

J. BLANTON BELK

J. Blanton Belk has spent much of his life striving to create a network of peace and understanding among the people of the world. For the past 25 years he has spent his time building Up With People, the international educational and cultural program of which he is founder, President and Chairman of the Board.

Born in Orlando, Florida, and raised in Richmond, Virginia, Belk attended Davidson College and the University of North Carolina. He served as an officer in the Pacific during World War II and navigated a PC boat, receiving a Letter of Commendation from the Secretary of the Navy.

In 1965, Belk began what was to become Up With People. Then 40 years old, he realized that the idealism and energy being demonstrated by young people could find expression in a positive and creative way. With the encouragement of such individuals as President Dwight D. Eisenhower, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and De Witt Wallace, founder of Reader's Digest, Belk incorporated Up With People in 1968 as an independent, non-profit, educational organization.

Since its inception, Up With People has been a vehicle through which young people could channel their idealism and energy while developing the global vision and leadership abilities necessary to make a contribution in an increasingly interdependent world. Every year 700 university-age students are divided into five groups, each of which travels more than 30,000 miles on two continents. They spend one year together performing musical shows, doing community service activities, living with host families in 70 to 80 cities, and learning to work cooperatively within a diverse, multi-cultural group.

During its 25 year history, Up With People has taken its musical show to 3,900 cities in 52 countries, performing for an estimated 35 million people. More than 12,000 young men and women, now living in 72 nations, have participated in this unique experiential education program and have stayed with 350,000 host families worldwide.

Honors and praise have been accorded to Belk from many corners of the world.

An editorial in a Norwegian newspaper commented, "One of the new figures of America is J. Blanton Belk, who is responsible for the Up With People program. Hunger for brotherhood, humanness, equality and freedom fills youth worldwide and expresses itself most strongly and positively through the demonstration for a new spirit - Up With People which today moves like a wave all over the globe."

Belk last year was awarded the Order of Leopold by the government of Belgium, the highest honor bestowed upon foreign citizens by that country. The award was given for "distinguished services in favor of promoting international cooperation and understanding."

In 1968, the Panamanian government awarded Belk the Order of Vasco Nunez de Balboa, also the highest honor permitted a foreigner, for his "extraordinary personal merits and as an expression of gratitude for the admirable job Up With People has done in our country."

Belk has served on numerous international boards and committees, including the International Fund for the Disabled in The Netherlands and the University of Peace in Costa Rica. He is also on the Advisory Board of the University of Arizona's Latin American Resources Center and a member of the Governor's Arizona-Mexico Commission. He has been listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Outstanding Educators of America*, and *Community Leaders and Noteworthy Americans*.

Prior to incorporating Up With People, Belk managed international public information and education programs for Moral Re-Armament (MRA), a private nonprofit organization, and worked as an aide to a U.S. Congressman.

Belk and his wife, Betty, live in Tucson, Arizona. They have two daughters, Jenny and Katie, both of whom have traveled in Up With People.