

PROFILE OF AN OSI-BALTIMORE INVESTOR: LOIS BLUM FEINBLATT

A life-long resident of Baltimore, Lois Blum Feinblatt is an alumna of Goucher College who received her Masters in Mental Health Counseling at the Johns Hopkins School of Health. Her interest in education and adoption issues was kindled soon after she graduated, when she became an adoption worker in the Baltimore City Department of Welfare and, shortly after, founded the Adoption Connection Exchange to offer support and search service. She then joined the Department of Psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, where she has been a practicing psychotherapist for over 40 years.



What originally motivated you to get involved in the community?

On the wall in my parents' home, there was a small black and white picture which they had cut out of the Baltimore Sun paper. There were two little kids on Eutaw Place manning a lemonade stand. A closer look showed my brother, Chuck, age seven, and me, age 5. Above the stand was a home-made sign that read, "Fresh Air Fund: Lemonade 5 cents." That is my first memory of getting involved in the community. I was born into two large Baltimore families. One started with an ice wagon; the other, a dairy store. Both families had lots of children but not much money. Yet they always had enough to give to their neighbors or relatives who were in need. Sharing was just a part of the families' ethos.

What are the issues that engage you most, the ones about which you are most passionate?

My greatest interest for the last decade has been public education. My family and myself, all products of the Baltimore City Public School System, feel that a fine education is the passport to a good and fulfilling life. We have used our foundation, The Lois and Irving Blum Foundation, to continue the legacy and ideals of my husband, who died at a relatively young age. In his lifetime, he fought for many causes. Always foremost in his mind were those who needed assistance to best help themselves. Our involvement in the public schools is a way of carrying on his legacy. His children and I have tried to carry on his high ideals. The Blum Mentoring Program, a highly successful program, which has helped to retain new teachers in our challenging urban setting, is an example of this.

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As a life-long resident of Maryland, how have you seen the city of Baltimore change?

I've always loved Baltimore and I have enjoyed seeing it change and grow. My second husband was Eugene Feinblatt, whose vision helped to reshape Baltimore's reinvigorated downtown. He was the Mayor's lawyer when the Inner Harbor was conceived and made into our gorgeous HarborPlace. And he helped the Stadium become a reality. It has been a thrill to go to the Harbor to see people from every ethnic group in our city mixing and enjoying the delights of our downtown. This was not the way Baltimore was when I was young.

With all that has happened to our fair city that is positive, we still have many problems. But then along comes a visionary like Dr. Andrés Alonso, who is the new CEO of Baltimore Schools. And suddenly, we know that we are on the right track to bring this most important part of Baltimore back to where it will be right for Baltimore's children.

Why did you decide to invest in OSI?

I am a firm believer in how leadership shapes any organization, our country, our family, OSI. I was fortunate to meet Diana Morris when she first moved to Baltimore and I have followed her career. Diana has the qualities of a true leader. When Mr. Soros wisely chose her to head OSI, I knew instinctively we had a combination that couldn't be beat. Of course, for the first eight years, OSI didn't need private funding. But when the appeal went out to meet Mr. Soros' challenge grant, my children and I felt a compulsion to show our support.

As someone who is clearly passionate about the Baltimore Community Fellows, how did you first become interested in them?

I am in love with visionaries and I find the Fellows to be real visionaries. There are both young and a sprinkling of older Fellows who have a vision of their own as to how they can change a little bit of our city and make an impact on the lives of those less fortunate than themselves. One wanted to pursue the idea of planning a city garden to help feed an underprivileged neighborhood with fresh vegetables. Another, to help people in conflict work their problems out through mediation instead of sticks and stones. Or, as Galen and Bridget Sampson are doing, feeding us all well at the same time they are training women who have been in prison or men who have been addicts to learn the restaurant trade. Encouraging such visions is a joy that means a great deal to me. As one of my greatest heroines, Eleanor Roosevelt said—although perhaps loosely translated, “We must give back what we owe in relation to what we have.” 