement can be very important.

KIRWIN: I think Ford Foundation still supports some programs. If they're not on the Board, I think they still have grants that support programs.

SHELDON: Well, that would make sense. I wouldn't be surprised at that. Now, at some point, as you said, you retired?

KIRWIN: I retired in February of 1995. I was sort of looking for something, but one thing I knew, I didn't want to go back downtown. I had been driving downtown for over 20 years, and I said I'm going to get off that freeway. One day I got a call. The director of the Volunteers Center of Los Angeles was retiring, and I was asked if I would be interested. I said absolutely not; I'm not going back downtown. So I went to Florida. When I came back about a month later, I got another phone call from somebody else.

SHELDON: You were an obvious person to seek out, that's for sure.

KIRWIN: Well, they said to me, "Look, you have to do this." I said, "I don't got to do anything. I'm not coming back downtown." (Laughter) "Well, would you do this?"

There was a health issue with this person, and the person retired. She said, "We need to look for somebody. Will you come and mind the store for a couple of months?" I said, "Sure, I'll do that." She said, "We'll pay you what we're paying him. Just come in and watch the store." Well, I came into what was a veritable hornet's nest. There had been major money stolen. I'm not going to mention any names, or whatever, but there was a tremendous loss of funds, and certain employees were involved. It was just a total mess. At one point, when I realized that the organization was living off its assets - now the Board was aware of this and warned me when I came in, but I don't think they realized how bad it was. It came very close to shutting the doors of an organization that had been in existence since 1946.

SHELDON: Now that gets to what I was just going to ask you - a little bit about the early growth, the origin of the Volunteer Action Center of Los Angeles. Way back then it started?

KIRWIN: Yes, it started in 1946. There were several women involved. I don't know their names and I don't know - I think there are probably people around who remember that, but I'm not sure. I'll tell you who might, although she didn't like me too much - is Emita Armi. She's on the board of this Archives.

SHELDON: Oh really.

KIRWIN: She is. But I think that Emita thought that I was too tough. What happened was that I had - I had taken up the problems with the Board and the Finance Committee. We just had to do something. I was the 53rd employee. There were 52 employee when I

got there. I cut it to 25. I think they felt that I shouldn't have done that. I said, "Look, this is a business. I'm sorry, but if you want the organization, this is what going to have to be done. We have to cut expenses, because I need to know." I was not a financial person, but I said to the bookkeeper, "I want to know what's coming in every month and what's going out. I need to balance that."

SHELDON: What was the source of income?

KIRWIN: Well, the source of income was government funds from Corporation for National Service that ran the "corporation programs." These were Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, RSVP - those were government programs. But then the core volunteer program was funded by money from corporations. We held events and there were board members who provided funds. There were various sources, let's say, contributions. But what I had to do was balance these and at the same time, try to run an organization that was supposed to serve the community.

SHELDON: Having started way back in the 1940s with the leadership of these women you mentioned, it continued on, then, during that long period of time till we came to what I think of as the "modern era of coordinated volunteer activity" in the 60s and 70s. I wonder if in that early period, Los Angeles must have been unusual in having such a coordinated approach.

KIRWIN: It's my understanding that the Volunteer Center was one of the first in the nation.

SHELDON: Yes, I would think so.

KIRWIN: This is what I think happened, but I'm not sure. For what it's worth, the women who started it were the wisest of judges. What they did was that they wanted to

start community service programs. Now this is probably years later, but that was part of what the Volunteer Center did. But it was one of the earliest volunteer centers in the country.

With the help of the board and the finance committee, the situation straightened itself out and got back on a financial footing that was sound. About two years ago, one of the board members from IBM suggested that there were too many volunteer centers in the County of Los Angeles. There were five in the County of Los Angeles.

SHELDON: That's a point I was going to raise with you. So there were five centers in outlying areas, plus Los Angeles, itself. What did you do? Did you coordinate those and bring them together?

KIRWIN: The situation was that it was difficult to do business, because nobody knew who was who. The public didn't know the difference between us and the next guy. There was one in the Valley; there was one in Long Beach, one in Torrance, one in Pasadena. We all got along, but we were always stepping on each other's toes. The problem was - what the IBM guy, Bill Brown, said, and he was right. He said, "You know, we can't be funding all these places. We need a merger to take place." Well, the merger that took place was between the Volunteer Center of Los Angeles and the Volunteer Center of the Assistance League, which was based in Panorama City. They were really bigger than we were. One of the things was that it was guaranteed employment for these people. That was what I was always worried about every month. It got increasingly difficult to raise money, especially with these corporations leaving the area. We had many organizations. To tell you the truth, over a period of time prior to my arrival, there was not the nurturing of the funding sources that there should have been. I

mean, if your organization depends on people to give you money, you need to schmooze with them or you're just not going to get the money. They ignored the funders.

