

Joe Lenhard, Community Leader

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of 9-14-2020)

Joe Lenhard was my next-door neighbor. He often came over to talk to me about some idea he had for a Historically Speaking article. I never hesitated to write the articles he recommended because they were always good stories and unusual settings.

The first suggestion he told me about was a fenced in area near the Oak Ridge Country Club, but far back in the woods. He took me there and I remember being concerned for him as we had to cross streams and go through some rough area to get there. I mentioned to Joe that he should be careful. Joe replied, "You worry about yourself young man, I can take care of me must fine."

When Joe passed away recently, I asked Jim Campbell to honor Joe with a Historically Speaking column. I think you will enjoy Jim's insights into one of Oak Ridge's legendary community support individuals.

Joe Lenhard never shied away from being a leader.

He did that in his work with the Atomic Energy Commission, now the Department of Energy. He did that in his retirement working with business groups, the Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary, the list goes on. When you needed someone to go, to be there... Joe was always willing to be there and to use his energy and enthusiasm for this community to do good.

Joe Lenhard passed away Friday, July 11, 2020, at the age of 91.

His family has asked the American Museum of Science and Energy Foundation to continue his legacy by dedicating one of the science classrooms at AMSE in his name. The Foundation is hoping to raise \$50,000 in his honor to support the science educational outreach programs in the STEAM arena. Donations will be used to upgrade equipment, develop new content, and delivery mechanisms in the years to come.

The education staff at the Museum gave the elements of the classroom a good deal of thought. They want the room to reflect the values Lenhard held as a scientist, particularly in the arena of health physics. They also wanted it to be able to be used in tandem with the Harold Conner Classroom next door.

"Taken together, each element will greatly assist AMSE in advancing our mission of increasing STEM understanding among students of all ages, and honoring the legacy of Mr. Lenhard," said Alan Lowe, ASME director.

Lowe said the first element will be an interactive touchscreen will be placed on the south wall, enabling the educators to access and provide a wide range of information and resources.

Second, the laboratory section of the classroom will be updated to allow a wider range of safe, educational experiments. Most significantly this update will include the addition of a portable, ventless hood. In addition, we plan on purchasing a Boxlight Labdisc, a tool to allow a wide range of data capture and analysis during experiments.

Third, an additional telepresence robot by Double will be purchased to be used in educational programs in the Lenhard Classroom, as well as in schools around the region. This robot will allow our educators to reach students in an innovative and very engaging manner. Within the classroom, both educators and students will be able to control the robot during a range of educational exercises. In schools, the robot will allow our educators to take part in activities with students while never leaving AMSE.

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"Using the robot will always be a great way to engage students, but it is especially important in a time when in-person outreach in classrooms is severely limited, said Lowe. "Additionally, it will assist AMSE in reaching students without straining our ability to continue programs at the museums."

Fittingly, Lenhard spend a good amount of time in his retirement trying to make sure the museum, which has been in almost continuous operation since the opening of the Secret City of Oak Ridge to the public on March 19, 1949, continues to thrive. He worked on several initiatives to transform the old AMSE on Tulane Avenue, and kept abreast of the work the AMSE Foundation is doing to move the operation into a true public/private partnership. He never stopped inquiring about this transition he felt he had helped study and make plans for it to happen.

Lenhard, an Oak Ridger since 1957, was born June 18, 1929, in a rural area outside Detroit. He graduated from East Detroit High School, where he participated in football and track, in 1947. After graduation, he worked in an automobile factory, then enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

He received a U.S. Navy scholarship to Vanderbilt University in 1949. He studied physics and graduated in 1953. After serving as a naval officer for three years, he returned to Vanderbilt on a U.S. Atomic Energy Commission fellowship in 1956. He earned a master's degree in nuclear physics in 1957. He came to Oak Ridge for summer training and stayed in the city for the rest of his life.

(One of the first events Joe was involved in after coming to Oak Ridge was the Criticality Accident in C-1 Wing of Building 9212 at the Y-12 Plant on June 16, 1958. He agreed to do an oral history about this pivotal event in the history of health physics and was proud of the lessons that were learned about protecting individuals from radiation hazards resulting from the thorough studies conducted following the first industrial radiation accident. – Ray)

Lenhard served as a senior executive with DOE, and for the last 15 years of his employment, he was responsible for all research and development activities within Oak Ridge Operations. His obituary said Lenhard received numerous federal awards during his career and was a U.S. delegate to the 1964 Atoms for Peace Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, where he was responsible for the safety of all U.S. exhibits. He also established and directed the first integrated Safety and Environmental Division in AEC-Oak Ridge. He worked for DOE for about 32 years, from 1957 to 1989.

He made generous contributions to local universities, especially the Oak Ridge branch of Roane State Community College and to the University of Tennessee. In August, Lenhard was recognized for more than 30 years as a member of the Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club.

Lenhard served as president of the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce in 1992, and he was chair of the East Tennessee Economic Council in 1993 and 1994. He helped found Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee in 1994, and he was the founding chairman. CROET helps find ways to re-use former federal property, not just real estate but also equipment and other federal assets. A tribute to Lenhard's service is noted on a plaque in the Horizon Center Industrial Park in west Oak Ridge.

(This plaque also recognizes the largest sycamore tree in East Tennessee in Joe's honor – dedicated to his spirit and leadership. <https://ray-smith.smugmug.com/Joe-Lenhard-Sycamore-Tree/>)

"He gave substantial sums of money to the University of Tennessee and Roane State Community College," the statement said. "Roane State dedicated a room to Joseph Lenhard for his outstanding contributions. Joe came from an economically disproportionate background and saw the benefit of higher education. He wanted to provide educational opportunity for the young people of East Tennessee."

