



Elmer Tropman¹

A few months before he died in February 1993, local leaders and hundreds of nonprofit executives gathered to honor Elmer Tropman on the tenth anniversary of the Forbes Fund. The Forbes Fund was his idea and he led it brilliantly. He knew that government cutbacks, "Reaganomics," would cause huge problems for agencies. He addressed this developing phenomenon in the nonprofit world with wisdom, understanding, and intellect of the highest caliber.

During the ceremony, Pittsburgh Foundation Chairman William J. Copeland announced that a new fund to aid local nonprofits would be named the Elmer J. Tropman Nonprofit Reserve Fund. Its purpose is to help local human service nonprofit agencies get bank loans to stabilize their finances or to carry them through periods when expected funding has not come through. Several foundations contributed more than \$3 million to establish the fund.

Elmer's distinguished life and career have been an important contribution to mankind, measured by the goodness and faith that have passed from his life into the lives of many others and have made the world richer because he lived.

He was blessed with such rare gifts of mind and heart and spirit, of generosity and caring wisdom, and above all, a deep love for humanity – gifts which he freely spent on others, even to the very end of his days.

As he began consulting with agencies, and working with them over the issues and concerns they had, an idea of a special fund to stabilize and energize this purpose began to take shape. This idea became the Forbes Fund, begun in 1982.

The Forbes Fund was initially created to help agencies with financial problems caused by governmental cutbacks. Its experience, however, has indicated that:

- Financial crises and the need for financial assistance are caused by many other factors. One-half of the Forbes Fund assistance was related to financial problems other than changes in government funding patterns.
- Human service agencies are operating businesses, but unlike for-profit businesses, they are precluded from arrangements that would stabilize their operations. For example, inclusion of interest charges as part of operating costs on many government contracts, limitations to establishing reserves, limited line of credit with banks. Frequently these agencies have had no place to turn for assistance.
- Financial problems of agencies are often embedded in a failure of the board of trustees to discharge their trusteeship and the limited management experience and knowledge of the executive director.

This last point crystallized something he had known for years from personal experience – that agencies needed better management.

Significant dates in the life of Elmer J. Tropman

December 3, 1912	Born in Buffalo, NY
September 1928	Entered the University of Buffalo
Spring 1932	Received A.B. from the University of Buffalo
Fall 1933-Spring 1934	Completed his first year at Harvard Law School
Fall 1934-Spring 1935	Completed Master's work in Sociology at the University of Buffalo
September 3, 1936	Married Elizabeth Ann Overfield
Fall 1936 – Winter 1940	Worked as a parole officer at Auburn Prison in Syracuse, NY
Winter 1940	Returned to Buffalo to become Acting Secretary, then Secretary of the Council of Social Agencies of Buffalo, NY
Winter 1956	Accepted the position of Executive Secretary, Health and Welfare Federation of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, Pennsylvania
Fall 1971	Selected Social Worker of the Year for Pittsburgh
March 1975	Retired as Executive Director of the Health and Welfare Planning Association
Spring 1975	Consultant to University of Pittsburgh Gerontology Program
Fall 1975	Joined the Pittsburgh Foundation as a consultant
July 1982	Proposed the creation of and became the director of the Forbes Fund
February 28, 1993	Died at his home in Pittsburgh

¹ Foreword by Alfred W. Wishart, Jr. to *Grandma Called It Charity*, Edited by John E. Tropman, 1999.

