

# Education Foundation looks toward the future, Part 1

By: **D. Ray Smith | Historically Speaking | The Oak Ridger | December 19, 2006**

Last week we introduced the early history of the Oak Ridge Public School Education Foundation. Now we will continue that history and focus on the present efforts as well as the intended future efforts of the organization.

During the fall of 2003, Heery International, an architectural firm from Nashville, completed a study of each building at Oak Ridge High School. The study was done at no cost to the taxpayers and was funded by UT-Battelle. It provided options to transform the school into a state-of-the-art educational facility.

Momentum was building. Grand visions were beginning to be seen by more and more individuals. Nine members of the foundation board were elected in October 2003: Thom Mason, chairman, Jim McCarten, Marshall Whisnant, Lila Metcalf, secretary; Tom Clary; Alex Zucker; Bill Pardue; Ann McNees and Ron Townsend. At the next meeting,, in November 2003, ten additional board members were elected: Gerald Boyd; Edwena Crowe; Tom Southard; Ginny Basseen; Shawna Smith; Pete Craven, treasurer; Jim Campbell; Bill Biloski; Jim Helton and Bill Lenihan. The superintendent of schools and the president of the Oak Ridge Education Association served as ex-officio members, as did Tracy Larabee, school board member.

The foundation directors were divided into working committees focused on facilities and funding. The results were forthcoming in conjunction with the city. There was the \$58 million bond referendum, \$40 million that was funded by a one-half cent sales tax increase, \$17 million coming from a fundraising campaign and matching state grants (\$8 million from the foundation's efforts and \$9 million from state bonds interest free to the city). All this was done to finance the recommended renovation of Oak Ridge High School.

Other key elements in the funding were pledges of \$1 million and more from the major local government contractors UT-Battelle, Oak Ridge Associated Universities, Bechtel Jacobs Company; BWXT Y-12 and Wackenhut Services, Inc. – Oak Ridge. This demonstrated the accuracy of Billy Stair's original premise of the importance of the school system to help attract the scientists, engineers and skilled workers required to do the work needed by the government contractors in Oak Ridge as well as the private companies.

Another thing to remember is that these enormous pledges were all contingent upon the citizens of Oak Ridge passing the sales tax referendum, which was done overwhelmingly. Many other community awareness initiatives led by Jim Campbell's sub-committee for communications enabled an informed citizenry to make excellent choices. Again, something that Blankenship would have recognized as vital to such an overarching effort in the community was the stakeholder meetings. In Blankenship's words, "workshops" were conducted to educate elected officials, community leaders and other audiences of the general public.

Tim Myrick, serving as a "loaned executive" from UT-Battelle, worked steadily from March to July 2004 conducting the grassroots educational meetings needed to bring the community awareness to the needed level to support the obvious need to renovate the Oak Ridge High School and to do it soon. There is no way I can cover the extent of the tasks Myrick undertook during his tenure in this capacity, nor can I adequately express the gratitude the community owes Tim for his dedicated efforts and tremendous self-sacrifice to accomplish the goal of assuring that the community fully understood not only the "what" of the foundation's goals but also the "why" behind them. Tim Myrick is a unique and dedicated individual who supports the community in a variety of significant ways. I am proud to serve on the board of Aid to Distressed Families in Appalachian Counties with Tim and admire him greatly!

Now, after Tim's stakeholder meetings, it was getting time for the actual fundraising. Promises had been made, education was being completed, but the need to organize and actually raise some significant funds from many diverse sources rested on the foundation. Pete Craven suggested Herman and Pat Postma as a team to chair the fundraising drive for the ORHS renovation project. They agreed to join the board in October 2004 as joint fundraising chairpersons. This was an excellent choice by Pete and the foundation board and a key element in the success of the fundraising efforts.

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As readers may recall, Herman died while on vacation in Hawaii just after this was announced. Such a huge loss for Oak Ridge! Pat soon agreed to continue the effort about which both she and Herman had felt so strongly. Although still grieving her enormous loss of Herman, she quickly devoted herself to the task with Herculean effort and enormous enthusiasm. By Dec. 1, 2004, she was leading the foundation in a basic fundraising workshop titled "Where the Rubber Meets the Road, or, Fundraising 101." Again, we are reminded of Blankenship's "workshops" approach. There are so many similarities and so much parallel success. Blankenship obviously was ahead of his time and Pat Postma continues a grand tradition of excellence in communication and involvement through shared leadership.

As an aside, this leadership style so natural to Oak Ridge leaders is evident to observers of Oak Ridge from afar. James Kelley, of Apple Computers, recently spoke at both Oak Ridge Rotary Clubs on technology in education. He and I exchanged e-mails after his talks and I inquired of his perception of Oak Ridge. He commented regarding the leadership in the schools by citing both Tom Bailey and Ken Green as innovative and empowering leaders. Pat Postma can be placed in that same category of innovative and caring leaders. She is passionate about education in Oak Ridge.

The summer of 2005 saw much effort devoted to educating the public regarding the need for Oak Ridge to have a state-of-the-art high school. A huge team was forming with special efforts by all members of the foundation and others in the community were being brought into the various teams. High performance work teams were formed without any need to ever state such a thing existed or was needed. It just happened because it was the right thing to do. Yet again, can't you see the parallel with Blankenship's "workshops"?

Next week, I will discuss the current status of fundraising for the Oak Ridge schools and recent accomplishments which demonstrate their excellence.

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Pictured are, front row from left, Assistant Superintendent Ken green and oak Ridge Public Education Foundation board members Cathy Toth, Tanya Vargas, and pat Postma; second row, board members Ron Townsend and Beth Adler; third row, board member Barry Stephenson; fourth row, board members Bill Lenihan, Tom Clary, Bill Pardue and Thom Mason; fifth row, board members Jim Helton, Bill Biloski, Pete Craven, Alex Zucker, and Jim Campbell. Not pictured are board members Ann McNees, Jim McCarten and Gerald Boyd