

Literacy Lunch: A Twenty Five Year Success!

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on March 7, 2016)

One of the most enjoyable and highly successful annual events in Oak Ridge is the Lunch 4 Literacy event co-sponsored by the Oak Ridge Altrusa Club and the Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club. I have been privileged to serve on the planning committee and helped obtain speakers since 2007. What fun!

Arranging speakers is much easier during these last several years because of the reputation of the event. It was not always so easy to find speakers. Yet, some dedicated individuals have done yeoman's work to get speakers each year and to continue the successful run of the event.

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 and is scheduled for March 22, 2016, in the Oak Ridge High School Cafeteria at 11:30 AM. So popular the first time she spoke, New York Times bestselling author Sharyn McCrumb is making an encore appearance.

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.

Here is a listing of funds awarded over the past few years:

2001: \$12,000
2003: \$12,700
2007: \$16,000
2008: \$16,883
2009: \$14,000
2010: \$15,709
2012: \$18,000
2013: \$20,096
2014: \$23,532
2015: \$22,996

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.

Over the years many speakers have been supportive of literacy. In an attempt to document the history of this phenomenal event, Frank Jamison and Larry Dipboye and others are attempting to document the history. You can help if you recall the name of the speaker for 2004, please contact Ray Smith at draysmith@comcast.net or 865-482-4224. I will add the information you provide to the online archive version of this history for future reference.

Here is a listing of the speakers over the years:

1992- Speaker: Alex Haley; Frank Jamison was Community Services Director. The club was only three years old and had had no active community service project to date. He had learned that the Oak Ridge and Anderson County Literacy Councils were struggling for funds to buy materials for use in their adult literacy programs. He hit on the idea of a luncheon to raise money for the two organizations. He was able to get Alex Haley to be the speaker. Alex Haley was living near Norris at the time. Jamison bumped into him at Regas Restaurant in Knoxville one evening and asked Alex if he would come be the speaker. Alex graciously agreed.

1993-Speaker: Wilma Dykeman; No one would volunteer to pick up the literacy luncheon so Jamison picked it up again. Dave McCoy assisted. Frank was able to get Wilma Dykeman to come speak. Her fee was \$500, almost as much as we netted the previous year;

1994- Speaker: None; Jamison felt that the effort was in danger of becoming a one man show centered on him so he decided not to lead the effort again. Unfortunately, no one in the club would pick up the project so it

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languished for a year;

1995- Speaker: Slam Poets; No one in Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary would take the responsibility for the effort, but there were several Altrusa Club members who were also in our club. Led by Bonnie Carroll, Altrusa picked up the sponsorship of the luncheon that year instead of ORBRC. The program was "Slam Poetry" highlighting Bonnie's brother, Robert Carroll and Jerry Quickley from California performing slam poetry. It was a rousing success.

1996-Speaker: (Unknown) This year or the next may be about when Larry Dipboye first led the effort. Larry worked diligently to establish a grant framework for dispensing the funds. That framework has managed the luncheon proceeds ever since.

1997- Speaker: Robert Haas, U.S. Poet Laureate in 1997;

1998- Speaker: Diane Johnson author of "Ie Divorce"; She also wrote the screen play for the movie "Ie Divorce"; Bob Highfill was able to obtain Diane.

1999- - Speaker: Katie Smyser former Oak Ridger and TV Journalist spoke about TV journalism;

2000- Speaker: Carolyn Jourdan, award-winning documentary filmmaker;

2001- Senator Paul Simon, author of "Tapped Out: The Coming World Crisis in Water and What We Can Do About It," Introduced by Congressman Zach Wamp;

2002- Speaker: Kate Campbell, Nashville recording artist and singer-songwriter

2003- Speaker: Sena Jeter Naslund, author of "Ahab's Wife" was the speaker;

2004- Speaker: (If you know who this speaker was, please let me know)

2005- Speaker: Sheila Kay Adams was the speaker. She is a seventh generation ballad singer, storyteller, claw hammer banjo player and author of Come Home With Me and My Old True Love (2004). (She was incredibly popular and would be fun to have back.)

