



OEF News

Fall 2011

A publication of the Okemos Education Foundation

www.oefsite.org

Nurturing the Heart and Soul of Our Schools

Traditionally, the OEF has focused on enabling innovative teachers to provide their students with more engaging learning experiences via fairly modest (\$1000 or less) classroom grants. You can find a detailed list of *all* awards and grants we've made in recent years, at www.oefsite.org.

We dramatically expanded our impact by launching a Strategic Fund last year, supporting "big ticket" items, such as software and textbooks used across entire grades, and extracurricular activities such as 17 after-school clubs across the district that had been cut from the school budget due to reductions in state school aid.

When we heard about even deeper cuts in state school funding this past spring, the OEF trustees voted to significantly increase our support for what we consider both the heart and soul of our schools.

The *heart* encompasses our excellent academic programs that prepare our students to succeed at post-secondary learning or in a career. This year, in addition to our traditional classroom innovation grants, the OEF is providing the school district with \$70,000 to replace outdated textbooks in a variety of courses, including:

- French (at both Chippewa Middle School and Okemos High School)
- 9th Grade U.S. History and Geography
- Child Development
- Anatomy and Physiology
- Advanced Placement U.S. Government
- Advanced Placement Biology

We believe the *soul* of our schools is manifested in the many service and citizenship clubs and activities that provide our students with opportunities to discover and grow their talents, develop leadership skills, find friendship, and learn the

importance of community service in their lives.

So this year, we increased our support for these vital learning opportunities by 300%, to nearly \$80,000.

In addition to continuing support for 17 after-school clubs, we are funding:

- Student government groups at each of the elementary schools and Kinawa and Chippewa
- The Okemos High School Student Council
- Safety Patrol supervisors at the four elementary schools
- Science Olympiad teams and Yearbook advisors at both Chippewa and Okemos High School
- Okemos High School Quiz Bowl and Robotics

The final club on the list of extracurricular activities we are supporting, one that should fill every member of the Okemos community

Continued page 6

Key Ballot Measure on November 8th

Here's a trivia question:

What occurs once every 10 years, and is one of the rare opportunities for Okemos residents to directly affect the level of funding for our schools?

The answer:

The renewal of the Okemos Schools **Building and Site Sinking Fund** millage.

In reality, the question we just asked is anything but trivial.

The school election on Tuesday, November 8th includes a ballot measure to renew for ten years the .9919 mill assessment that enables the school district to provide our students with a learning environment that is safe, healthy, and conducive to learning. The outcome of this vote will have a major impact on school finances.

Continued page 4

Okemos Education Foundation

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Thank You!

The Okemos Education Foundation sincerely thanks all of our *Partners in Education* - the many individuals, professionals, and businesses that so generously supported the Foundation in 2010-11. Our Partners play a key role in supporting the ongoing classroom grants and fellowships, Strategic Fund grants, Connie Osborn Deits Science grants, and the Commitment to Excellence awards that supplement the excellent staff and programs at Okemos Public Schools.

For a complete list of
2010-11 Partners in Education,
visit www.oefsite.org

Message from OEF Chair

If you get a window seat the next time you fly and watch the trailing edge of the plane's wing when taking off, you'll see a pretty good metaphor for Okemos Education Foundation donors in action.



Dean Bolton - OEF Chair

To increase the amount of lift, the pilots deploy those simple little *flaps*, the small sections on the rear of the wing that move up and down. What I find most impressive is that the flaps are such a small part of the plane, yet they are vital to enabling such a large craft to climb gracefully into the sky.

OEF donors have an analogous impact on our students. Like the wing flaps,

the classroom grants and teacher awards our donors fund equal a very small percentage of the school district's total budget, but they lift our schools in powerful ways.

The OEF enables our creative teachers to provide struggling learners with extra support, advanced students with exceptional learning challenges, and all of our students with more engaging experiences inside and outside the classroom.

For a list of the grants we've given over the last few years, visit oefsite.org, point to the *Grants* tab, and click on *Past Grants Awarded*. The books, software, lab equipment, learning games, and other learning materials that the OEF provides spark curiosity, expand horizons and create more of the "Aha! Moments" that literally trigger bursts of high-frequency brainwaves in the heads of our students.

Wing flaps also provide critical lift when a sudden drop in air speed threatens an airplane's ability to stay aloft. I'm not exaggerating when I say that recent budget shortfalls have created a similar

threat to our classrooms. So the OEF is pledging to increase our support for learning by over 175 percent during the 2011-2012 school year.

