



Interview with...

Doug Ross

SCOPE volunteer

Tell us about yourself. Where are you from? What brought you here? What are you doing in the community?

I grew up in Pennsylvania in a suburb of Philadelphia. I went to college at Lebanon Valley College and received my Master's Degree in Experimental Psychology at Bowling Green. I later went on to receive my PhD. at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in Research Psychology.

I taught at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) as a Professor of Psychology for 22 years. During my career as a professor, I was also a union leader for 10 years with the Association of Pennsylvania State Colleges and University Faculties (APSCUF), was chair of my department for 8 years, and was an Acting Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics for a year and a half. Throughout my career, it was always important to me to be active in my community. This is why I have been so attracted to SCOPE and why SCOPE's work is so relevant to me.

I retired early in 1992 and moved to the San Francisco Bay Area where I studied Organizational Development; I lived there for 11 years. I worked as an organizational development consultant and opened my own practice called Collaborative Solutions. I served both corporate clients and non-profit organizations including Birkenstock Sandals, an art gallery, a high tech start up, and the Novato, CA Chamber of Commerce.

I moved to Sarasota in 2001 because my sons' growing families could no longer afford to fly to San Francisco to visit me and I ultimately wanted to be closer to them. Three live in Pennsylvania and one in Florida. Needless to say, the warm weather played a large part in my decision to move to Sarasota. Since I have lived here, I have worked in a consulting capacity with Mote Marine Laboratory, the Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County (EDC), Polk Community College in Winter Haven and Lakeland, and several others. Besides consulting, I've taught part-time for University of Phoenix, Keiser University, and am currently teaching at Argosy University Online.

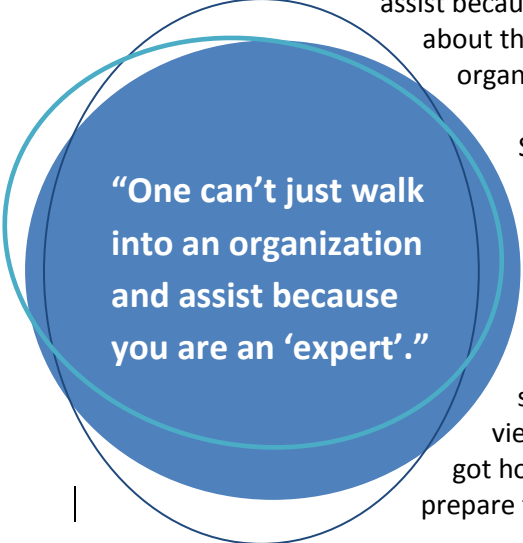
I have been a member of the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce and have continued to stay connected to the EDC where I served as Coordinator and later Co-chair of the Life and Environmental Sciences Cluster for several years, and facilitated the clusters' strategic plans. I've been a member of Open Network Sarasota, The Young Entrepreneur of Sarasota (YES), and The Lakewood Ranch Business Alliance.

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Community involvement has always been a part of me.”

How did you begin working with SCOPE and what are you currently doing with SCOPE?

When I consult, one of the first things I do is to learn the culture, for example I was a volunteer at Mote before I served as facilitator of their 1993 strategic plan. One can't just walk into an organization and assist because you are an 'expert'. I feel it's necessary to understand and learn about them so that whatever changes are to be adopted fit the organization's culture.



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So with SCOPE, I attended Aging: The Possibilities meetings, joined a study group on housing, and then attended the Winter Forums on Aging. It's hard to separate the influence of Winter Forums from SCOPE itself because it is the mission and processes of SCOPE that has drawn me in. I've always been attracted to organizations that support community development because the attention to engaging people as a part of the process seems tantamount for success. Looking at the process of aging and the needs to change the views of our culture here has been a perfect connector for me. I really got hooked in by being a part of the Institute for the Ages Task Force as we prepare to form the mission and business plan.

SCOPE released a report *Aging: The Possibilities* earlier this year. As a big picture, the report helped to consolidate separate themes and efforts. The Winter Forums' then brought the expertise of luminaries here to share their knowledge, each adding clarity to the emerging mission of an Institute focusing on wisdom of research and experience – a think and do tank. I couldn't resist my urges to become part of it.

My role now is to convene citizens that are interested in continuing the conversation as a follow-up to the 2009 Winter Forum on Aging. This group is focused on helping to push the Institute for the Ages forward.

You have been helping to convene a group of citizens interested in making the Institute for the Ages a reality in Sarasota. What inspires you to do this?

In the Institute for the Ages Task Force the question was, “what are we going to do about it?” I felt that the only thing missing from the Winter Forums on Aging was that there wasn't much happening between them. When we started talking about an Institute for the Ages, I saw that there was a way and a need to keep this topic in front of our faces and to continue to engage participants between the once-a-year Forums. If we are going to change attitudes within our community, we needed a process to keep the people involved who would be the real change agents of the future.

We thought that the people that voiced interest in doing more than just attending the forum would get their own groups together to discuss these issues, and from this we would attract future leaders. This institute is a big deal for Sarasota and we have to keep people involved ... we need them ... we need the community support.

What is your dream for the Institute for the Ages in particular and the community as a whole?

Right now, I feel that Sarasota's biggest assets are the beaches and arts and culture.

I think that as we make the kind of medical discoveries that will keep people alive longer, the old idea of retiring in one's mid-60's is outdated. A lot of my dreams are hinged on the workforce. People are drawn here for the beaches and our cultural climate, but the "boomers" are going to want to be more active and contribute in ways that matter because they want to or they need to (See Marc Freedman's argument about the Encore Careers). My dream is to be a part of this. I really can't imagine my own life without active engagement in the business and professional life of Sarasota.

I also love the idea of the think/do tank inherent in the Institute for the Ages. I always imagined being a part of a think tank. There is a void here that was partially filled by the EDC and their particular interest in bringing diverse businesses to Sarasota. The most recent County Strategic Plan identifies the study of, and possibilities related to, our aging population as one of three major themes.

The growth and influence of The Ringling College of Art and Design has added much. The work of Gene Cohen, M.D., Ph.D., and a Winter Forum favorite, suggests that continued artistic activity continues to keep brain structures functioning at high levels as we age, so there is a confluence for us. I believe that our Institute offers Sarasota additional branding beyond beaches, leisure, arts and culture. A major organization exploring something that is going to be of importance to many other communities throughout the world for the next 20 – 25 years is very exciting. Communities all over the USA are aging. We have a head start and can offer much leadership on issues surrounding "the possibilities". I want to be part of it. It matters.

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"to connect and inspire citizens to create a better community"

To learn more about the Institute for the Ages, visit www.scopexcel.org

To volunteer with SCOPE, call us at (941) 365-8751 or email scope@scopexcel.org

Interview by Kim Weaver, SCOPE Staff, 7-17-09