(West Haven, CT 6-20-16) Part 2 – Former city resident Hank Silverberg, now 61, recalls West Haven Community House memories, where his father, Sid Silverberg, was executive director of the agency from 1957 to 1970.

“In those days, to raise money the West Haven Community House had a huge Summer Fair. It was well known around town and the highlight of the summer for many people. For years it was held on the West Haven Green downtown.

“There was lots of food all cooked by volunteers. There were all kinds of booths and contests, many of them homemade.

“My younger brother Mitch and I set up a mini-golf course for several years in a row using old gutters, bricks and garden rims. We borrowed Dad’s precious golf clubs and a few old balls, and people would play our course at the fair.

“Mom got involved with the Fair, too, coordinating the rummage sale among other things, and helping with the booths.

“The Fair was just one Saturday in late June or July (never August). There were usually lots of entertainment, as well as on the portable bandstand that the city set up – no Gazebo in those days.

“One year in the late ‘60s – 1966 or 1967, I think – my Dad wanted to bring in better entertainment that would be a ‘big draw.’

“Someone suggested ‘The Shags,’ a group of guys who had made the pop charts with one hit. They dressed like the Beatles, or Herman’s Hermits (or Freddy and the Pace Makers) – but of course they didn’t sound as good.

“Anyway it did bring in lots of people and the Fair was a big hit and money-maker ... until the last hour.
“The Shags came rolling in in some stretch limos to the screams of thousands of local teenagers. The band got up on stage, did a few tunes including their ‘hit’ and then, well, that’s where the ‘trouble’ started. Town fathers would later call it a disaster but it was just 1960s teenagers.

“As the Shags left the stage, they were mobbed by the screaming kids. They got into their limos and tried to pull out with hundreds of kids following them.

“They took off down Main Street with hundreds of kids running after them in the middle of the street blocking traffic and giving the police fits. The fair was a big hit - made more money than usual.

“But the next year the City Council would not give the agency a permit to hold the fair on the green because of the ‘disaster.’ It was moved to the agency's back yard on Elm Street the next year where it did not do well – just breaking even.”

Too bad, too, because “raising money was a never-ending battle for Dad and agency for most of his tenure. But the Camp ran every summer and the nursery school continued and the senior citizens programs went on.

“But I can say that during Dad's tenure, The West Haven Community House, with lots of help from the Board of Directors, and eager young people who worked for little money, like me and Candy Carl, Ed Stannard, Marty Reiss, Don Altschuler and many others, went from a small agency that no one knew existed to the center of life for hundreds of people from ‘3 to 93.’

“I know this sounds like I am bragging about my Dad, but he really did lead the agency to prominence in that era.”

NOTE: Throughout 2016, the West Haven Community House is celebrating its 75th anniversary since its founding in 1941 including a free “Party on the Green” from noon to 4 p.m., on Saturday, June 18, featuring games, rides, music, face painting, vintage cars, agency history display, food trucks and more. While ‘The Shags’ will not be playing this year, the local teen group, ‘Tears Fall Down’ will. For more information, visit our web site at: www.whcommunityhouse.org.