SHELDON: You can't do that.

KIRWIN: And the mission kind of got muddy. There were people who said there was too much involvement with the corporate donors.

SHELDON: I think, at some point - maybe right now - we ought to know a little bit for the record about just how the Volunteer Center served to stimulate or direct or coordinate volunteer activities. Even after you came in and had to cut the staff so much, you still had a sizable staff. What did all these people do? How were you organized?

KIRWIN: Each one of the programs had a manager. In other words, the three corporation programs, each one of the corporation programs like Foster Grandparents had a manager and maybe an assistant, depending on how much work there was. In fact, both the Grandparent Program and Senior Companion Program had two people. Eventually, RSVP had two people, also. So there were six right there. Then we had outlying offices. There was an office in South Central, an office on the Westside and an office in East L.A.

SHELDON: To some extent, then, the Voluntary Action Center and the Volunteer Center of Los Angeles operated certain programs?

KIRWIN: Yes.

SHELDON: I see.

KIRWIN: Some of these programs, the ones that were operated by these managers in the different locations around the city, stimulated the voluntary effort. They each had their own advisory committee, and what they could do is look into opportunities for people to volunteer. In other words, if you walked into the office and said, "I'd like to

volunteer,” it was a program where first of all, you’d be interviewed to find out what your interests were, and then you were given the opportunity to observe several venues so that you didn’t go to one and say, “I don’t like this” and never come back. If you don’t like what you’re doing, come back and see us. We’ll give you something else.

SHELDON: That gets to exactly what I was curious about. Back in the early days of the National Center for Voluntary Action, I found that people had, I thought, the mistaken impression that what it was all about was simply recruiting volunteers. I remember I used to keep harping on the point that well, yes, you have to recruit volunteers, but to make it work, we have to give a lot of attention to structure and programs so that volunteers can be utilized effectively. We had lots of stories about well-intended, interested people - competent people - showing up at some agency, wanting to volunteer and then disappearing into the woodwork because they didn't have any way to connect the individual with an actual-going program.

KIRWIN: Well, one of the things we did at the Volunteer Center was to have a training program, periodically, for non-profits: How to deal with volunteers, because, they would abuse the volunteer, and especially, young people. We had high school students, college students, who would come or call and say, "I would like to do something." They'd go to someplace, and someone would hand them a broom. You had to nurture the volunteer, give them meaningful activities or the volunteer experience was going to be disastrous. That was one of the things that we really took pride in: the fact that we were able to create, as you said, structure, so that the volunteers would feel that they were doing something worthwhile.

SHELDON: So then you served as the head of the Volunteer Center for how long?

KIRWIN: I was there exactly five years.

SHELDON: Five years, okay.

KIRWIN: I was only going to be there for two months (laughter). By the time the holidays came, things were such a mess, I couldn't leave. So they said to me, "Would you like to stay?" I said, "Well, I guess I've created such a mess here, I had better stay until it gets straightened out."

SHELDON: That's a rather unusual recruiting technique they used, but it worked (laughing).

KIRWIN: Actually, I think they had somebody. They had a couple they were interested in, but they said, "If you want the job, it's yours." I was the kind of person who didn't want to leave in the middle of something. I didn't initially particularly think that this merger was the thing to do, but I went along with it, knowing full well that I was going to lose my job. I mean, I didn't lose my job, but there was no role for me, anymore. One of the things I said was that they need to keep the name, "Volunteer Center of Los Angeles." Now, the other volunteer centers don't seem to be interested in merging. A lot of it has to do with individual needs such as board members who don't want to be part of a larger organization. They would be against it: directors who want to direct their own organization. I felt that way too. I was their number two person, all of a sudden. It's different. I have to be able to control things, or I'm not interested in doing them.

At any rate, what happened was that with the help of the board and the finance committee, everything got straightened out. Then they did the merger, and still I was struggling with the commute. It was an hour and fifteen minutes in the morning and again going back.

SHELDON: That was a real sacrifice on your part.