In addition to our traditional classroom grants, teacher awards, and support for school clubs, we will underwrite the purchase of textbooks and fund a much-expanded list of student activities including A.C.T.I.O.N. at OHS, Science Olympiad at Chippewa, and Student Government at Kinawa and each of our elementary schools. You can read more about this significant expansion of OEF-funded activities on page 1 of this newsletter.

The OEF needs your help to sustain the vital programs that make our schools some of the best in the state. We are an all-volunteer, tax-exempt organization and every dollar we raise will be committed directly to our schools. I can promise you that this year your generous support will have a bigger impact than ever before.

Can we count on you to help optimize the aerodynamics of learning for our children? **O-er**

Message from our Superintendent

In August of this year, I met with the Board of Education to discuss my professional goals for 2011-12. It was truly a philosophical, as well as a practical, discussion about the Board's and the Superintendent's vision for Okemos Public Schools, our youth, our families, our staff and our community. Philosophically, our vision for the future includes encouraging, challenging and supporting every student in his/her pursuit of achieving his or her full academic, artistic, athletic, civic and social potential.



Dr. Catherine J. Ash

Superintendent of Schools

Practically, we agreed on four significant goals to focus my work. However, with that said, I am astute enough to know that my ability

to successfully achieve the established goals continues to be dependent on the time, energy and expertise of our dedicated and talented staff, our supportive parents and our committed and motivated students. So, this is **OUR** focus for this year!

Strategic Plan -

As a district, we will be reviewing and revising the district's strategic plan to ensure that the district is addressing the critical issues as perceived by the board, the community, parents and staff. It's important that we continue to focus our efforts on the priorities established by our school community. The strategic plan will provide structure and guide our "next steps" as we strive to maintain quality programs that meet the

needs of all of our children within a collaborative and productive environment during fiscally challenging times. A Strategic Planning Committee consisting of members of the Board of Education, teachers, parents, administrators, support staff, students and community members will be established. Their work will include: reviewing, revising or validating the district's mission, vision, values and learner outcomes; identifying the "critical issues"; developing goals to guide the district's strategic direction; and identifying potential strategies to accomplish the goals.

Building and Site Sinking Fund -

There are ongoing expenses associated with maintaining safe and functioning buildings and grounds. Another goal is to pursue a successful renewal of the 0.9919 mills for the Building and Site Sinking Fund. Funding acquired through a Building and Site Sinking Fund millage is separate from a public schools' general fund. A district must use the Building and Site Sinking Fund for capital improvements (examples: roofs, windows, playground structures, parking lots, athletic fields) or for major repairs. If this source of funding doesn't exist, costs associated with major repairs, as well as normal and necessary updates of a district's facilities would have to be covered through the general fund. The general fund is the funding source for educational programs and services. If a portion of the general fund has to be allocated for major repairs, then the dollars available for educating and servicing students and families would be less. Okemos voters have supported a Building and Site Sinking Fund for the last 20 years. If this millage is renewed, it will not result in an increase of the tax rate for property owners. Instead, it would be the renewal of an existing millage that is estimated to generate over \$1 million each year for the next ten years. Voters will have a voice on this very critical financial issue on November 8.

Substance Abuse and Our Youth -

During the 2010-11 school year, there were several alcohol and drug related incidents involving our adolescents that generated a heightened level of concern by our faculty, parents, students and community. This was the impetus for a third goal. It's important for us to acknowledge that alcohol and drugs are accessible by our students and that they are choosing to use these substances in a variety of settings, for a variety of reasons. As a school community, we need to make every effort to establish a culture that promotes healthy and informed choices. I will be establishing a district-level committee comprised of high school and middle school administration, parents, teachers, counselors, high school students and substance abuse professionals to serve as a resource for our efforts. During the 2011-12 school year, we will focus on identifying and defining our "current reality", as well as beginning the foundational work that will continue into 2012-13 and beyond.

Student Achievement/Growth -

As part of the school improvement process, we have reviewed and analyzed testing data and identified areas of focus within the core academic program. The objectives include: increase K-12 reading, writing and mathematics proficiency of identified subgroups (economically disadvantaged, African-American and students with disabilities) by at least 3% annually, as measured by MEAP or MME; maintain or improve the percentage of all students reaching reading proficiency as measured by MEAP or MME; maintain or improve the percentage of all students reaching college readiness benchmarks on the ACT Explore and Plan writing subtests; achieve 80% of all students meeting the grade level benchmarks established in reading and mathematics as defined by AIMSweb and Everyday Math assessments. Throughout the 2011-12 school year, we will continue to engage in strategies across the district to promote the success of all of our

Continued page 6

Ballot Issue continued

Since Michigan voters approved Proposal A in 1994, we've been prohibited from using property taxes on owner-occupied homes to directly fund the operating expenses of our schools—textbooks, teachers, keeping the lights on, and similar items that can only be covered by the district's *General Fund*.

