

Some GREAT things that happened in Oak Ridge in 2011!

*(As published in **The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking** column on January 17, 2012)*

During the Christmas holidays while enjoying watching our grandkids experience the joy and wonder that is Christmas, I received an email from Gordon Fee sounding a sour note. I chose not to deal with it at the time but to continue to enjoy the family Christmas. But his sad commentary on Oak Ridge would not go away.

What Gordon had observed was a single headline in *The Oak Ridger*. The article carried a small red banner citing "A Year in Review." It featured, above the fold on the front page on December 26, 2011, a story titled, *2011: Three area murders, arrests made*. Well, Gordon blew a gasket!

I have never forwarded the full content of his email because I am sure he would not want those exact words repeated. He was mad and I say "justifiably so!" In his mind his hometown was being presented as a place where the local newspaper's "year in review" featured murder and drugs as the prominent theme.

While this is not entirely accurate, seen in isolation the message is not good. A balance between positive and the undeniable negative stories is necessary to avoid creating misconceptions about our town. Getting the positive stories seems to take an inordinate amount of effort on the part of all concerned. The negative, on the other hand, just jumps out at us through necessary Police reports and other glaring domestic situations.

Now, back to Gordon's email, I did forward one sentence: "What about a year in review for all the great things that were done here? What happened at ORNL? What happened at Y-12? What happened at SAIC?" I sent this to several community leaders. I included the *Oak Ridger* Publisher/Editor, Darrell Richardson, and *The Oak Ridger News* Editor, Donna Smith.

Both Darrell and Donna responded immediately explaining that the one article that Gordon saw that caused his reaction was but one of several "Year in Review" articles and some of the others were positive in nature. Yet, both of them thanked me for attempting to surface positive accomplishments. They had been trying to do that with less success than the overwhelming negative stories that more readily come their way.

I sent Gordon's question to 38 people. I received 23 responses back, all listing positive accomplishments in 2011. I want to share some of the responses with you.

Among the very first replies was that of our City Manager, Mark Watson. . Mark said he felt one of the most positive accomplishments in 2011 was, "Admittance to the Knoxville Transportation Planning Organization..."

Mark continued, "The City of Oak Ridge has been part of the Southeast Tennessee Rural Transportation Planning Organization consisting of many of the rural counties around Knoxville. As much of the transportation planning and transportation summits around here have concentrated on getting greater Knoxville area residents to jobs at Oak Ridge, the planning stopped at the Solway Bridge where the Knoxville Transportation Planning Organization's boundary stopped.

"Such future possibilities like light rail and bus systems would not be planned with us being in the other Transportation Planning Organization. After a series of discussions, the elected officials have voted to add Oak Ridge into the Knoxville Transportation Planning Organization which will help us plan transportation needs, regional bicycle paths, air quality planning and other such inclusive topics. This is bigger than most would think." Now did you know that? Our City Manager sees the big picture and has the long range perspective. Thanks Mark!

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Mark went on to identify other positive accomplishments. The Parks and Recreation Board is one he mentioned. The Riverfront pavilion was another.

He identified the new Police Chief James Akagi and the quick way he has taken command as a positive accomplishment for 2011. Mark stated that, "just yesterday he swore in 10 new officers" and noted that these younger officers represented a major step toward a generation change in the Oak Ridge Police Department.

Mark also identified as one of the positive accomplishments in 2011 the reassessing and withdrawing of the economic abatement agreement for the Oak Ridge Mall. Wow, all I can say is, it is about time!

Another was the grant application with the Tennessee Department of Transportation for the rejuvenation of the Jackson Square shopping center. Mark cited the selection of Darryl Kerley as Fire Chief as a positive accomplishment and he also noted that Darryl was selected to go and support fire services in Israel. Here is yet another example of the impact Oak Ridge has on other parts of the world.

Tom Beehan and Mark represented the United States in a conference on city management in Mexico City...there you go again, Oak Ridge representing our national interests.

Oak Ridge again achieved the Government Finance Officers Association's Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting for another year. It is easy to consider such recognition as routine when actually it is quite extraordinary.

And finally Mark cited the Cedar Park Renovation and Community Rebuild as a positive accomplishment. I remember photographing Mark as he personally participated in this exemplary event. Oak Ridge IS special, you know!

Parker Hardy responded with, "This morning during a brief staff meeting our staff developed the following list of positive accomplishments for Oak Ridge during 2011: "New police chief; Not in Our City package; Holiday Inn Express; Salsarita/Suntan City; 2011 Christmas parade; Siemens Winners; Centennial Village opens; Cedar Hill playground build; Roane Sate grants – for campus and from AMTEK; Building in Heritage Center; Carbon Fiber Pilot Plant; Horizon Center improvements/tenants; ATC Nuclear; Omega Consulting; Census population increase; Canberra expansion; Eddie Hair redevelopment; Applebee's rebuild; AT&T store; CapitalMark Bank.

Now that is an impressive list! I was also most pleased to see David Bradshaw in his role as incoming President of the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce and Kim Denton, President of the Oak Ridge Economic Partnership, interviewed for a column by Beverly Majors in *The Oak Ridger* of January 10, 2012.

Beverly's story, *Big Wins: Companies building a future in Oak Ridge*, was certainly a positive accomplishment story! They cited numerous examples of jobs created and "wins" such as, "Omega Technical Consultants, Site1, Canberra, Appalachian Underwriters, Answer Financial, ATC Nuclear and the Carbon Fiber Technology Facility." This last one is the subject of an email from Rich Chinn. Rick wrote, "To me one of the biggest wins for Oak Ridge in 2011 was the procurement and construction of the new Carbon Fiber Technology Facility in Horizon Center. This could well be the biggest thing to happen to Oak Ridge since the Spallation Neutron Source."

"However, unlike the SNS which only promises to bring in scientist and companies to use the facility on a short term basis and make little if any capital investment in the community, the CFTF actually could bring in huge investments in other new facilities and long term users to set up shop in Oak Ridge. The fact that almost 50 companies (like 3M, Dow Chemical and Volkswagen) have invested in the Carbon Fiber Consortium to promote this new technology speaks volumes." Wow, Rick is right!

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Martin McBride submitted the following sobering thought: "I would like to see Oak Ridge take credit for another year without global war. This is an item that tends to get overlooked, year after year."
"In the sixty-six years since World War II, the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (with their 300,000 deaths) remains in the world consciousness. On the other hand, the memory of World War II's staggering non-nuclear death toll--over a hundred times larger at 50 to 70 million deaths---has largely faded. It's the legacy of the Manhattan Project that year-after-year pushes mankind back from the brink of World War III. In my opinion, world-peace is by far Oak Ridge's greatest ongoing contribution." I agree, Martin!

There you have just a sampling of the "GREAT things that happened in Oak Ridge in 2011." Next week we will explore more examples of positive accomplishments in Oak Ridge, many with worldwide impact. Remember, I have not yet even touched upon the accomplishments of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the Y-12 National Security Complex, the Oak Ridge Associated Universities or Science Applications International Corporation. Those will come later in this series. Their accomplishments are what Gordon admonished us to consider and I am doing just that for upcoming *Historically Speaking* columns.



The Carbon Fiber Technology Center at the Horizon Center is but the latest in major "wins" for Oak Ridge and is the "Center of the Universe for Carbon Fiber," according to Kim Denton, President of the Oak Ridge Economic Partnership