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His daughter Andrea said her father loved the natural world, and she became a biologist and veterinarian because of him. Her father used to take them on long rambles in the woods, Andrea said, and he would pick up animals like snakes and frogs and tell the children what he knew about them.

"He loved nature, and that was very infectious," she said.

Later in life Lenhard could often be found walking in local grocery stores. He was very conscious of his health, Andrea said, and he would walk every day at stores that included Walmart, Kroger, and Food City. He would sometimes stop to talk to people, including an Oak Ridge Today reporter.

"The City of Oak Ridge and the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Operations were equally blessed to have Joe as their champion from the time he arrived here in 1957," Oak Ridge Mayor Warren Gooch said. "Whether it was in his role as DOE Director of Research for Oak Ridge facilities, civic leader, or advocate for re-industrialization, his integrity, intellect, and passion for his work helped make Oak Ridge great. We are better people, our community has prospered, our national security has been strengthened, and Oak Ridge National Laboratory's world leadership in research has been advanced because of Joe's dedicated work."

"Joe has forgotten more about Oak Ridge than the rest of us will ever know," said Tennessee Senator Ken Yager, a Kingston Republican. "I will miss his welcome when I would show up for ETEC. RIP, my friend."

Lenhard is survived by his wife, Crissy Lenhard; two daughters, Andrea Lenhard and Michele Lenhard; two step-children, James Buchan and Leca Buchan; five grandchildren, Sarah Buchan, Meagan and Michael McClanahan, and Stephen and Samantha Scales; and five great-grandchildren, Dominic and Keegan Francis, Skylar Lawrence, and Sawyer and Waylan Scales.

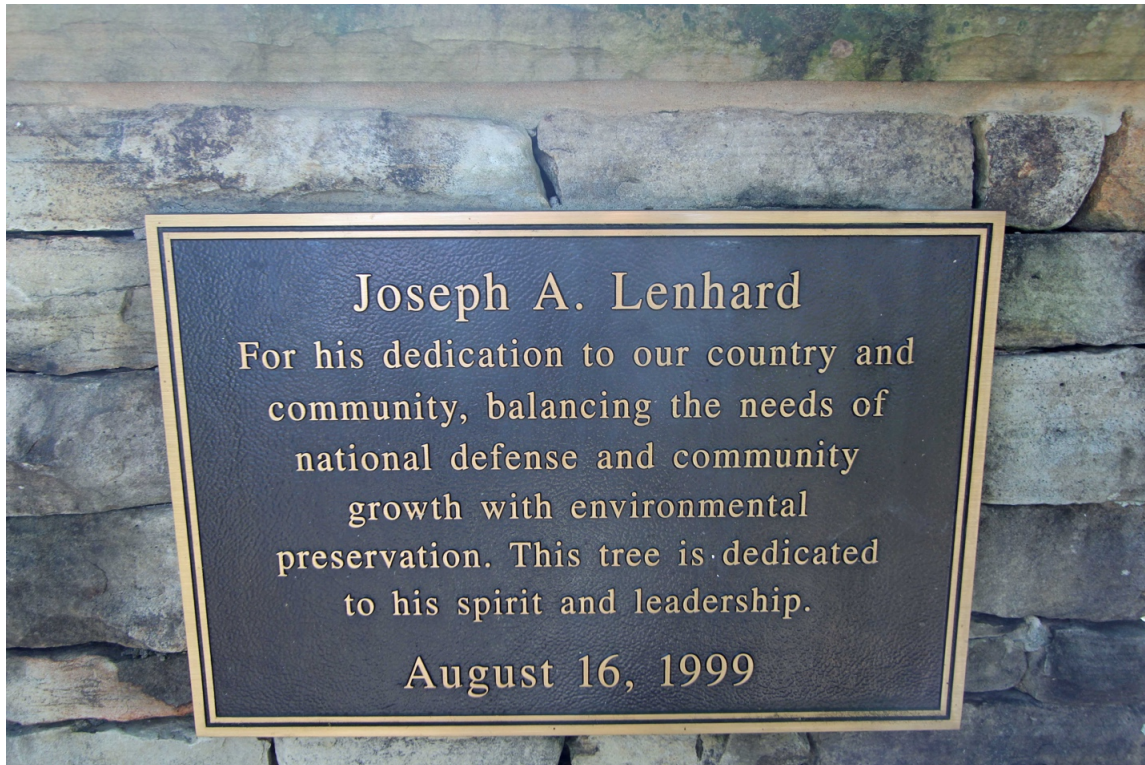
Thank you, Jim, your recollections about my friend and neighbor, Joe Lenhard, are much appreciated. His family was excited to learn of the opportunity for a classroom at his beloved AMSE to be named in his honor and readily agreed for donations in his honor to be used to support that effort.

During the last year or so Joe and Crissy lived next door, I was privileged to be asked by Joe to help him get to some of his regular meetings when he could no longer drive. Those morning travels were a delight as Joe always reminisced about Oak Ridge and the many things he had helped bring about over the years. Leader

s such as Joe are important to a community. Such devotion, dedication and relentless energy can accomplish much. We were sure blessed to have Joe Lenhard as our community champion!

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This plaque in Horizon Center expresses the broad impact Joe Lenhard had on his country, community and the environment. Well said! Of course, the eight foot diameter Sycamore tree is awesome as well...largest tree in East Tennessee!



Joe Lenhard from his oral history on file at the Center for Oak Ridge Oral History:
<http://cdm16107.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15388coll1/id/197/rec/2>