The dollars generated by the Building and Site Sinking Fund millage renewal will protect dollars for classroom programs.

The state *does* permit voters to approve bonds to purchase school technology and buses (we approved a Tech bond in 2007) and, with a Building and Site Sinking Fund millage, to pay for major repairs, upgrades or replacements to our school buildings and facilities.

The millage is scheduled to expire in 2012, and unless we renew it on November 8th, the District will have to begin **dipping into the General Fund** to replace leaky roofs, obsolete boilers, inefficient heating and ventilation systems, unsafe gymnasium floors, and similar items. (You can find a detailed list of the items the Building and Site Sinking Fund is used for, along with a list of Frequently Asked Questions, at the millage information website listed in the sidebar.)

Since school elections are frequently decided by very small margins, we encourage everyone to make it to the polls on November 8th. **OEF**

Millage Math

Amount estimated to be raised for our schools by the millage	\$1.1 million / year
Amount estimated to be raised per Okemos student	\$275 / year
How much the millage will increase our tax rate	0% Because we're renewing the millage we approved in 2002, your tax rate will remain the same.
Savings to our school's General Fund resulting from Sinking Fund-provided energy efficiency upgrades	\$750,000/ year
Cost on a home with a market value of \$300,000 (taxable value of \$150,000)	Under \$150 / year
Millage rate up for renewal	.9919 mils

For a list of current and proposed Building and Site Sinking Fund projects, and a list of Frequently Asked Questions, visit www.orgsites.com/mi/voteyesforops

Questions can be emailed to opsmillageinfo@comcast.net

To find the taxable value of your home (generally no more than 1/2 its marketable value), check your most recent tax assessment statement. Meridian Township residents can find the information at www.meridian.mi.us.

Night on the Field

A new fall tradition was started this year at Okemos High School with the first ever **Night on the Field**. On September 17th, almost 400 OHS students spread out on the football field to watch the movie "Source Code" on a giant screen. Organized by OHS Student Body Co-President Stuart Hammond as a fundraiser for the OEF, it was the perfect way for students to have fun and support their school at the same time. The OEF was not the only organization to benefit that evening: Okemos Athletic Boosters were on hand as well, selling refreshments to support the athletic program. Stuart, along with fellow Student Council officers Doug Peters, Alex Bez, Chris Walter, and Sarah Kovan worked with administration to carry out what was a very successful event. Our thanks to these OHS leaders and all who attended for their efforts to benefit all Okemos students! **OEF**



Early arrivals at Night on the Field

2011 OEF Award Recipients

The annual OEF Awards Banquet is scheduled for Thursday, November 17, at the Country Club of Lansing. Each year students, parents, community members, support staff, teachers, and administrators support the nomination of outstanding individuals within the Okemos school community for these prestigious awards.

Based on what is always an extraordinary array of nomination packets presented, the OEF has the unenviable task of selecting a finite number of award recipients. Award recipients will be recognized at the OEF Awards Banquet on November 17th.

Congratulations to the following 2011 recipients!

Commitment to Excellence Award:

The criteria for this award includes the ability to inspire and motivate students, implement innovative and/or creative ideas, promote the welfare of students, and provide leadership within the school community. Current educators will receive a \$1,000 grant from the OEF to support their continued contributions to Okemos Public Schools.

Susan Casey, Seventh Grade Teacher at Chippewa 7-8 School

Kevin Culling and Mark Stice, Band Teachers at Chippewa 7-8 School and Okemos High School

Denise Daberko, Science Teacher at Okemos High School

Kathy Lanzetta, Kindergarten Teacher at Hiawatha Elementary School

Marisa McCormick, Fifth and Sixth Grade Montessori Teacher at Kinawa 5-6 School

Patricia Trelstad, Deputy Superintendent of Okemos Public Schools

Special Recognition Award:

This award is presented to support staff who demonstrate a passion for excellence and whose work elevates Okemos Public Schools.

Lori Greenberg, At-Risk Aide at Cornell Elementary School

Okemos Education Foundation mission:

"Recognizing excellence and promoting innovation in Okemos Public Schools"

Volunteer Service Award:

This award honors an individual who has had a significant positive impact on students, staff, and/or the school community through extraordinary volunteer service.

