

Access Press

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Minnesota's Disability



Community Newspaper

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Access Press -- Bringing News and Information to People with Disabilities since 1990

In This Issue

[Front Page](#)

[Columns](#)

[More News](#)

[At A Glance](#)

[Performances](#)

[Upcoming Events](#)

[Organizations](#)

[Back Issues](#)

[About Us](#)

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History Note

Each month of 2008, Access Press will feature an important person or persons in disability history: local, regional or national

Operation Citizenship

*State Hospital residents support
Johnson/Humphrey in 1964*

by Luther Granquist

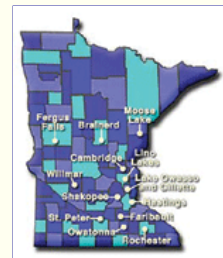
David Vail started Operation Citizenship in 1964 as part of his campaign against dehumanization in the state institutions. As medical director of the Minnesota Department of Public Welfare, Vail directed the state hospital staff to encourage voluntary patients to vote. He urged the institutions to ask candidates to speak at rallies. For those not eligible to vote, he asked the institutions to conduct a straw vote. The Lyndon Johnson/Hubert Humphrey ticket received 85% of the state hospital residents' vote, defeating Barry Goldwater and William Miller by far more than the 61% of the vote they received nationwide.

In his 1966 book *Dehumanization and the Institutional Career*, Vail noted that the 1964 election polarized liberals and conservatives along the "axis of privilege" and that the Democratic party appealed to "those without property, those in deprived and lonely circumstances, those hoping for a better day—like those in mental hospitals." But Vail did not create Operation Citizenship to support one party or another. Rather, he wanted to enable state hospital residents to play an active role in politics and to expand the civil rights movement to include persons with disabilities. ■

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David Vail



Map showing locations of state institutions

