



GALLERY OF DISTINGUISHED CITIZENS INDUCTEE 2009

STEVE OREL, a native of Los Angeles, California, was born on December 20, 1953. While living in Los Angeles, he began his community and civic service as an organizer for the National Lawyers Guild, helping to establish the Peoples College of Law, a progressive, non-profit, community-run law school in Los Angeles.

At age 26, he moved to Birmingham, where he became an adult educator and found his calling as founder of the World of Opportunity (WOO), a non-profit, free adult education school located in the Gate City area of Birmingham, with the motto "Teaching to and learning from the whole person."

WOO was to students what a food pantry is to the homeless. The difference is that WOO offered nourishment to the mind and spirit. Students who had dropped out of school, been expelled or who had interrupted their educational experience for other reasons, could attend WOO and take GED, computer, AutoCAD, or Certified Nurse Aide classes. The quality of the education was exceptional. Many of the students left the program to enter college or were hired for good paying jobs. This fresh start transforms the lives of the students by equipping them with skills that boost their self-confidence and provide a renewed sense of purpose for their lives. This incredible transformation impacts the students, their families and the community at large. Teenagers and adults who had been relegated to poverty and despair become productive citizens brimming with hope for the future.

For his extraordinary leadership and outstanding community service, Mr. Orel earned numerous awards and recognitions including the Southern Hero Award from SouthernLINC Wireless; the 2006 Library Champion from the Jefferson County Public Library Association and was honored as one of the 25 top Good Small Schools by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Steve Orel passed away at age 52 in July 2007.