

Lionel Rosenblatt

Bellport High School Class of 1961



Lionel Rosenblatt is a 1961 graduate of Bellport High School. In his senior year, he served as student council president and graduated as valedictorian. Lionel went on from Bellport to Harvard College where he graduated with honors in 1965.

Commencing in 1966, Lionel served as a Foreign Service officer with the State Department for 22 years, many of these years in refugee and humanitarian work. In addition to assignments in Washington, Lionel was posted to Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Thailand.

In 1975 Lionel helped establish the Interagency Task Force for Indochinese refugees, the U.S. entity responsible for the evacuation of Indochinese refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. He went on to Bangkok as Refugee Coordinator to head the primary U.S. field office for Indochinese refugees. In his years directing the U.S. refugee program in Thailand, Lionel was responsible for U.S. protection and assistance to hundreds of thousands of Indochinese refugees, as well as the resettlement in the U.S. of about 400,000 and initiating U.S. relief assistance for Cambodians fleeing the famine of 1979-80.

Ultimately, more than a million Indochinese refugees came to the U.S., greatly enriching our country. With strong leadership from the U.S., an additional half million refugees were settled in other countries around the world.

Lionel's last Foreign Service posting was as U.S. Consul General in Quebec City.

After leaving the State Department, Lionel in 1990 became president of Refugees International, the Washington-based advocacy organization. Lionel took the organization to African humanitarian problems as well as the emergency in Bosnia. In addition, Lionel broadened work with refugees in Asia, including those from Bhutan and Burma, as well as continuing protection for Indochinese refugees, especially for Hmong refugees from Laos.

In 2001 Lionel became president emeritus of Refugees International. In this capacity he focused especially on vulnerable, indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia which has continued following his retirement in 2006.

Lionel has received a number of awards, including the State Department's Rivkin award and Una Chapman Cox fellowship, a royal decoration from the government of Thailand and an honorary doctorate from Concordia University for his work on behalf of refugees. He is also the recipient of the first Interaction Julia Taft award for humanitarian accomplishment.