

Lunch - 4 – Literacy and Denise Kiernan

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on February 25, 2014)

Some special fundraising efforts that have historically been most successful in Oak Ridge have become annual traditions that seem to just get better and better each year and continue to raise more and more money for worthy causes. The "Lunch – 4 – Literacy" is such an event. It is scheduled for Tuesday, March 18, 2014 and will again be held at noon in the Oak Ridge High School Cafeteria. This year's special speaker is Denise Kiernan, author of "The Girls of Atomic City," bestselling book on Oak Ridge's history.

Lunch - 4 – Literacy is a joint effort of the Oak Ridge Altrusa International of Oak Ridge and the Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club. The purpose of the joint effort is to provide grants to help improve literacy in Oak Ridge and Anderson and Roane counties. Each year the grants are awarded to selected recipients. In 2013, \$23,532.99, was awarded.

To qualify for grants potential applicants should meet award criteria which may be found on the Altrusa International Oak Ridge website <http://oakridge.altrusa.org/> or Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club website <http://www.orbrc.org/>. Hard copies are also available at the Oak Ridge Public Library. Each year, applications must be submitted by Nov. 1.

In 2013 the following grants were awarded: Aid for Distressed Families in Appalachian Counties - \$1,000; Andersonville Elementary School - \$1,000; Bowers Elementary School - \$2,051; Girls Inc. - \$2,500; Jefferson Middle School - \$4,860; Briceville and Dutch Valley Elementary Schools - \$2,935; Norris Middle School - \$833; Oliver Springs Middle School - \$1,345.99; Roane Imagination Library - \$200; Trinity Outreach Center of Hope - \$3,500; Woodland Elementary School - \$3,308.

A primary feature of the joint effort by Altrusa and Rotary is a Lunch – 4 – Literacy Luncheon is its location, the Oak Ridge High School's beautiful open and spacious cafeteria. It is always a most enjoyable event and always features great food, good fun and excellent speakers. You will want to get your tickets early from either the Altrusa or Breakfast Rotary as the seats fill up early each year.

The 2014 luncheon will be a special treat for many Oak Ridgers who have achieved fame both locally and nationally. Not only will they be the focus of the talk by the featured speaker, they will be given special invitations and prominently included in the luncheon. They are our very own "girls of Atomic City."

These women are well known by many of you and they will take great pride in being asked to help raise funds for literacy. They are just that way, they give their all in anything they undertake. After all, they were key contributors to the winning of World War II. What else would be expected of them?

The Girls of Atomic City is a tremendously important literary work on the history of the Manhattan Project focused here in Oak Ridge. Denise Kiernan tells the story through the eyes of the "girls of Atomic City" which really means she has used some of our most valued citizens who actually lived the history. She has let them tell their stories and has wrapped scientific facts and details around the human interest inherent in these marvelous ladies with whom she has grown as close as family.

What a tremendous experience it has been to see her as she grew from an author looking for a new challenging project to a person who found something special in Oak Ridge. Denise has developed an extremely close relationship with several of the women (and some of us men) here in Oak Ridge. She has become a nationwide ambassador for Oak Ridge at her numerous book signings. The book has gone as high as number seven on the New York Times Best Seller list!

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The book is just now coming out in paperback and she is off to make another round of book signings to promote the paperback version. Recently it was printed in Polish, so it is now truly an international hit.

But to think of this project only in the sense of the finished book is to miss the heart of the interactions with the people in our city. It is to fail to comprehend what has happened between Denise and the women she interviewed as well as between them and her husband Joe D'Angese.

Something much more powerful than writing a book has taken place! The "girls" here in Oak Ridge have become celebrities. Oak Ridge has been given the gift of an outstanding and amazing ambassador. Denise has done more to promote interest in Oak Ridge history to audiences that no one else could reach than anyone else has ever done.

Can you imagine what you would have thought if I told you months ago that we would have someone on national television talking about Oak Ridge and that she would be the hit of the Daily Show with Jon Stewart! You would have laughed at me, but Denise did it.

Colleen Black sends me emails regularly stating that I started a "chain reaction" by introducing Denise to the ladies who were the "girls of Atomic City." Colleen is an exceptional personality who welcomes the opportunity to tell her stories of working at K-25 as a leak checker. But she enjoys even more telling of her experiences courting and marrying the love of her life.

Denise has taken a remarkable scientific experiment that turned into what has been labeled the world's most significant technical achievement and has put the details of that story into comprehensible and practical language. She had done that using these "girls of the Atomic City" who did not have privileged access to the technical and scientific details, but who did the actual work needed to achieve the desired results...without even knowing exactly what they were doing.

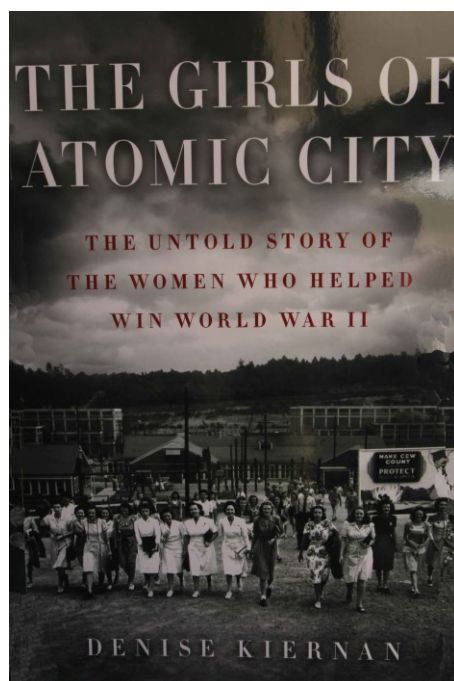
I can't think about Denise and her choice to write about Oak Ridge without mentioning my good friend Ed Westcott. You see, it was Ed's famous photograph of the "Calutron Girls" that we all adore for several reasons that first attracted Denise to the story of the women ("girls") of Oak Ridge. It has been my great joy to have been contacted by Denise and to have been able to help her connect with folks like Colleen Black.

When Denise first came to Oak Ridge, she wanted to meet Ed Westcott, so I took her to his home to introduce them to each other. Ed immediately won her heart and I think he found her to be a very special individual and saw her tremendous passion for Oak Ridge's story and its people such as himself and Colleen. Now, each time she returns to Oak Ridge she tries to connect with Ed if possible. She and Joe have also grown very close to Virginia Coleman, in whose home they have stayed and enjoyed meals.

Fanny and I have become fast friends with Denise and Joe and have taken them to our favorite restaurants such as Mt. Cloud in Jacksboro and many local Oak Ridge restaurants. I just can't say enough good things about Denise and what she has done for Oak Ridge with this book. I look forward to hearing her speak to the Lunch – 4 – Literacy audience! Come join us...get your tickets NOW!

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The New York Times Best Seller book telling the history of Oak Ridge through the eyes of “The Girls of Atomic City”



Denise Kiernan, bestselling author and good friend to Oak Ridge

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Colleen Black's collage of the "Girls" and Denise