

Oak Ridge's Special "Moment in History"

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on February 6, 2007)

Over the past few months I have been very favorably impressed by presentations by Gerald Boyd – Manager of Department of Energy Oak Ridge Operations, Jeff Wadsworth – Director of Oak Ridge National Laboratory, George Dials, President and General Manager of BWXT Y-12, Ted Sherry - Manager of National Nuclear Security Administration Y-12 Site Office, and Ron Townsend – President of Oak Ridge Associated Universities. Each presentation, although uniquely focused, expressed similar ideas.

It seemed that all these leaders selected themes of recent successes and more potential opportunities for successes in the future for Oak Ridge. After seeing these presentations it began to dawn on me that Oak Ridge just might be on the cusp of phenomenal change that will truly impact all that we know and all that the world knows. I have also recently been present when Billy Stair received the Muddy Boot Award and in accepting that award Billy made reference to what he called "a special moment in history" for Oak Ridge. That put the cap on it for me. He said it well.

As a result of these seemingly parallel and complimentary events and a brief conversation with Gerald Boyd, I decided to attempt to document the perception I have formed regarding Oak Ridge community leadership and what Billy Stair has termed "A Special Moment in History for Oak Ridge." In the past two columns of *Historically Speaking* I have included many specific examples of world impacting ongoing activities in Oak Ridge.

Oak Ridge Mayor David Bradshaw, Jeff Bohanan of Protomet Precision Machining, John Smith - Chairman of the Oak Ridge City Schools Board of Education and others have been cited as they remarked concerning the world impacting nature of Oak Ridge from their perspectives. I have saved the remarks of Billy Stair until last as I think he has drawn a most significant conclusion and has painted a remarkably clear picture of Oak Ridge's unique and special opportunity at this moment in time.

Let's now enjoy the comments made by Billy Stair regarding the worldwide impacts of Oak Ridge initiatives and opportunities.

Billy Stair's comments made at the Muddy Boot Awards breakfast on December 5, 2006 immediately after being presented the award by Joe Johnson, retired University of Tennessee President:

"Thank you Joe,"

"It is a special privilege to be introduced by the only person I know at the Western Barber Shop who is able to get half price for his haircut."

"This is not a time for speeches and I don't want to make one, but there are two things I would like to share with you this morning."

"I want everybody in this room to understand that UT Battelle would not be in Oak Ridge - Billy Stair would not be in Oak Ridge - if not for Joe Johnson. Seven years ago Joe Johnson was the person who realized it was time for the University of Tennessee to come out and bid for this contract for the Oak Ridge National Laboratory."

"He made the decision to bid. Joe made the decision to choose Battelle as our partner. Joe was the person who realized what that partnership could mean for his university, our lab and to this community. And, if you would, I would like you to join me in thanking Joe Johnson" (hearty applause by all in the room).

"It is difficult for me to express how much this award means to me. I probably know as much as any in this room what it took for all the accomplishments we've talked about here today. It took a community to do that. For whatever combination of luck or circumstance, we are blessed at this moment in time to have an incredible collection of talent in Oak Ridge, Tennessee."

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"We could not possibly have better partners than Gerald Boyd and Ted Sherry, Robert Brown and my good friend John Shewairy who has helped me so much at the Department of Energy. You need to know that - that this is a special moment in working with the Department of Energy."

"Drive up Scarboro Road and look over at what George Dials and Randy Spickard and their team are doing. It is just a renaissance at Y-12. It's spectacular what they are doing. Jack Britt, if people want to know what is going on, what this partnership means at the University of Tennessee, tell them to look in the Los Angeles Times last night when they said that in the \$500M competition to build a super computer they believe it's now down to the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory and the University of California or the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the University of Tennessee."

"Lou Dunlap, Dave Bradshaw, Tom Bailey, find me one other community in the United States of 28,000 people where they could build a \$55M High School. You can't do it."

"None of these things was accomplished by a single person. It was accomplished by people like Thom Mason, Ron Townsend, Homer Fisher, Pat Postma, Tom Rogers, Jan McNally and a hundred other people in this room. And there is a message that comes out of all this. That's the thing I would like to share with you today."

"The message was in New York last week when those teams gathered from Napierville Illinois, and Austin Texas, and Boston, and the Bay Area. When they awarded the national championship at Siemens, it went to three boys from Oak Ridge High School."

"And it's the same message that Alex Fisher, Dana Christensen, Jeff Wadsworth and I are going to take when we get on a plane this afternoon and go to India."

"The time has past when we simply want to be the best in Tennessee. The day has come for this community to take our place among the very best in the world. It's our time. It's our moment."

"I can't tell you how much this award means to me. I can't tell you what a privilege it is to be a part of this community at this special moment in history and I thank you from my heart" (Another hearty round of applause as the crowd realized the import and timeliness of Billy's remarks).

