



# City of Chicago



R2019-48

Office of the City Clerk

## Document Tracking Sheet

<b>Meeting Date:</b>	1/23/2019
<b>Sponsor(s):</b>	Arena (45)
<b>Type:</b>	Resolution
<b>Title:</b>	Tribute to late George N. Schmidt
<b>Committee(s) Assignment:</b>	

## **Chicago City Council Resolution Honoring the Life and Memory of George N. Schmidt**

**WHEREAS**, The members of the Mayor and Members of the City of Chicago City Council were saddened to learn of the death on Sept. 17, 2018, at age 71, of George Neil Schmidt, a Chicago teacher, journalist and union leader who fought tirelessly to improve the lives of many thousands of Chicagoans; and

**WHEREAS**, George N. Schmidt, served the people of this city for more than 50 years since his arrival as a first-generation scholarship student at the University of Chicago in 1966. A conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, he began his life of service by organizing soldiers within the GI Movement, producing underground newspapers *Vietnam GI* and *Camp News*, and counseling soldiers in military law, which he studied at DePaul University. Over the next five decades, he tirelessly worked for civil rights, workers' rights, and for quality education for the students of Chicago, particularly those suffering from poverty and racism; and

**WHEREAS**, George N. Schmidt was a brilliant English teacher, who chose to work with the neediest students in Chicago, eschewing scripted lessons for dynamic instruction ensuring that all his students could appreciate and understand literature. As a prolific writer himself, published in *Substance*, *Chicago Lawyer* and *Chicago Reader*, and in national periodicals *Learning* and *Education Week*, he taught writing with expertise, pioneering the use of Macintosh computers in the classroom and featured by Apple for his innovative teaching. A recipient of local and national awards for teaching and writing about classroom teaching, he also coached students in weight lifting and advised them in scholastic journalism; and

**WHEREAS**, knowing that unions are essential for the working class to ensure their rights and obtain economic justice, George N. Schmidt empowered his colleagues in the schools through his work in the Chicago Teachers Union as representative and leader, working for fair pay and decent working conditions for union members through contract enforcement. In addition, he was employed by the Service Employee International Union Local 73 as a researcher and CTU as director of researcher, director of school safety, and consultant. As a retiree, he remained active in the union as representative to other retirees and as a delegate to the American Federation of Teachers conventions, while continuing to mentor active teacher union members; and

**WHEREAS**, George N. Schmidt dedicated his life to improving schools and unions in Chicago, by teaching and union organizing, as well as by publishing a print newspaper and online news service to force transparency and hold accountable those in power, telling the real stories of those on the front lines, particularly those in poor and segregated neighborhoods. He was the editor of *Substance*, an independent newspaper in Chicago covering public education that he helped found in 1975. In *Substance*, George N. Schmidt broke the story of a CPS principal who was sexually abusing students, later convicted and sent to prison. He analyzed budgets and reported stories of waste and financial mismanagement. He reported on large-scale pedagogical atrocities, such as the misuse of standardized tests, which unfairly labeled students and schools and narrowed the curriculum. He regularly exposed harmful policies of privatization and racial segregation in the Chicago school system. *Substance* was in print until 2014, now remains online; and

**WHEREAS**, as an expert in Chicago schools and unions, George N. Schmidt was a regular resource for local media, such as the *Reader*, WTTW Chicago Tonight, Labor Beat and the Chicago Newsroom, which sought his commentary. His analysis was valued nationally, and he presented at conferences across the country at the American Educational Research Association, the National Save Our Schools Conference and March on Washington, and the Rogue Forum, among others. He received the University of Arizona's In Defense of Good Teaching award and was honored by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund; and

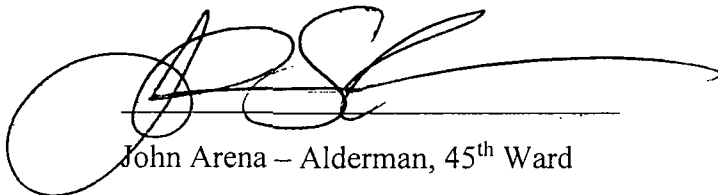
**WHEREAS**, after George N. Schmidt incorporated *Substance* in the 1990s, he joined the Portage Park Chamber of Commerce. An ardent believer in the potential of democracy, George worked within a wide variety of existing organizations, including Students for a Democratic Society in the late 1960s, the anti-racism group Sojourner Truth in the 1970s, the Illinois Board of Directors of the ACLU, and as a teacher representative in the first of Chicago's local school councils in the 1980s and 1990s. When organizations were not adequately serving those concerned, he started new groups and caucuses to push change in existing leadership; and

**WHEREAS**, George N. Schmidt was an active father, joyfully involved in his three sons' baseball at Portage Park and their education, serving regularly as Parent of the Day at the Christian Parents Co-op nursery school, and advocating for his sons and their Chicago public schools – Beaubien and O. A. Thorp elementary schools and Whitney Young M. Magnet High School. He worked with his sons and their teachers and administrators for freedom from excessive standardized testing and fully-supported academic and athletic programs. He treasured his family and taught his sons well, modeling using one's own gifts to empower others and fearlessly seeking and sharing the truth; and

**WHEREAS**, George N. Schmidt is survived by his beloved wife, Sharon; his sons Daniel, Samuel, and Joshua, and countless friends; now, therefore,

**THEREFORE**, Be It Resolved, that we, the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, assembled this 23th day of January 2019, do hereby honor the life and memory of George N. Schmidt; and

**Be It Further Resolved**, That suitable copies of this resolution be presented to the family of George N. Schmidt as a token of our sympathy and esteem.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Arena', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John Arena – Alderman, 45<sup>th</sup> Ward