LouAnn Stark-Dykema, Okemos Music Patrons Board Member


Dan C. Wertz Founder's Award:

This award recognizes individuals for a commitment to quality education through generous financial support of the OEF as well as exceptional and notable service for Okemos Public Schools.

Clark and Kathleen Manning

The selection process was extremely difficult since every nominee was deserving of the award to which they were nominated. It was evident that every nominee is respected and their expertise is truly appreciated. Those who were nominated for awards this year also included:

Penny Wallace, First Grade Teacher at Bennett Woods Elementary School (Commitment to Excellence Award Nominee)

Please plan to honor the recipients and nominees by attending the 2011 OEF Awards Banquet! 

2011 Okemos Education Foundation Awards Banquet

Thursday, November 17, 2011

Country Club of Lansing
2200 Moores River Drive, Lansing

Social Hour 5:30 p.m.

Dinner 6:30 p.m.

Adult \$30.00

Children (12 and younger) \$12.00

Tickets are available at all school offices until
November 9, 2011

Nurturing Our Schools continued

with a measure of pride, is A.C.T.I.O.N., the high school's community service club.

Standing for All Connecting To Improve Our Neighborhood, the program enables students to engage in a variety of volunteer efforts, including the Ronald McDonald House in Lansing, local soup kitchens, and refugee services agencies. A.C.T.I.O.N. volunteers mentor and teach younger students, visit residents in senior centers and nursing homes, help staff child care activities that allow parents of young children to attend

evening meetings at the schools, and run a Bowl-A-Thon to raise funds for charities.

Of course, each time you've read the phrase "we are supporting" or "we are funding" in the preceding paragraphs, the word "we" really refers to *you*. Your generous support is the only thing that allows us to make grants. We've included an envelope in this newsletter to make it a little more convenient to ensure that the heart and soul of our schools remain healthy.

☛

Superintendent's Message continued

students. This includes continuing the implementation of Reading Street, Every Day Math, supplemental programs for both enrichment and skill building, continuing our Response to Intervention work, Child Study and Data Teams, universal screening assessments, progress monitoring, professional learning communities and literacy blocks just to name a few. The common themes: identify the students' needs through assessment, work collaboratively to analyze data and to identify best practice interventions, support staff through professional development and time, implement strategies, monitor progress and adjust to promote student achievement and academic growth and success.

These are lofty, but important goals! To achieve success will truly result in meaningful and essential outcomes for all of our children . . . our students. Please join me in focusing our energy, time, efforts, expertise and support to make our vision a reality.

Meet the School Board Candidates

The November 8th ballot will give voters an opportunity to fill three seats on the Okemos School Board: two 4-year terms and one 2-year term. The 2-year term is the remainder of former board member Andrew Saultz's term, who resigned in May of 2011.

Damian Fisher and **Melanie Lynn** are running unopposed for the two 4-year terms. Two candidates, **Vin Lyon-Callo** and **James McGillicuddy**, are both running for the one 2-year seat on the school board.

Damian Fisher



Damian Fisher is an attorney living in Okemos with his wife Bonnie and their four children. The Fishers moved to Okemos from the Isabella Indian Reservation in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan in 2001. Damian is member of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan. Damian has coached football, wrestling, and softball at the Okemos High School and youth baseball, softball and basketball. He has been a substitute teacher at Chippewa Middle School and at Okemos High School and participated in Okemos Community Education sports camps.

Damian earned an A.S. in Business Administration and an A.A. in Economics from Grossmont Community College before earning his B.A. in English from San Diego State University. He has completed MBA/MSA coursework at Central Michigan University, studied math and science at Lansing Community College and is currently attending West Shore Community College to earn a degree in

accounting. Learning is an important part of his life.

Before becoming an attorney, Damian worked in the food service, manufacturing, retail, and hospitality industries. He also operated small businesses including a wholesale bakery and a landscaping service. After graduating from Cooley Law School in 2001, Damian was a staff attorney at Legal Aid of Lansing, then an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney for Gratiot County, and then he clerked for Ingham County Circuit Court Chief Judge William Collette. In his private practice Damian has worked for several Indian Tribes including as Executive Director of the Gaming Commission for the Torres-Martinez Desert Band of Cahuilla Indians and as a social worker for the Saginaw Chippewa Indians. Currently, Damian is the Chief Legislative Counsel for the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians in Manistee, Michigan.

