

IN MEMORIAM

Larry Scheff

Presented on Tuesday, May 29, 2007, at Larry Scheff's Memorial Service, held at the Oriental Institute, Breasted Hall, by Terry Friedman and Catherine Dueñas, Volunteer Coordinators.

We are honored to share with you our memories of an exceptional person, a true Renaissance man, Dr. Lawrence Scheff, who sadly lost his valiant battle with cancer in May of this year. Larry, as his colleagues and friends knew him, distinguished himself in his professional life as a dentist and in his volunteer service at both the Oriental Institute and The Field Museum.

It will be hard to imagine a Volunteer Day without Larry Scheff in the second row aisle seat listening attentively to the guest speaker. Larry came to these monthly programs to listen, to learn, and to spend time with old friends in a place he truly held dear to his heart, the Oriental Institute. Despite his frail health in recent years, he continued to remain involved with the Oriental Institute and the Volunteer Program. With great pride and enthusiasm, he continued to bring friends, guests, and out of town visitors to view the collection with him.

Larry's thirst for knowledge and intellectual curiosity never took a back seat. He was an exemplary life-long learner with an inquisitive mind, insightful perspectives, and a thorough mastery of numerous subjects including archaeology, classical music, Shakespeare, and opera to name a few.

Larry began his volunteer service at the Institute in 1987 as a Tuesday afternoon museum docent, and quickly became a Docent Captain. He was an excellent teacher and mentor to not only the Tuesday afternoon docents, but to the entire Volunteer Program as a whole. He enjoyed sharing his wealth of knowledge with everyone. Over the past twenty years, Larry donated scores of interesting articles as well as hundreds of books to our Docent Library's permanent collection.

He was an avid supporter of the program and always on the lookout to recruit new volunteers and to make them feel welcome.

In the mid-nineties, when the museum closed for renovation and climate control, Larry continued to forge ahead with his docent activities through the Outreach Program. With his trusty slide projector in hand, Larry would give amazing slide presentations about the Oriental Institute's collection. He especially enjoyed discussing ancient Egypt. Larry would come alive in front of an audience. He exuded enthusiasm and people would hang on his every word. Larry continued the tradition of sharing his love of learning throughout the remainder of his life.

We would be remiss if we did not share with you some personal memories of Larry,



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not in the context of the Oriental Institute, but as a prominent dentist in the Chicago area community. Larry made a visit to the dentist “a pain-free-experience” and there was always an interesting educational component added to the mix with good music and interesting current event topics that peaked his interest.

Dr. Scheff was also an upstanding role model throughout the civil rights movement, extending his practice to people of all backgrounds, and refusing to recommend patients to practitioners who did not serve everyone equally. His professionalism, personal empathy, and social justice ethic resonated throughout not only his practice, but also the Chicago area communities he served.

Larry’s enthusiasm to continue learning and teaching never stopped. When he and his wife, Dorothy, moved to the retirement community at Montgomery Place, Larry took charge of the Speakers’ Bureau. He would line up fascinating speakers such as professors and scholars from the University of Chicago, the Oriental Institute, and The Field Museum. In this way both he and Dorothy and the Montgomery Place residents were continuing their education and expanding their horizons by hearing great lectures on a wide variety of topics.

Then there was the archaeologist in the dentist, who decided to go on a dig to Ashkelon, Israel, with Professor Larry Stager from Harvard. It was at Ashkelon that Larry discovered his dental training and his dental tools were a valuable asset in getting at brittle and delicate artifacts on the excavation. He would collect and donate old dental tools, which would be used to extract tiny things like the bones of a dog fetus. However, Larry did not limit his dental training to working on people and on dogs. He went on to something even bigger. He would use his dental skills on the dinosaur remains at The Field Museum. He would work on cleaning their teeth and bones with the same care and dexterity that he used on his human patients.

But there was much more to Dr. Lawrence Scheff according to Bob Cantu, Docent Coordinator / Human Resources at The Field Museum. Larry’s delightful sense of humor and wit could make the Egyptian exhibition come to life for the visitor, making you feel as though you were there at the time the pyramids were being built. Bob enjoyed when Larry would stop by his office to see him whenever he was at The Field Museum. Even when he was in a wheel chair, Larry would say to Bob: “Don’t worry I’ll be back when I get better.” This was the beauty of Larry; he was an eternal optimist with a positive attitude about everything.

These recent years have not always been easy for Dorothy and Larry. Despite many health setbacks, they never took “NO” for an answer. Larry was a fighter until the end. He would often say, “I’m not giving up. I’m coming back to the Oriental Institute and The Field Museum to give tours as long as I can.” And he did! We will always remember Larry as a dynamic docent with an iron-clad will to survive and a heart of pure gold.
