

Oak Ridge: Science making history — Part 2

By: D. Ray Smith | Historically Speaking | The Oak Ridger | January 30, 2007



Protomet Precision Manufacturing, winner of the Fast 50 Award for being one of the fastest growing companies in Tennessee

Last week's column focused on the idea that right here in Oak Ridge, science is making history. This week continues that focus by further exploring the 20 specific items given last week as examples of the enormous impact Oak Ridge is having on the world.

Additionally, while all these new "science making history" initiatives are either already in existence or soon to be implemented, the cleanup of the Oak Ridge superfund site continues. Melton Valley cleanup, K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant demolition, the East Tennessee Technology Park's Heritage Center transition to support industrial development as well as the emerging heritage tourism destination, removal of UF₆ left over from past K-25 operations, and numerous other clean-up initiatives are also proceeding toward ultimate completion.

The Integrated Facilities Demolition Plan project being promoted to continue the cleanup and expand the scope into the Y-12 and ORNL sites proper is a major long-range initiative. This initiative is vital to the long-term viability of both the laboratory and Y-12, and Gerald Boyd is leading the effort to assure continued funding to support the effort.

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The initial recommendation was well received and caused the DOE to suggest that other sites across the country should be thinking the same way as we are in Oak Ridge. Foresight such as this will keep Oak Ridge funding sustained at the present level or may even increase it over the next several years. The reason for citing the 20 items listed last week (and I have surely not included anywhere near a comprehensive list of things that originate in Oak Ridge and impact the world) was to focus our attention on something that Billy Stair, director, ORNL Communications and External Relations, calls a unique “Moment in History” for Oak Ridge.

Billy spoke briefly of this “moment” when he recently accepted the Muddy Boot Award. He cited Gerald Boyd, DOE ORO; Jeff Wadsworth, ORNL; George Dials; Y-12; Ted Sherry, NNSA; Ron Townsend, ORAU, among others, as being key individuals at this “moment in history” in Oak Ridge — all focused on creating positive support for Oak Ridge and East Tennessee. I might add that they along with several others — whom I will not attempt to name for fear of leaving out many deserving individuals in Oak Ridge — serve to make Billy’s “Moment in History” the most significant time of change since the Manhattan Project.

Next week, with Billy’s permission, I plan to publish the entirety of his acceptance speech at the recent Muddy Boot Awards. You will see what I mean regarding his powerful “Moment in History” message. You too will agree that he is very much on target and that we are truly blessed with exceptional leadership in all major organizations in Oak Ridge right now.

Recently, Gerald Boyd presented an update on the status of DOE ORO, as did Jeff Wadsworth regarding ORNL, George Dials on Y-12, Ted Sherry on NNSA and Ron Townsend on ORAU. After his presentation to the East Tennessee Economic Council, I spoke to Gerald about the perception I had that Oak Ridge had more positive energy going for it right now than at any time since I had been here. He agreed.

We discussed the possibility of attempting to present this idea of the unique opportunities coming to Oak Ridge in a newspaper article where the technical jargon was minimized and the focus helped the general public to increase the awareness of the positive influence and teamwork being realized in Oak Ridge at present. This series is the result of that conversation.

Mayor David Bradshaw has observed that the “can-do” spirit in Oak Ridge is attracting many people, projects and businesses to Oak Ridge for the first time. Bradshaw said, “Folks from around the region are remarking to me about how well the many diverse people and businesses in Oak Ridge really work together, and are successful on key projects such as SNS, Oak Ridge High School, Methodist Medical Center and privately financed buildings at Y-12.”

The mayor continued, “These folks are coming to Oak Ridge to be a part of this success. This spirit of cooperation is not lost on our partners at the state and federal level either — they too want to invest where there is a successful team already in place.”

Jeff Bohanan of Protomet Precision Manufacturing in Bethel Valley Industrial Park says, “The Secret City is no longer a secret. Oak Ridge and the Innovation Valley are receiving national recognition in numerous business publications as a key place to conduct business. There are few other places that contain the wealth of technologies and the ability to deploy these technologies into real businesses.”

