

THIS ISSUE

FEATURES

NEWS

CLASS NOTES

DEPARTMENTS

MAIN

CURRENT ISSUE

ARCHIVES

WRITE TO US

SUBMIT CLASS NOTE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUBMIT STORY IDEA

CONTACT US

"WE KNEW WE COULD HELP"

BY JONI MOTHS MUELLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HILLARY SCHWAB

It started with a note. Marquette was hosting a reception in Washington, D.C., and local alumna Jacqueline Lewis and her husband, Robert, were invited. "We knew we had to attend," says Jackie, Arts '60. "That's when we found out that something was planned for students here, that Father Tim O'Brien and the university wanted to build an academic center in Washington, D.C. We knew we could help."

That was in 1994 and the Lewises could not imagine how important their response would be to Marquette. They couldn't guess it would result in a permanent home for a congressional internship program on Capitol Hill, one that would bring more than 1,600 students into the halls of Congress to work. Or that this academic program would later become the Les Aspin Center for Government and reach beyond the United States,



growing to include a program welcoming members of Parliament, cabinet officials and non-governmental executives from six African nations to this country to learn democratic ideals and processes to instill in their home governments. The Lewises were not alone — very few people knew what Marquette was trying to build nearly 1,000 miles away from its Milwaukee campus.

TEACHING A CLASS on the U.S. Congress on Marquette's campus through lectures, reading assignments and an occasional guest speaker struck Father O'Brien as slightly absurd. In 1988 the adjunct professor of American government decided it was time to inject some reality and began taking students to Washington, D.C., for a summer session to actually experience Congress at work. There was no comparison. They lived in the city where the political decisions and votes counted every day become headlines and national policy. They worked as interns in the offices of senators and representatives. They complemented that with a full class schedule, exploring topics from interest group politics to urban social issues.

"We didn't really realize how rewarding it would be for us to be involved with the Aspin Center but that was part of Father O'Brien's vision all along, the networking that occurs between Marquette's current students and alumni."

"The enormous value to our students was obvious early on and the program became highly popular," says Father O'Brien, "so much so that in 1993 I leased housing from Georgetown University and began a full-semester program in addition to the summer program. Then I met Jackie and Bob and began plans for a full-time center. From the beginning they were imaginative, energetic and generous in helping shop for real estate and meet zoning requirements and myriad obstacles in building a center in D.C. At every step of that long journey, they were there with me."

The Lewises say they had no trouble seeing the potential of a center. "Father O'Brien is such a visionary, and we tuned into his vision right away of bringing students here to learn about public policy and public service in the city where so much of it happens," Jackie says. "We knew where the university could find properties that would place students at the center of every-thing going on in the Capitol, and we wanted Marquette to have the very best."

Marquette purchased the property at 502 E. Capitol St. on Capitol Hill — that's four blocks from the U.S. Capitol and the National Mall. Then the Lewises turned their attention to a student residence. They picked a multiunit apartment house just around the corner from the Aspin Center site.

"Bob and I bought that building," Jackie says. "We said we would lease it back to the university and when we had it paid off, we would make it a gift to Marquette." Last fall the Lewises presented that building to the university. Their gift has made Marquette's the lone university-sponsored congressional internship program able to boast operating both an academic center and student residence on Capitol Hill. Student-interns can walk to their offices in the Congressional Office Building in five or six minutes.

The Lewises stay closely connected to the Aspin Center. They invite every class of interns — nearly 100 students annually — into their home for a get-acquainted dinner at the start of the term. When the Africa Program participants arrive in this country, and there have been 300 so far, a first stop is the Lewises' dining room, where they share a welcoming meal.

"It means a lot to the students and the Africans to be invited into someone's home. For the Africans, in particular, I think it gives them support and confidence during their time in our country," Jackie says. "We didn't really realize how rewarding it would be for us to be involved with the Aspin Center," Bob says, "but that was part of Father O'Brien's vision all along, the networking that occurs between Marquette's current students and alumni. From what we see, the Aspin Center internship program is often a life-altering, career-altering experience for students and it's great to be involved in that. We hope Marquette alums in other cities around the country will recognize the value of networking like this and begin reconnecting with the university in whatever way they can to help students."



Jackie and Bob Lewises' St. Bernard loves the attention showered on her by Aspin Center interns (left to right) Fred Ballenger, Michelle Blaschke, Melanie Baier, Peter Prigge, Evelyn Rodriguez and David Franklin

NET EXTRAS

- [Les Aspin Center](#)
-
-

[← BACK TO PREVIOUS](#)

 Printer Friendly

 E-mail to a Friend