

William E. Cameron

Bill Cameron, who retired from the YMCA of the USA in 2003 after a 26-year career, was regarded as one of the noteworthy interpreters of the YMCA movement for a generation of Y staff and volunteers. As a speaker, trainer and writer, he inspired pride in the movement in the hearts and minds of Y workers.

He did not start his professional YMCA career until mid-life and he began it as a CEO. At the age of 39, Bill was hired as Executive Director of the North Penn YMCA in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. For most of the preceding decade, Bill had been President of Camil Associates, a Philadelphia-based consulting corporation working for federal agencies operating anti-poverty programs. Before that, he had served as executive director of two community organizations, the Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement and the Fair Housing Council of Delaware Valley. Earlier, he was pastor of a local church.



Bill's communications abilities were recognized early by the YMCA movement. While he was leading the North Penn association, he began writing for *Perspective* magazine, which was then the official journal of the Association of Professional Directors (APD), which was later renamed the Association of YMCA Professionals. He also began service as a trainer in the YMCA of the USA's Career Development Programs.

From North Penn, Bill went on to become executive director of the Main Line Branch of the YMCA of Philadelphia and Vicinity. Then, he was hired as a field consultant by the YMCA of the USA, serving Ys in New England. After that, Bill became Senior Vice President and Management Resource Center (MRC) Director for the Philadelphia metro association, serving 11 years in that role. Under his leadership, the Philadelphia MRC created and published member service training programs that were adopted nationally. When the YMCA discontinued the MRC system, Bill finished out his career by returning to the staff of the YMCA of the USA, acting as a consultant to the Philadelphia area YMCAs he had served as MRC Director. Over the years, Bill inspired, mentored and coached many YMCA staff people. After his retirement, he continued to serve for some years as a YMCA presenter, trainer and consultant and as a researcher for YUSA and the YMCA Hall of Fame.

Throughout his career, Bill showed a determination to help YMCA leaders appreciate the importance and power of the Y mission. His occasional writings for *Perspective* grew into an every-issue column called "The Last Word." He was a keynote speaker and platform presenter at Key Leaders Conferences, CVO institutes, YMCA annual meetings, APD national and regional conferences and other gatherings of Y leaders, including pre-retirement seminars sponsored by the YMCA Retirement Fund. He

was a presenter at a host of Y career development sessions. Bill served two terms on APD's national board, including a term as national secretary.

During the later years of his career, Bill also taught a graduate course in nonprofit leadership at the University of Pennsylvania.

Bill's contributions to the YMCA movement did not go unrecognized. In 2000, he was presented with APD's Kuenzli-Hall Award, which recognized "outstanding career and professional accomplishments, especially in the development of others." The Cameron Award for Excellence in Writing, given annually to the author of the best article in *Perspective*, was named for him. A collection of his *Perspective* columns was published by APD as a book, "The Last Word" in 2003. For several years thereafter, the book was used in the YUSA Principles and Practices training program for new entrants. Bill was inducted into the YMCA Hall of Fame in 2007.

Bill was born in 1938 in Parkersburg, West Virginia. He spent most of his youth in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where he was active in the local YMCA, both as a member and as a youth department employee and resident camp counselor. An ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, he graduated from Lafayette College and the Chicago Theological Seminary.

Bill frequently referred to himself as an "explainer." Through vivid stories and imagery, he drove home the significance of the YMCA in the lives of young people and in the vitality of communities. He encouraged local volunteers and staff to take pride in their accomplishments and strengthen their efforts. He sometimes likened YMCAs to cathedrals, adding tales about the construction of the great churches of Europe. And in praising the mission-driven work of the YMCA, he invariably added the modifying phrase "when we are at our best."

Through all his communications, it's clear that Bill's mission was indeed to help create a movement where the YMCA was always at its best.