Jeff continued, “We selected this location several years ago for its strategic location. We work with high technology companies to transition prototype concepts into production products, and our decision to locate in this area has been repeatedly validated. Oak Ridge has a long history of developing technology solutions for our country.”

He concluded by saying, “The ability to deploy technologies into products generates a strong economy. Oak Ridge is now demonstrating the ability to lead in technology development and technology

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deployment via real products. This combination is key to a strong economy and our national security and we are honored to be part of the Oak Ridge mission.”

Ron Townsend sees education as one of the most important elements in Oak Ridge's future. He recently spoke to the League of Women Voters and stated, “The new high school is a turning point for Oak Ridge.” He also stated, “The Imagination Library is the greatest thing we have done as a company!” So you see, Ron is committed himself and his organization to supporting education in Oak Ridge.

No one can buy this kind of individual commitment. It comes from the heart of dedicated leaders. All we can do is support Ron's determined and highly energetic efforts. Let's be very sure each of us does that regularly! Ron and the leaders in other major contractor organizations, and DOE/NNSA leaders, are working closely together on many initiatives that help keep Oak Ridge poised for any and all opportunities coming our way. We should all be proud of their continuing vigilance and internal fortitude in what is right now most uncertain times.

John Smith Jr., chairman of Oak Ridge City Schools Board of Education, comments, “As we strive to be a world-class school system, it is important that we embrace the community and the partnerships with the scientific communities we have in Oak Ridge. It is no surprise that the relationships we have with ORNL, DOE, ORAU, and others, have resulted in one of the best science programs in the nation among public schools.”

John goes on to say, “As we continue to develop programs to educate our children, these partnerships are vital to attracting the talent we need in this community. Just recently three Oak Ridge High School students won the Team Division of the Siemens National Competition in Math, Science, and Technology.”

“The accomplishments of these students and our award-winning high school program were recently recognized by Tennessee's Senator Lamar Alexander on the floor of the United States Senate. Sen. Alexander mentioned the three Oak Ridge High School students by name and described their winning project as he sought support for legislation to fund the sciences. He used the students' project as an example of how federal funding for Oak Ridge National Laboratories and similar facilities can produce research which benefits everyone.”

John concludes by saying, “Oak Ridge High School is the flagship of the Oak Ridge Schools and is currently undergoing a significant face lift. This new facility will house a state-of-the-art science wing and laboratories for future students to learn. This multi-million dollar project would not be possible without the dedicated partnerships of the science community. Once completed, this region can boast of having a one-of-a-kind educational facility.”

In conclusion, as Billy Stair succinctly put it, “We are blessed at this moment in time to have an incredible collection of talent in Oak Ridge, Tenn.” And I might add that it is entirely possible that this particular “moment in history” may well be unsurpassed since the Manhattan Project. We can either watch the moment pass or we can collaborate with and support the key leaders of our city, our state, our elected representatives, our companies and our federal agencies as we seize the moment.

From attracting some aspect of the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, to possibly becoming the Plutonium Center of Excellence in addition to the Uranium Center of Excellence, to having the world's fastest computer, to creating leadership in nanotechnology research, other world-impacting science, and manufacturing opportunities, most of these may well come to Oak Ridge.

The key managers and leaders in our government-related industry are working together like never before and have set their sights on tremendous advances for Oak Ridge. It is not just the DOE/NNSA and the major contractors. There are many other companies in Oak Ridge who figure into the talent pool. Next week's column will attempt to list several of them.

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Let's support them at every turn! Let's be the world leaders in all areas where expertise and opportunity exists for Oak Ridge to impact the world. Let's work together for the good of all mankind!

If you have not done so already, please go to the following computer link and see the movie introducing the Spallation Neutron Source: http://www.sns.gov/multimedia/intro_2006.shtml. You may also see this movie at the American Museum of Science and Energy's Spallation Neutron Source exhibit, where a model of SNS showing the collaboration between scientific laboratories is featured.

Next week Billy Stair's "Moment in History" acceptance remarks at the recent Muddy Boot Awards will be published.