

LETTING LIFE UNFOLD

By A. James Fuller & Rebecca Blair '80



Gene Lausch '60

“Life isn’t a straight line from who you are at twenty or twenty-two; life is an unfolding. Let your life unfold. Maybe its worth will be revealed in different ways.” Gene Lausch advises today’s students to let their lives unfold with an air of confidence because that is exactly what he has done. The Indiana Central graduate, class of 1960, has found that life takes different turns and leads us down different paths, but, as he puts it, “I learned in my thirties that I needed to do something meaningful, that I wanted to do something to make our society a better place.” So, the young lawyer threw himself into a career of public service, and now hopes that his efforts working in state and local government helped “set a tone where we made wise decisions.”



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Born in 1938, Lausch grew up in University Heights, the neighborhood surrounding Indiana Central College, and he often went to sporting events on campus. His parents each graduated from Indiana Central: Catherine Kurtz '35 and Ralph Lausch '36. His family also attended the University Heights Evangelical United Brethren Church and, since the school was affiliated with the church, this connection added to his familiarity with the college. When Gene was twelve, his family left Indianapolis, moving to a farm near Kokomo that was owned by his grandfather. He graduated from high school five years later and had to decide what to do next. His parents were devout Christians and they stressed the importance of education, urging him to pursue higher education.

Drawn to science, Lausch strongly considered attending Purdue (which enjoyed the reputation as being the best college for science study in the state, thanks to the high quality of its agricultural and engineering programs) instead of Indiana Central College. Lausch was also interested in track, but he didn't rate his athletic skills good enough to run track at a large

state university like Purdue. He successfully competed for a small academic scholarship at Indiana to help pay for tuition. After a comprehensive consideration of what both institutions had to offer, his choice was clear: he went to Indiana Central where he joined the debate team during his freshman year and met the challenges posed by the courses that he took in various disciplines.

At first, Lausch wanted to major in chemistry, in keeping with his scientific bent, but he found laboratory work to be uninteresting, and he began to consider the possibility of changing his major. After taking some aptitude tests that gave inconclusive results, Lausch decided to move to the social sciences to prepare for law school. His decision resulted in part from a private exchange in which Dr. Robert Brooker (see pp. 138–141) offered Lausch a candid assessment of his prospects as a scientist. Describing Brooker as a man who was “unconcerned about doing things in the expected way, both crusty and compassionate,” Lausch remains grateful to the chemistry professor for being honest with him. After this interchange, he finalized his decision to change his major to sociology. Knowing that he did not need to specialize in any particular discipline to go to law school, Lausch took a broad range of courses in the liberal arts including significant coursework in history, philosophy, and sociology.

Looking back, he says that several Indiana Central professors greatly influenced him, although he didn't always recognize their guidance at the time. Mr. Marvin Henricks, who taught sociology, became an important mentor and later a good friend. Dr. Cramer and Dr. St. Clair also served as significant role models. Henricks taught in Lausch's major academic discipline, which meant that Gene had a lot of opportunity to engage Henricks in the classroom. Lausch had only one course with professor Robert McBride, who taught philosophy. Nevertheless, McBride still contributed greatly to the young man's intellectual development. Lausch was a member of the Philosophy Club, which met weekly, often in the basement of McBride's home near campus. He remembers spending many happy hours in that setting, discussing books and issues and struggling with the great questions of life. Whether advising him honestly about his coursework, teaching him in class, or mentoring him in extracurricular activities, Lausch abundantly credits the college faculty who “helped me become who I am.”