Damian's public service includes: an enlistment in the United States Navy, an appointment to the Board of Trustees for Michigan Indian Legal Services (its

Continued page 7

School Board Candidates continued

former president), service on the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Education Advisory Board (3 years), and significant work on the Board of Regents for the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College (8 years). Damian has also done committee work in areas of public elections, judicial reform, and law and public policy making.

Melanie Lynn

Melanie C. Lynn and her husband, Wayne W. Lynn, are the proud parents of three Okemos Public School students; one at Chippewa and two at Okemos High School. They have resided in the Okemos community since 2007.



Melanie received her BS in Electrical Engineering from Clemson University and her MBA/Operations Management from the University of South Carolina. She has over ten years of experience as an Electrical Engineer and Project Manager.

Melanie is an Adjunct Information Technology Instructor at Lansing Community College. Melanie has been an active school volunteer. She enjoyed participating as a member of the Hiawatha Elementary School Parent Group, "Popcorn Mom", and Classroom Mom. She has served in various schools as the President of the Parent Group and the Membership Chairperson.

Melanie is proud of the service that she renders on behalf of children. She is actively involved at the local, regional and national levels of leadership in Jack and Jill of America, Inc., and she is a youth leader in her church.

Melanie was appointed to the Okemos Board of Education on October 28, 2010 to serve in a seat vacated by

former Board Member Mary Graham. She currently serves as Treasurer. Her appointment expires December 31, 2011.

Vin Lyon-Callo

Our family moved to Okemos in 2002 primarily because of the excellent



schools. My wife, Sarah, and I have two children. Our son, Tobias, is in 5th grade at Kinawa while our daughter, Bella, is a 2nd grader at Bennett Woods. Sara is a chronic disease epidemiologist for the Michigan Department of Community Health. I am a Full Professor of Anthropology at Western Michigan University, an active volunteer in the schools and community, a committed teacher, and a supporter of the Okemos Education Foundation.

My teaching and research focuses on poverty, homelessness and other inequalities as well as the complexity of globalization and political economic restructurings. I spent over a decade working in homeless shelters in Connecticut and Massachusetts and as an activist member of several community based movements aimed at transforming responses to homelessness. I continue that work today in Kalamazoo. My recent research explores the impacts on communities and middle class Americans from recent political-economic and cultural restructurings within the US.

I enjoy coaching youth sports and am currently coaching 5th grade boys and 2nd grade girls soccer teams. I also consistently volunteer at my children's school and in their classrooms working

with small reading groups, cooking at the annual Field Day BBQ, chaperoning field trips, reading to classes, and presenting in classes on social studies. I have been a consistent participant in community forums and board meetings in order to contribute to, and learn from, the process of maintaining a quality educational system.

James McGillicuddy

My name is James McGillicuddy MD and I am a candidate for the Okemos School Board. I am a proud lifelong resident of the Lansing area having been born at St. Lawrence Hospital, grew up in

East Lansing, and then spend the last 40 years in private practice here. In addition to being a general



surgeon, I am also a passionate educator having served as an instructor in surgery at the University of Cincinnati, clinical professor of surgery and director of the surgical clerkship in the MSU College of Human Medicine, and most recently mentoring Sparrow Hospital family practice residents. I also bring to the position years of leadership experience having served as a board member for the Michigan State Medical Society, Sparrow Hospital Chief of Staff and innumerable presidencies of smaller organizations and honor societies.

I have lived in Okemos for more than 20 years and am the proud parent of two graduates of the Okemos School system. My reason for want to join the Okemos School Board is simple; I feel that it is vital for us to sustain the excellence carved out for our children by generations of great teachers, administrators and educational support organizations for the next generation of Chieftains.

OEF News

Okemos Education Foundation

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Free ACT Prep Workshops

The OEF is again sponsoring four free ACT prep workshops for Okemos High School Students on upcoming early release days. Sylvan Learning will conduct these workshops on test taking strategies and breakdown sample questions from the ACT.



The workshops are free, but students should sign up in advance at the OHS Guidance Office.

The workshops will be held at Okemos High School from 12:45–1:45 p.m. on the following early release days: November 16, December 7, January 11, and February 29. 

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

–Benjamin Franklin

A gift to the Okemos Education Foundation helps support excellence in educational programs and services for Okemos students now and in the future. The OEF is a 501(c)(3) organization and donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. For your convenience, we accept online credit card donations at www.oefsite.org.

OEF Partners in Education are donors who contribute \$50 or more annually with recognition and benefits at various levels of giving. More information about OEF Partners in Education recognition can be found at www.oefsite.org.

Now more than ever before, it's up to all of us to maintain the quality of education for Okemos students. Thank you for considering a gift to the OEF!