KIRWIN: I was compensated well. As a matter of fact, in the last couple of years, I was only working four days a week. I took a cut in salary as a part of the cost-cutting process. I said, "I don't need to be here five days a week." Once I got matters straightened out, it would run itself. You don't need to be there. If you need to be there, you have the wrong people. That's my philosophy. If I can't leave and have things run as if I were there, then I have the wrong people there.

But one of the things that I was thinking about - I made a speech one time, years ago, to DOVIA: Directors of Volunteers in Agencies - and talked about the changing face of volunteerism.

SHELDON: Tell us a little about that changing face of volunteerism. That's important.

KIRWIN: It's a lot different. Well, first of all, it was different in the different cities. We had a person on the Westside, a person in South Central, a person in East L.A. We're talking about different populations. Angela Edwards, who was the director of the West L.A. Center, had women in the afternoon who didn't have anything else to do. I'm not being sexist or racist, but the people in South Central didn't have the time. You had to create programs for them that they could walk in maybe as a family. The Kellogg Foundation came up with some funding for a program we ran, called Family Matters. They operated out of the Third and Alvarado neighborhood. There's a school down there that is very close to our original offices. It was getting families together to do volunteer work out of there. You couldn't do it otherwise. You had mothers and fathers working. Then, in East L.A., the Latino community there is entirely different than the community in South Central. You had all these different things. You had the changing face of the

volunteer. It's very different than it was 20 years ago or even 15 years ago, because of the changing population.

SHELDON: So, you're saying that the change was the direct product of the community makeup change rather than anything intrinsic to the process of the volunteers?

KIRWIN: Yes, the people in the Hispanic community make wonderful volunteers, but they tended to volunteer in their own communities back home in a different way than they do here. I don't know whether it's de-personalized in L.A., but they would take care of themselves and take care of their families and each other back in what we used to call "the old country." But here they were disassociated from the community. They really don't feel as if they have any ownership. It's a problem if you don't feel any ownership - and this only my opinion, but it's an opinion that's based upon observation of what I think is true. They didn't feel that they needed to participate in any community activities or help the community in any way. On the other hand, if one of their neighbors needed something, there was no question: they would babysit or whatever, but not a combined effort. This Kellogg Foundation funding for the Family Matters program is still going on. It's really wonderful. We had, at one time, about 100 families in East Los Angeles, doing projects on weekends.

So, that's different. The other difference is that people don't have as much free time as they once had. They're always involved in a lot of work.

SHELDON: I believe that is a fundamental fact of life these days. People are so busy with everything. I think a big change in our society started at the end of World War II with so many women going into the work force for the first time. The War ended, and of

course there was a process of women being attracted to the experience they had had working, whether they were Rosie the Riveter or working as a file clerk or whatever.

KIRWIN: But they were out of the house.

SHELDON: They were out of the house. I remember discussing this with some people a long time ago. I was making the point that this process of more women getting involved in the work place was going to mushroom and build on itself. If Sally Smith, next door, is working and earning enough money to supplement the family income appreciably, the lady down the street may be under pressure to do the same thing. Gradually, over time, of course, all that happened. Society pays a price for that, because people are so busy with their work-a-day lives. Something's gotta give.

KIRWIN: Another myth was that the Baby Boomers are going to be retiring, taking early retirement, and they'll be available for volunteer activities. Not true.

SHELDON: Not true?

KIRWIN: Not true, because they didn't save any money, so they can't retire.

SHELDON: That is an absolute fact.

KIRWIN: They have to work. I know that. I know people who are my age and say, "I can't retire. I don't have any money. My wife's working, I'm working." They don't have time to volunteer.

SHELDON: They have to keep on working as long as they can.

KIRWIN: That's right; they'll always work. So there are a lot of forces that are acting against the volunteer effort.

SHELDON: That's a fine little fact. That's too bad.

KIRWIN: And it's too bad about the corporate volunteer programs - there are some, but not as many as there should be. I'm a believer that business corporation, of whatever size, are members of the community and need to give back to the community. One of the ways they can get back to the community, if they don't give funding, and many organizations can't afford to give funding, but they can let their employees work in schools. And as I said earlier on, there's a tremendous opportunity that companies don't take advantage of: to give their employees an opportunity to do something that's going to make them feel better not only about themselves, but about the kind of job they have to do every day.

SHELDON: That is the way it works in a company that is intelligent about it and has a view toward understanding corporate responsibility. We always preached that at Ford, and it worked up to a point. But there were always shortcomings, of course.