2006- Speaker: Sharon McCrumb, author of numerous bestselling novels set in Appalachia;

2007- Speaker: Mim Eichler Rivas, author of the nonfiction book "Beautiful Jim Key";

2008- Speakers: Dr. Bill Bass and Jon Jefferson, co-authors of the Jefferson Bass series of mysteries;

2009- Speaker: Robert Hicks, best-selling author of "The Widow of the South";

2010- Speaker: Terry Kay, author of "To Dance with the White Dog";

2011- Speaker: Alex Gabbard, author of "Return to Thunder Road";

2012- Speaker: Pamela Schoenewaldt, author of "When We Were Strangers";

2013- Speaker: Carolyn Aebersold, co-author of "The Elf on the Shelf";

2014- Speaker: Denise Kiernan, author of "Girls of the Atomic City";

2015- Speaker: Mike Tabor, author of "Walk of Death" and other books;

2016- Speaker: Sharon McCrumb returns after 10 years She will speak at the Oak Ridge High School Cafeteria on March 22, 2016 at 11:30 AM. Make your plans now to attend. See the end of the article for ticket information.

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Now for a look at some samples of the 2015 awards through an interview Martha Hobson conducted.

Altrusa and Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club (ORBRC) awarded 20 grants from the proceeds of the 2015 Lunch for Literacy at the Rotary Club meeting Feb. 17. Grants totaled \$22,996, ranging from \$200 to \$3,797.

Four grant recipients sat down to talk about their schools and their awards after the meeting.

"It's huge," says Janis Bishop, describing the \$2,028 grant her school received. Bishop is the librarian at Briceville Elementary School.

"We have 98 percent of our 130 children eligible for reduced-cost and free lunch," says Bishop. "They clean their plates at breakfast and lunch because many know they may not eat again until they come back to school. We have a clothes closet for our students to get clothes. We have to meet their basic needs before they can learn. We have a lot of second tier homelessness where children bounce around among relatives."

Bishop does everything she can to make the school library a welcoming place with special shelves for special interests.

"Research shows that if we can get fourth graders hooked on series books, they will be life-long readers," says Janine Brewer, librarian at Clinton Middle School.

Clinton Middle School received nine grants ranging from \$250 to \$775, totaling \$3,870. Brewer received \$500 to purchase series books for the library. She started a middle school book club Feb. 17. "Reading is not cool in middle school," says Brewer. "By middle school, students have begun to try to impress one another, and a lot of things take precedence over reading."

Sixty percent of children at Clinton Middle School are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches, so Brewer finds herself dealing with both poverty and the natural tendencies of developing middle schoolers not to want to read.

Brewer cites research showing that adults need to talk to babies and children. "If a child is not talked to, it is harder for that child to read. Children are enriched by conversation."

From Grand Oaks School, Sally Suttle, first grade teacher, and Sue Byrd, reading interventionist, received \$1,000 for three Chromebook tablets to use with struggling students. Byrd works one-on-one with children who are trying to get to grade-level reading.

Seventy percent of the children at Grand Oaks are eligible for free lunches.

"We don't have computers," says Suttle, "so there is a lot of stress for our children when they have to take standardized tests on computers. Not only do the children have to deal with the test, they have to figure out the equipment they are using. They can't possibly answer the questions as quickly as computer savvy students."

Learning styles have changed, according to Suttle. "Most children are visual learners today, and they like non-fiction more than they like fiction," she says.

According to these grant recipients, many of their students come from homes that do not have books. Some youngsters come from homes where the adults cannot read so they are never read to.

ORBRC members report that dictionaries Rotary give to area fourth graders are sometimes the first book a child has ever owned.

Other recipients from the 2015 proceeds are ADFAC, \$2,500; Emory Valley Center, \$1,819; Girls Incorporated, \$2,000. Norris Middle School, \$916; Oak Ridge Preschool, \$3,266 (three separate grants); Roane Imagination Library, \$1,800; and Robertsville Middle School, \$3,797.

Schools and non-profit groups from throughout Anderson and Roane Counties are eligible to apply for grants.

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Because of early ticket sales, the Lunch for Literacy Committee believes the 2016 event will sell out. "We are trying to raise as much money as possible for these grants," say Altrusan Kate Shult, who co-chairs the event this year with Tony Wright, Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club.

Tickets are still available at \$40 each at the Ferrell Shop (closed on Monday). Come join the fun and help address literacy issues!



Sally Suttle and Sue Byrd (Grand Oaks Elementary School), Janis Bishop (Briceville Elementary School), and Janine Brewer (Clinton Middle School)



Many of the representatives of programs who received grants in 2015