

Oak Ridge Fund for Achieving Community Excellence and Pat Postma

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking Column the week of April 4, 2021)

This Historically Speaking article will be focused on the future as well as reminding us of a past I feel not too many realize. Writing Historically Speaking has become a part of my life that is most rewarding. I am constantly being encouraged by readers who offer suggestions for topics and many who are willing to contribute to the articles. Benita Albert and Carolyn Krause are two who routinely contribute. Others, such as Mike Stallo also contribute.

This one is a bit unusual, but I hope you will enjoy learning some history and will join me as we look to the future. Stay with me now...

A few days ago, Pat Postma sent me an email which reminded me "Some time ago we talked about your writing articles on the future as well as the past which you seemed willing to consider. I have an idea that could really help our future."

Pat continued, "I'm thinking in the context of the Oak Ridge Fund for Achieving Community Excellence which is aimed at inventing our future. The article might start out referring to our unique history but see that history as a path to ensure an interesting and unique future."

I agreed because it is our history, and Pat's history in Oak Ridge, that led to the Oak Ridge Fund for Achieving Community Excellence. I know I am telling her story in a way Pat did not really intend, but I think is an important element of Oak Ridge history.

I first became aware of Pat Postma when I was researching the Oak Ridge Friendship Bell with Emily Mitchell who started at the bell and eventually reached Hiroshima in her quest to understand her hometown and how she fit into the resulting use of the Atomic Bomb. Emily's quest caused me to see the bell in a different light. And the Bell has continued to be a strong influence in my efforts to share the history of Oak Ridge.

Pat's involvement in the effort to place the Bell in Oak Ridge along with her husband, Herman Postma and Alvin Weinberg, started as something she did with Herman and supported his efforts there. After his death, I believe the bell took on even more meaning for Pat.

When, after 20 years, the wooden pavilion failed because of water damage, she became a leader in the effort to replace the pavilion and what we have now as a main feature in A. K. Bissell Park has resulted. The International Friendship Bell and Peace Pavilion is a centerpiece on all my Oak Ridge History Tours. Recently, I was privileged to provide a tour for a Russian travel writer, Alexei Dmitriev. He was amazed at the Bell and its significance. We Oak Ridgers may sometimes just take our Friendship Bell for granted, but visitors often see it in its proper light.

A few years earlier, when the Oak Ridge High School \$55 million renovation required \$8 million in private funds to be raised, Pat Postma took a leading role there along with others. Just a few months ago, a Historically Speaking column written by Jessica Steed included the following:

"Pat Postma, ORHS Class of 1956 alumna and daughter of longtime ORHS Principal Tom Dunigan, worked on the design committee that envisioned the new ORHS. She was so inspired and excited by the creative re-thinking from teachers sharing their visions of what their best teaching environment could be, and the interaction with the architects, that she understood this was an opportunity to do something extraordinary. When she was asked to chair the fundraising committee, she knew it simply must happen, and she agreed.

"She spent the next two years immersed in the work with her co-chairs and a large team of other Oak Ridgers. Yet she said, 'No matter how many architects' drawings I exulted over, no matter how many areas I had seen in varying dusty stages of construction, when I walked for the first time through this entire, finished place, the light, the space, the labs, the arena, the orchestra pit, far exceeded my most optimistic imaginings.' "You have done something extraordinary' she said to the community."

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Pat is not the only person in this generous town who has dedicated so much to our city, but she is a special representative of that element so prominent in so many Oak Ridgers over the years. I asked her how she became so invested and involved in Oak Ridge.

In the early days of Oak Ridge, everyone had a mud story and Pat has hers. Her dad came in July of 1943 and brought the family here in September. As a preschooler, she and her sister were packed in their car with everything else and arrived at the muddy street of their new house on the corner of Tennessee Avenue and Fairview. Pat's mother assigned Pat the task of carrying her large hatbox up the slope and warned her not to drop it in the mud. Pat proudly accepted the task, stepped out of the car and immediately slid right down in the mud, hatbox and all.