As a student, Gene Lausch was aware of the school's motto, “Education for Service,” but did not really appreciate its deeper



implications at the time. As he remembers, “I admired those who would take on the emotional burdens of others and would sacrifice conventional marks of success (status, money, influence) to pursue careers that would directly help others, but even so, I recognized that I was not selfless enough to do so myself.” He was not affected directly by the service activities on campus or those carried on by students and faculty in the community. Rather, he believes he was influenced more by the “penumbra of values that surrounded and supported the service value.” By this, he means the underlying values of the college community, values that he associates “with the University (from my time there) and that I see as characteristic of the people at the University and the institution itself when I return.” Among these values, he would include “a regard for the primary importance of each human person (irrespective of race, gender, or economic class), a sense of basic optimism about the future, a belief that the world can be made better by our efforts, a sense that we have some responsibility for others, and a belief that if people are ‘given a hand up’ that they can do much for themselves.”

Lausch observes that he would not have identified those campus values so insightfully as a student, but he sees them more clearly now. Further, he recognizes that the

cluster of core service values at the University of Indianapolis were themselves created in a particular context, rooted in the college’s Christian heritage. After all, “University-imparted values are likely related to outlook.” And that outlook includes the “commendable quality of earnestness” that “marks many graduates of Indiana Central/University of Indianapolis.” That earnest outlook was often lodged in the Christian faith and sense of mission that so many Central students shared.

His experiences as a student included serving on the Student Court, which meted out discipline on campus, a presage for his future career. And like so many others who met their spouse at college, Lausch met Carolyn, the young woman who became his wife. While he shared many positive experiences during his college days, Lausch also critiqued the school. In his senior colloquium, he expressed a number of criticisms as well as his overall disappointment with what he identified as the institution’s “inferiority complex.” Today, he still thinks that many of his criticisms were valid and he has continued to do his part to help strengthen the University by serving on the Alumni Board and chairing the committee that planned the centennial celebration in 2002.

Following graduation in 1960, Lausch traveled to Ann Arbor and the law school at the University of Michigan. Michigan, a top-flight law school with an “intensely academic” climate, as Lausch recalls, offered him a very different higher education environment. He chose to go to law school because he was attracted to the rigor of the program and the access to opportunities for service that he thought a law degree might give him. After earning his law degree, he returned to Indiana, where he clerked for an Indiana Supreme Court Justice, worked for a private law firm, and volunteered in Richard Lugar’s campaign for the office of Mayor of Indianapolis. Lugar won the election, and thereafter his administration began working toward consolidation of the city and country governance and administrative structures, an agenda that would have implications for Lausch’s career in public service.

In 1968, Lausch accepted a position working for the Metropolitan Planning Department, a county-wide agency planning and zoning agency that had been established a decade before. Because the MPD was not a city agency, Mayor Lugar did not have direct control of its work. With the adoption of the “Unigov” legislation (effective January 1, 1970), the MPD became part of the newly created Department of Metropolitan Development (DMD). After the reorganization, DMD was charged with administering an exceptionally broad range of development activities. Unlike the way development planning is handled in most US cities, where several different agencies may carry out overlapping tasks, the Indianapolis DMD is a department that deals with everything from abandoned buildings to zoning, and therefore plays a large role in shaping the future of the city. As a result, development planning in the city of Indianapolis has tended to be more focused and coordinated. In the later 1990s, the Department had a staff of over 160 persons and a budget exceeding \$40,000,000.

As part of the Unigov reorganization, Lausch was asked to head the Code Enforcement Division of the DMD. Later, he would be promoted to serve as deputy director, a position that he held until he was named manager of Regulatory Affairs for the city in 1992. In 1998, Mayor Stephen Goldsmith appointed Lausch to be director of development, a position he held until the opposition party won the mayor’s office and, as an appointed official, he was replaced in 2000. Since that time he has worked as a consultant, offering services to state and local governments around the nation in the area of metropolitan development.