Wow, do you get the excitement in Billy's remarks? Do you see the tremendous potential we have in the leaders of our community? A side note, Billy was so intent upon communicating his strong feelings regarding our "special moment in history" that he forgot his Muddy Boot Award and left it on the podium! This caused the crowd to relax and laugh along with Billy. I include this small humorous incident to indicate to you the rare excitement-charged and unique atmosphere Billy's remarks had created.

Everyone in the room seemed to realize they were experiencing a culmination of ideas, a groundswell of consensus of opinion, a wholehearted joining of minds around a concept that all could agree upon. Many of us shared the feeling that something special was happening here and now, we just could not find words to express the feeling. Billy did that for us.

I wonder still, do many of us who live or work in Oak Ridge fully realize the significance of what is happening at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, The Y-12 National Security Complex, The East Tennessee Technology Park, Oak Ridge Associated Universities, and other companies in town? I wonder do many of us really appreciate the tremendous value the many highly successful companies and their dedicated community-minded leaders bring to our city?

Companies such as Pro2Serve, NucSafe, ORTec - the first technology transfer company, that is still thriving here even though it has changed ownership several times. How about SAIC which is huge, and continues to grow, Methodist Medical Center of Oak Ridge is one of the top hospitals in the nation. And there is Remotec - another tech transfer company, now owned by Northrup Gruman and thriving in Clinton largely in the homeland security and national defense marketplaces.

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How about these two developers, R&R Properties and the Cowperwood Company? They are doing exceptionally well here. Information International is one of the best woman owned companies in America. Then there is the Washington Group International, Jacobs Engineering, Oak Ridge Tool and Engineering, Tennessee Tool and Engineering, and I know I have left out many, but you get the picture!

And I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that the University of Tennessee can make a huge difference in Oak Ridge as its relationships mature over time. Also there is Roane State Community College with a substantial campus here in the city and Pellissippi State Community College just down the road. And then there are the 96 universities forming ORAU's consortium and the untold numbers of universities from all over the world that will be represented by researchers at the Spallation Neutron Source. See the impact? See the national and even international involvement? Oak Ridge is truly a world impacting location.

Over the last few weeks we have looked at the specific successes and opportunities that Oak Ridge is experiencing and for which we have tremendous potential to impact the entire world. We are extremely blessed and are surely facing exceedingly exciting opportunities. As Billy Stair encourages us, let's truly take hold of our Moment in History! It is OUR TIME! Come on and join in as we together accomplish great science and community achievements that truly impact the entire world!

As an epilog to this series, it occurs to me that in all the past few weeks' focus on achievements and accomplishments, not once did I mention the sister city efforts with Obninsk, Russia and Naka Chi, Japan where for years exchange of ideas have been most beneficial. At the last such trip, Jim Campbell returned to tell of the experience he had when he observed Tom Row's interaction with the director of the Senior Center there.

Jim Campbell shares the following account, "The short history of Tom's role in Obninsk, Russia is one of empowerment."

"Tom was part of a sister city exchange program organized around 2001 (not sure the exact date) between what we call United Way agencies. Tom, then the chair of the United Way board, went to Obninsk with a group of Oak Ridgers, and then was a host for a Russian group that spent time here. While in Obninsk, Tom visited their "veterans" club, what we would call a senior citizens center. It was pretty much a dead place, with a few people and no budget to speak of. Tom built a relationship with the director of the center, and when she visited here, he showed her some possibilities for using the talent and limited resources that were available to her. He also helped them obtain a small grant. "

Jim continues, "Six years later, when we were there this summer, the program was simply vibrant. The center offered a variety of courses, had several choirs and art classes, and really was hopping with activity and enthusiasm. The center's director received an award for her work in revitalizing the center that was presented during the 50th anniversary celebrations. She gave Tom the credit for inspiring her work. "

"That's one of several sister city success stories with Obninsk. Tom Benning of Ridgeview has another. Pete Craven and Wanda Craven, and David Coffey all have good stories. Ken Luckmann tells a really funny story about taking a youth soccer team over there in the early days. Their city has emulated Tech 2020 to create new businesses. It's a great story, though little known."

See what I mean? The Sister Cities is yet another example of Oak Ridge's tremendous impact on other parts of our world. There are numerous untold stories of such impact. We in Oak Ridge are often so engaged in the events that we do not even begin to realize just how significant they actually are. It might do us all good to take a deep breath and just count the blessings we in Oak Ridge share with the world.

As Billy Stair said, "We are blessed at this moment in time to have an incredible collection of talent in Oak Ridge, Tennessee" – we truly are! Pause, relax, think large and big picture – do you see it? Oak Ridge, a KEY to the future with world impacting science making history!

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One last time, be very sure and view the movie introducing the Spallation Neutron Source:
http://www.sns.gov/multimedia/intro_2006.shtml or go to the American Museum of Science and Energy's Spallation Neutron Source display just off the main lobby.



Billy Stair, Director, ORNL Communications and External Relations - Photo by Scott Fraker