

Park Tower Profile

Barbara Buell

by Bob Shamo



The other day, I sat down with Barbara Buell to talk about her life and work here in Chicago. Like many of our residents, Barbara is Chicago-bred, in her case, “West Side Irish.” After raising a family in far-flung parts of the country, she returned to Chicago and embarked on a varied and fascinating career.

Barbara likes to say that curiosity and eagerness trump résumés — that while some of her generation prepared for careers, others simply looked for jobs. Her own jobs, upon returning to Chicago, were first as a Spanish teacher in an elementary parochial school; then in a variety of teaching positions up to and including, briefly, a large, Midwestern university.

Her final university level job, though, was at a downtown school specializing in business education, where she was associate dean of the evening school and — ironically, considering her earlier remarks — taught career development and résumé writing.

Then, following a successful stint as admissions director at a Catholic all-boys high school, Barbara joined the **Chicago Panel on School Policy** as associate

director, a few years later becoming its executive director.

The Panel was an independent research team that produced reports analyzing school policies and describing how, by further developing those policies, outcomes could be markedly improved. These reports were funded by private and corporate foundations. Barbara is pleased to note they found wide acceptance in the Chicago Public Schools, where she met regularly with superintendents Paul Vallas and — as he was rising through the ranks — Arnie Duncan.

Sensing an impending shift by her funding partners — away from independent research to projects with immediate and measurable results — Barbara closed down the Chicago Panel in 2005. But not, she reports with satisfaction, until the Panel’s projects had been finished, her employees had new jobs, and a new tenant signed up for the work space.


Barbara continues to be interested in innovative solutions to tough questions. She has founded her own company, **Issues and Answers**, where as “executive tutor” she offers assistance in strategic planning, performance evaluation, leadership support, and writing and editing. As a grant writer, etc., her company has raised more than \$10 million for clients.

A client in whom she has taken a special interest is the **Latino Policy Forum**. The Forum has led Barbara into new areas, including affordable housing and immigration reform. And, full circle, it brings her back to Spanish, her major in college and the subject she was first hired to teach, some 30 years ago.

Barbara has had a long association with Park Tower. Her mother moved in while it was still an apartment building and stayed when it became a condo association. Barbara herself moved here 18 years ago, exchanging the original one-bedroom for an 01 unit, the second bedroom of which is now her office, Murphy bed and all.

A three-year remodeling project is finally finished. It was not without its challenges, and Barbara is particularly appreciative of management’s support in some contentious moments. As a matter of fact, she admires the fairness and professionalism of board and staff, especially given the sheer number and variety of issues they address every day.

Some things never change, though. Barbara remembers her mother, even then, pondering as to why there was never an elevator when she needed one!

Barbara’s website is www.issues-and-answers.com 

Holiday Fund

Remember Our Employees This Holiday Season

by William Kay, with Scout

They mop and vacuum our floors, fix our leaky faucets and clogged drains, keep the heat on in winter and the A/C going in the summer. They take our trash out, replace the air filters & light bulbs. They patch and paint damaged walls, shampoo stained carpets.

They work on budgets, plan and manage projects. They help safeguard our homes, our investment. They are a friendly face to greet you when you come home and a helpful hand when you need one. They quite literally keep Park Tower humming.

Scout and I have worked in dozens of condo buildings throughout our fair city over the years and I can confidently say that we here at Park Tower have one of the most professional, dedicated, hard-working building management teams in Chicago.

This holiday season, please generously contribute to our PTCA Holiday Fund, and let’s show our appreciation for all that our Park Tower Management and Staff do throughout the year to make us safe and comfortable in our homes. 