Gene Lausch entered government work after a number of years in the legal field. In his thirties, he “realized that I wouldn’t be happy with just any kind of law,” and this understanding led him to think of using his law degree to make a difference for others. He sees his work in metropolitan develop-



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ment as a career of service, since he believes it was “important to people,” benefiting them in a variety of ways. The creation and implementation of development policy is a complex process that includes urban planning, regulatory policies, zoning and housing issues, economic development, and a myriad of other matters. His legal background prepared him for the task of drafting statutes and ordinances, including building and drainage codes. In Regulatory Affairs, Lausch was responsible for analyzing “existing and proposed municipal regulations for the City of Indianapolis for the Regulatory Study Commission (RSC).” The RSC was supposed to “eliminate unneeded business and development regulations and simplify what citizens must do to meet needed regulations.”

In his six years as manager of Regulatory Affairs, Lausch facilitated the RSC mission to make numerous important changes, ranging from “opening up the taxi industry to new entrepreneurs” to “reducing the number of required business licenses and rationalizing the remaining businesses licenses” to the elimination of the municipal dog license. In his two years as director of development, he administered his old department, assuming responsibility for “comprehensive planning, development regulations and permits, some economic

development activities, enforcement of development ordinances,” and many other tasks, including zoning administration and the redevelopment of areas in economic decline. Economic development remained a constant issue throughout Lausch’s career in government office. He worked hard to strike a balance between the need to promote economic growth and specific community considerations, such as historic preservation and social concerns about matters ranging from safety to racial issues. Whenever he encountered difficulties resolving a problem, Lausch returned to his objective scientific inclinations, depending upon empirical data to make the solution clear to all concerned.

Lausch also strove to put a human face on the development office and its activities. While his empirical approach intended to arrive at the best solution for the greatest number of concerned parties, he also tried to make his office more interactive with the citizens of Indianapolis and Marion County. He often reminded those working in his office that the department was “not planning for the community, but planning with the community.” In Lausch’s experience, “fact gathering and principled analysis are only the first two steps in coming to a final decision. Listening and consultation with others typically follows; most decisions are not made solo. But having a good grasp of ‘the facts’ and the benefit of a careful analysis gives one a leg up in talking or negotiating with others.”

He believes the essential human values he carried with him from Indiana Central have been reflected in his work, prompting him to express his gratitude by working on behalf of his alma mater. Lausch has served as president of the Alumni Association and as a member of the Centennial Committee. But this work for the college represents just one recent example of his community service efforts and ethos. He defines service as “being helpful to one’s fellow man,” and, in that sense, both his personal and professional work constitutes a life of service. Throughout his years in government, he tried to “treat people with dignity and respect,” and did his part to “give people a fair shake.” Looking back at his career, he hopes he helped set a tone, a climate, in which “we made wise decisions.”

Truly, for Gene Lausch, life has not followed a straight line. His journey has taken him along several different vocational paths, requiring him to change directions more than once. As a student, he changed his major from chemistry to sociology. As a young man in his thirties, he changed his career from law to public service. While he has worked with dedication in each role he has filled, doing his part to make good choices, he also has come to recognize the value of “letting life unfold” and enjoying the rich experiences it has brought, even as he strove to make a difference by making the world around him a better place.

— *Sease Award* ¹ 1993

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- A (p. 74) Gene Lausch with Stephen Goldsmith, Mayor of Indianapolis (1999). Photograph provided by Gene Lausch used with his permission.
- B (p. 75) The Philosophy Club from 1960 edition of *The Oracle* yearbook (p. 39). Gene Lausch on back row, fourth from right; Dr. Robert McBride on front row at right. Photograph used with permission of the Frederick D. Hill Archives, University of Indianapolis.
- C (p. 76) Gene Lausch with his successor Carolyn Coleman (ca. 1999). Provided by Gene Lausch used with his permission.
- D (p. 77) Gene Lausch with colleagues being given an award by Harold Rominger (1999). Photograph provided by Gene Lausch used with his permission.
- E (p. 77) Gene Lausch and Carolyn France (his future wife), taken from the Oct. 1966 “Brown County Day” issue of the *Reflector* newspaper; Photograph used with permission of the Frederick D. Hill Archives, University of Indianapolis.