KIRWIN: There are many ways you can do it. We had different programs. We would - people would come to us and say, "Well, we would like to do something, but we don't know what to do." So we'd have a smorgasbord of activities. What you need to do is ask your employees what they want to do. Let them vote. Then, when they tell you what they want to do, then come back to us, and we'll set it up. We'll make arrangements for box lunches or.....

SHELDON: Rather than dictate from the top down: here's what we want our guys to do.

KIRWIN: That's one of the things that ARCO has never done. Whatever you did was fine. There were certain things, religious things, that you couldn't get involved in. If you wanted to, that's fine, but it probably wasn't going to be as significant as if you did something else, because a lot of people worked for the churches. That's a different thing.

You certainly weren't going to get any funding for it, because the Foundation had rules and regulations about what they would fund.

SHELDON: You can't dictate as to what they want to do, although, when we did it, we had the opportunity to go after that school. But when we did it, we heard about it from USC. USC has a program called - oh, I'm not going to remember the name of it right now - a joint education project. It was being run from the campus, and it was to get students in the classroom to work with elementary school kids. We said, "Well, if students can do it, why can't the boss do it?"

Well, USC now has a five-school program, working very actively with five schools in the general community near campus. They involve the faculty and all kinds of people.

KIRWIN: From the School of Social Work?

SHELDON: The School of Social Work is involved, but it's broader than that. It's under the auspices of the Senior Vice President for External Affairs, who set it up.

KIRWIN: I chaired the Board of Councilors (in the School of Social Work) for a number of years. I don't know if Frances told you that.

SHELDON: Oh, you did?

KIRWIN: I did.

SHELDON: Of the School of Social Work?

KIRWIN: Yes.

SHELDON: Is that right?

KIRWIN: During Dean Patti's administration.

SHELDON: Oh, right, I know Rino well.

KIRWIN: I used to tell him, "You need to get faculty out into the community here. You have a community that's isolated from the School." He said, "Well, what are we going to do?" We talked about it, and they finally did some things. But I was always on him for that.

SHELDON: I didn't realize that. So, you were the Chair of the Board of Councilors. Yes, Marilyn (Flynn, Dean of the School of Social Work) has a Board of Councilors. I've gone to their meetings a couple of times.

KIRWIN: I had to leave while I was on the Board. I think they wanted me off. I'd been on too long. I did it for about three years. But then, when I left ARCO and got involved with the Volunteer Center, I really didn't have time.

SHELDON: So, when you were at ARCO is when you became Chairman of the Board?

KIRWIN: Yes, it was probably 1990 to 1993, something like that. I can't remember the years, exactly, but it was around then.

SHELDON: Certainly, your activities add up to a model for what people ought to do.

KIRWIN: Well, I was telling somebody this morning, I said, "I don't know why they want to interview me. There's a lot of people who know more about volunteerism than I do. (Laughter)

SHELDON: I believe you're contributing a wealth of observations. What could be done about this problem we were talking about a minute ago: lack of time? It's a huge challenge to our society, and volunteerism is right at the heart of what can be done about it. I guess we just have to live with the reality of this new world. There aren't that many people who can do that much.

KIRWIN: I think that the government needs to encourage businesses to make it happen. I don't know what form that would take, but I think that just like you relating your experience with Nixon and the Ford Motor Company - when somebody says, "Here's what we think we ought to do," just like this initiative that George Bush has come up with, with faith-based organizations. That's a terrific idea because these people are doing some things in the community that nobody knows about. I know about them, because I work with them. We did things with faith-based organizations that got high school students their first jobs in the summer when they were between semesters. They do an awful lot in the community and need to be supported. So I think that the government can say, "Well, it will take tax dollars to do this. Let's give people a tax break. If you do this, we'll do this." There's some of that now. You can deduct your mileage and any expenses can be deducted for taxes, but that's not a big enough carrot to get people to do something like that. You need a bigger inducement than that. You need to give some kind of a tax credit or something. Just as I mentioned earlier that the ARCO Foundation provides funding to an organization - and I think it's up to \$1,000. "Whatever you're going to do, we'll give you \$1,000, if you go out and do that." Well, maybe they could get a tax break. If you can give 100 hours a year - whatever the number is. I didn't have a plan about this, but...and the President says, "Here's what I want you to do," or "Here's what I want corporations to do;" that goes a long way. That's certainly not the only answer, but I think that would go a long way to alleviate the shortage. It's kind of a forced volunteerism, but you need an incentive today.

