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OACAC director celebrates forty years

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When Carl Rosenkranz first came to southwest Missouri, it was as a volunteer who wanted to fight poverty.

The mission became his career.

Tuesday, Rosenkranz celebrates his 40th anniversary as a paid staff member of the Ozarks Area Community Action Corporation.

"Looking back, everything fell into place," he told the News-Leader Friday. "Fate dealt me a pretty good hand."

Rosenkranz, 66, says he has no plans to retire. "I'm going to keep going until whenever."

Gail Rusch, OACAC fiscal officer, said Rosenkranz is a great boss.

"He's always been friendly and personable, always patient and willing to listen," she said. "He has a lot of integrity, and a lot of care for the people we serve. He transfers that to the people he supervises. A lot of people here are like family."

Community action agencies were created in 1965 as part of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.

The idea was to get federal money to local communities, which would oversee the anti-poverty programs.

Rosenkranz came to Springfield's OACAC in 1970 as a VISTA volunteer, which had previously rotated him through training assignments in Colorado and on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Springfield's OACAC assigned him to work in Webster County. After the volunteer stint ended, he got a job with the agency, working in adult education.

In three short years he became the executive director.

Rosenkranz said in the four decades he's served OACAC, he's seen a lot of growth in the agency. He remembers when the budget was about \$2 million. Today the agency has a \$31 million budget, employs 600 people and provides services to 57,000 people living in 10 counties.

Rosenkranz oversees seven programs that

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help low-income people: Family Planning, Foster Grandparents, Head Start, Housing Assistance, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance, Neighborhood Centers and Weatherization.

Rosenkranz said OACAC has started some programs that proved so successful other agencies eventually took them over.

Adult Basic Education, which helps adults study for their GED exams, is now funded by the state, he said. A home health care program the agency started was eventually taken over by St. John's Hospital.

One of the biggest challenges of his job is deciphering funding issues and compliance issues when working with federal guidelines.

While Community Action Agencies were started with federal money, today they must be adept at leveraging other government money as well as private money.

"Really good days are when we get a grant awarded, or when we do some good for some individuals who are really in desperate straits," said Rosenkranz.

"The way I look at it is we are all here for a purpose. It is all about the people we serve: those who need assistance, people who may not have any where else to go. It's really a team effort here."

Want to Say Happy Anniversary?

The public is invited to attend an anniversary celebration for Carl Rosenkranz from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday at OACAC, 215 S. Barnes Ave. in Springfield.

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