



Interview with...

Jim Wolfson

SCOPE volunteer

What brought you to this area? I moved to Sarasota 6 years ago from Boston. We came for the weather, the beach, the cultural life, and the overall ambiance. We found very welcoming and friendly people. We found a spiritual community. It feels like home.

How did you begin working with SCOPE? When I worked for the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, my office was right across the hall from SCOPE's office. I also worked out at the YMCA. One day, Tim Dutton was at the Y and introduced himself, so I began learning more about what SCOPE did. As I began to meet people in the organization, I was impressed with how bright and committed and energetic they were. It seemed like an exciting place. I still can't explain to my friends what SCOPE is, but what is so remarkable is that by building networks, creating something out of nothing, they make our community a better place. It also demonstrates the power of communities working together from the bottom up.

What was your professional life like? I spent my career in human resources specializing in organizational development, human resource development, and management training. I worked for the Ringling Museum, but most of my career was spent in banking.

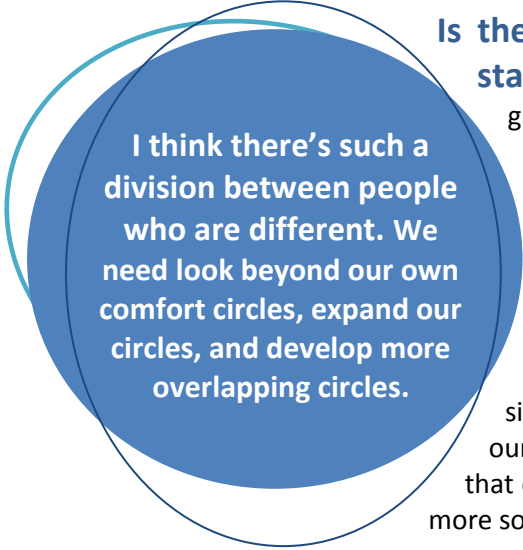
What from your life gives you faith in community? I could draw an analogy between a team and a community. In a team, the success of the team depends on the success of each and every member of the team. A community is a place that is similar to a team—it's a group of people who care about each other, support and look after each other. They try to create a sense of belonging and being able to take care of their own destiny.

What are you doing with SCOPE? At SCOPE, I've done everything from stuffing envelopes to leading an all-day retreat [for the Coalition for Inclusion and Diversity] and doing consulting [for the Grassroots Leadership Initiative]—all of which is very much in sync with my professional life. But I've also made a conscious effort to do things that I've never done professionally before. That's why I enjoy volunteering at Selby Gardens in the horticulture department. I throw mulch, plant flowers and pull weeds—and I

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barely got the grass cut when I was working! Through that volunteer role, I discovered that I love working outdoors, I love doing something physical, and I love seeing the results of my efforts each day.



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Is there anything about the place you grew up that has stayed with you?

What has stayed with me is a sense of family. I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, and my entire family—dozens of aunts, cousins, uncles, grandparents—all must have lived within a five mile radius of each other. That sense of family has stayed with us even though we're much more geographically dispersed now.

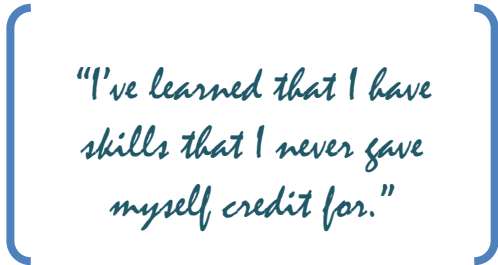
What is your hope for this community?

[Laughs] Where do you start? My hope is that it becomes more inclusionary, sustainable, peaceful, and more mutually supportive. It's similar to what I would say are global issues—but specifically, I think our community needs to take better advantage of the human resources that exist here and become less segmented, more inclusive, and a little bit more socially democratic.

I think there's such a division between seniors and people of color, or people of lower social and economic standing—people who are different. People move down here and the first thing they do is look for people like themselves. And I think that's natural, but we need to look beyond our own comfort circles, expand our circles, and develop more overlapping circles.

What have you learned through your community work?

I've learned that I have skills that I never gave myself credit for. And I've also learned that I can do new things, move in and out of new organizations, and build new relationships. That enriches my life. What you often hear from people who volunteer in their community is they want to give something back. I may be selfish but I volunteer because I *get* back: I enrich my life; I feel that I have a purpose; I make a contribution; I have new experiences, and I get inspired by the younger people that I meet. I especially like being around younger people.



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

To learn more about the Coalition for Inclusion and Diversity or Grassroots leadership Initiative, visit www.scopexcel.org

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

Interview and photo by April Doner, SCOPE Staff