SHELDON: Yes, you do.

KIRWIN: That didn't exist at some point in the past.

SHELDON: There needs to be a coming of grips with the new reality that we're faced with as times change. The one thing that doesn't change is change. You have such wonderful insights. One of the important contributions you've made in this interview is to address the role of the business community and the corporation and what they can do. That's just great. Just before we wrap up, how do you see the current situation in the Volunteer Center of Los Angeles? Is it going to continue doing the same things?

KIRWIN: Oh, I think it's a strong organization. They now have about 100 employees. They have a stable financial base, because they are supported by the Assistance League of Southern California, which is a very strong organization.

SHELDON: Assistance League? I see. After three years here, I'm still getting acquainted with the Los Angeles community. There's a lot of stuff I don't know about.

KIRWIN: The Assistance League is made up of or was begun by the wives of wealthy entertainment industry people, and they did good things for the community. They fed the poor, and so on. But they grew to where now they have day care, they have counseling sessions, and they run this volunteer center. But, they're all separate programs. The Volunteer Center has its own director. They do the same programs that we did, but there's no duplication of effort. Everybody has his or her own organization of it. The Director of the Volunteer Center of Greater Orange County got all the Volunteer Centers of Orange County together and made one organization. That certainly made things a lot simpler.

SHELDON: So there are a number of separately-organized Volunteer Center by individual communities?

KIRWIN: What standards are there for a volunteer center? Up until - now there are.

One of the things we did at our convention was to put together some standards as to what a volunteer had to do before it could be called a volunteer center. But it's not franchised like it ought to be. It's not like somebody says, "You use the name of 'Volunteer Center' if you meet these standards." But it's coming, it's coming. Part of the problem is that a lot of organizations do volunteer work like Volunteer Center of Los Angeles, and they call themselves something else that doesn't have the word, "volunteer" in it...

SHELDON: I know there's a diversity of nomenclature.

KIRWIN: ...And if you try to change the name, it's like stirring up a storm, because they want it that way, and that's the way it's going to be.

SHELDON: I can imagine. Well, Walter, are there other observations that occur to you that deserve to be recorded for all times?

KIRWIN: I think the Volunteer Centers need the guidance of knowledgeable community people. One of the problems that all boards have, to my knowledge, is that you get community people who sit on a board because they think it's a prestigious thing to do, not contributive, so you don't get the right people. You get people who are not knowledgeable about finances, and that's why an organization gets in trouble. The director comes in or the controller, or whoever it is, and views the books, and people don't know what they're looking at. They don't know how to read a financial statement. All of a sudden, they're in trouble. They wonder how they got in trouble. Because they weren't the right people. That is a difficulty, and I would like to see people who come on a board educated. One of the things I try to do is have a CPA come in and say, "Here's what you have to be looking for. You have to be looking for problems." On Saturday, I'd

bring the whole board in. "Here's what....." I think that more corporate people ought to be involved in these things, and they're not. It started up in the 80s, and now it's coming back down again, and it's a shame, because even your experience - and you provided a valuable, extremely valuable service in setting up the Voluntary Action organization that today is much, much stronger. It's an organization that might not have existed if you hadn't gotten involved.

SHELDON: I'm so encouraged to hear you bringing me up to date on how the Centers of Light took over (from the National voluntary Action Committee) and are continuing and doing the job they're doing. I had really lost touch with that.

KIRWIN: They're underfunded, though. They need more funding.

SHELDON: What is the basic funding? Corporate contributions or what for the Points of Lights?

KIRWIN: Corporate contributions as well as monies that come from the Corporation for National Service, which, I guess, is directly funded by Congress. But the corporation doesn't give as much money as they give to some of their other projects.

SHELDON: Well, Walter, I think this has been extremely valuable.

KIRWIN: I thank you for the opportunity.

SHELDON: We thank you for taking the time to come to this interview and the tape will be turned over - the archives actually are housed down at the USC School of Social Work. There's a special unit there.

KIRWIN: In the library, there?

SHELDON: Yes, I think it's in the library.

KIRWIN: Well, hopefully, somebody will listen to it.

SHELDON: They have a way of using these. I certainly hope so, because I think you've made some very significant observations from your experience and should be a very valuable addition to the Archives. Thank you so much.