She loved growing up in Oak Ridge but when she went to Duke University, she had her sights set on the big city after graduation: New York or Boston. Things turned out differently. It was a great time to be a single girl in Oak Ridge. Each summer our federal employers brought in science graduate students from the top schools in the country and there was a very active young singles scene. The summer before her senior year at Duke she began dating a young physicist who had been permanently hired by ORNL. She had a job offer from Bell Labs near New York, but that physicist won out and a year later they were married.

Pat says she made the right decision! Not only did her physicist become the Director of ORNL, she and Herman had two great children and Oak Ridge continued to be a wonderful place to raise a family. Pat worked at the University of Tennessee for several years, and she remembers a remark that triggered an epiphany for her. Oak Ridge had just won a State Championship in some sport, on the heels of a top place award in a national music competition. UT colleague asked her, "How come Oak Ridge excels at everything?"

She realized that the expectations of this community and the life available here was exceptional. Pat feels so lucky and so grateful for her life in Oak Ridge. She's determined to do whatever she can to make the future as good as the past.

ORFace, the acronym (we Oak Ridgers really like acronyms) for Oak Ridge Fund for Achieving Community Excellence, is an endowment fund for the town's future that was established three years ago on our 75th Anniversary, through the initiative and efforts of Pat Postma and East Tennessee Foundation. That happened because her attorney suggested she review her will after a dozen years or so. She did, and realized she wanted a way to put some money where her heart is.

The Advisory Board believes the way to make our future and presence distinctive is to build on the excellence we have already established – Science, education and community. The mission statement that first Board carefully developed is in the sidebar.

ORFace acts as a catalyst and partner for initiatives that can make a significant difference for our future. In that 75th Anniversary year they gave three grants of \$7,500 each that built on our significant strengths and supported some new initiatives. The first was a grant to begin a brand-new Flatwater Tales Storytelling Festival in Oak Ridge. That was a great success and connected us with some of the top tellers in the country, putting us on the map. This year it will be a virtual festival in early June, but it will continue to be an annual event for the town.

Another of those grants partnered with ORNL Federal Credit Union to establish a monthly WDVX radio broadcast from the newly located American Museum of Science and Energy in Oak Ridge. The radio programs featured distinctive WDVX sound and included segments dedicated to the history and significance of Oak Ridge.

The third grant that year was to become a major sponsor of the 75-year history of our outstanding school system, providing funds to give grants to our teachers for equipment and programs over and above what they might normally have.

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The following year was to become a lead sponsor for a special event to promote the vision of a new downtown for Oak Ridge. Unfortunately, that event was canceled for reasons of COVID, but ORFace continues to support that future-changing development in several ways. Excellence is not just a phrase in the name, it is a well thought out intention that is considered every time a grant is awarded.

Our affiliate association with East Tennessee Foundation assures top-notch professional management of all that this Oak Ridge Fund does. The funds for endowment and grants are managed by ETF with leadership provided by a volunteer team of investment professionals. They have a remarkable record of 8% annualized return over 35 years of operations. The Foundation maintains all records and ensures compliance. They share their insights and experience from expertise gained locally, regionally, and nationally.

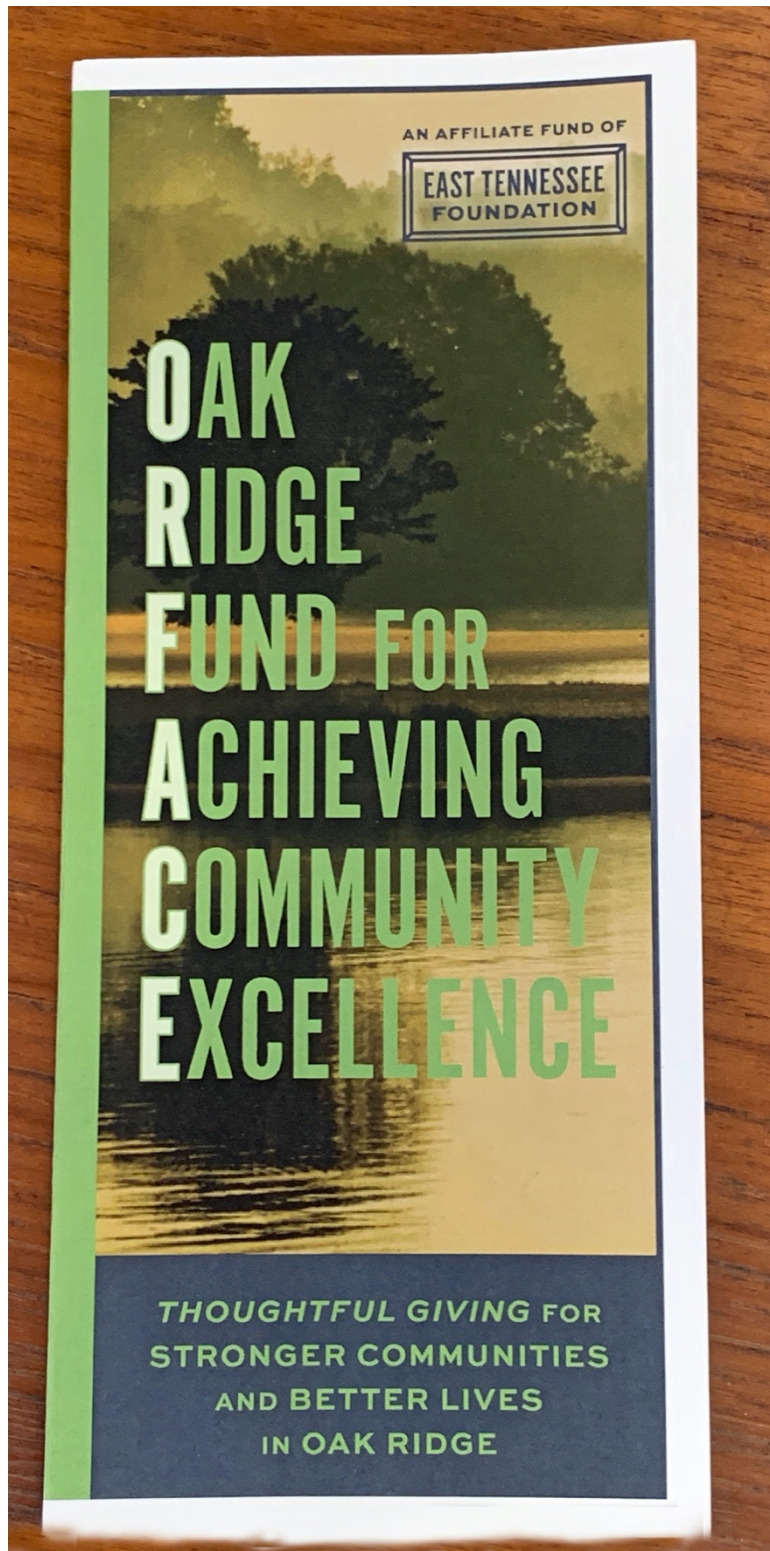
Annual gifts to this young endowment fund are very important, but family bequests and philanthropic gifts designated in our wills will make the most significant impact for future opportunities. So, here's a question for you: When did you last update your will?

Here, too, the East Tennessee Foundation can meet with you and your professional advisor to provide guidance on how best to accomplish what you wish. My friend, Pat Postma, hopes you will join in the noble quest to put some money where your heart is and provide for a future of excellence in Oak Ridge. Oak Ridgers in the future will thank you. I suggest you do it soon and be proud of including an investment in the future of Oak Ridge.



Pat Postma and the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell
which has become an icon of Oak Ridge

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Oak Ridge Fund for Achieving Community Excellence brochure

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We seek to make Oak Ridge the premier living and working community in Tennessee by:

- Building on our legacy of achievement in science, education, and community
- Including all of our citizens in contributing to and benefiting from our community.
- Identifying and serving as trustees for those who want to invest in Oak Ridge's future
- Motivating the many entities and organizations of the town to collaborate in achieving significant goals
- Providing grants to support these efforts

Mission of the Oak Ridge Fund for Achieving Community Excellence