



OEF

News

Fall 2008

A publication of the Okemos Education Foundation www.oefsite.org

2008 Commitment to Excellence award recipients announced

The annual OEF Commitment to Excellence Awards Banquet is scheduled for Thursday, November 20, at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing. Each year students, parents, community members, administrators, and/or colleagues support the nomination of outstanding individuals within the Okemos community for five prestigious awards.

Based on what is always an extraordinary array of nomination packets presented, the OEF has the unenviable task of selecting a discrete number of award recipients. Award recipients receive a commemorative plaque, but all nominees are recognized at the awards banquet. Congratulations to the following 2008 recipients.

Commitment to Excellence Educator 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. Each educator will receive a \$1,000 cash grant from the OEF.

- **Bob Cooley**, Bennett Woods and Central Physical Education Teacher
- **Frank DeWald**, Chippewa and High School Choir Director
- **Brian Harrod**, High School Business/Technology Teacher
- **Mary Ann Latta**, Second Grade Teacher & **Rosemary Buscetta**, Library & Media Center Specialist, Nominated as Bennett Woods Technology Team
- **Don Mowry**, Cornell Third Grade Teacher
- **Eric Staib**, Central & Wardcliff Art Teacher

Special Recognition Award:

Presented to support staff or volunteers who demonstrate a passion for excellence and whose support elevates the Okemos

district:

- **Janice Buhs**, Administrative Assistant to the Special Education Director
- **Ken Green**, Chippewa Lead Custodian.

Alumni Award:

A graduate of Okemos Public Schools selected for their dedication and achievement as well as humanitarian contributions:

- **Brig Sorber**, President of Two Men and a Truck

Dan C. Wertz Founder's Award:

Recognized for a commitment to quality in education through generous financial support as well as exceptional and notable service in the Okemos Public Schools:

- **Dr. Charles and Maria Bill**, Okemos Parents

Please plan to honor the Recipients and Nominees (see *Highlight on Award Nominees*, page 3) by attending the OEF Commitment to Excellence Awards Banquet!

Lee Gerard Professional Development Award

by Dr. Cheryl Kreger, Okemos Public Schools Superintendent

In outstanding school districts like Okemos, teachers and instructional staff become a professional learning community committed to discovering, sharing and implementing the best teaching strategies and practices. To create a culture where innovation is part of every day routines, it is important for teachers to move beyond a single classroom and engage colleagues in work that reflects shared values and beliefs about how students learn best. The OEF encourages use of insights, solutions, and successful classroom innovations that can be worked on and shared through teacher collaboration.

To encourage the collegial collaboration that is at the core of a vibrant professional learning community, the OEF established the Lee Gerard Professional Development Award. Thanks to the support of you, our donors, the award provides up to \$1000 to support small groups of teachers as they jointly investigate, adapt ideas, implement innovation and spread the word about

See Award, page 2

2008 Commitment to Excellence Awards Banquet

Thursday
November 20, 2008

 MSU Kellogg Center
East Lansing
Social Hour 5:30 p.m.
Dinner 6:30 p.m.

Adult \$30.00,
Children (12 and younger) \$12.00

Tickets available October 1 until November 12, 2008 at all schools, or see ticket order form on page 3!

Mark your calendar!

October 20: Next Mini-grant proposal due date.

November 12: Last day to order Commitment to Excellence Awards Banquet tickets

November 20: Commitment to Excellence Awards Banquet

(Award, continued from page 1)

what works best in the classroom so that others may utilize what has worked. In the first year of offering the award, two were granted and the OEF looks forward to more this coming year.

The award is named in honor of Dr. Lee Gerard, who served the Okemos Public Schools for 27 years, including three years as Superintendent from 2004 to 2007, and was a strong supporter of the OEF. Interested applicants must be current Okemos staff members and must fill out an application that is posted on the website. The OEF strives to support teaching innovation and high standards so that all students learn. **OEF**

Thank you again 2007-08 Partners in Education!

Emerald Partners (\$5,000 and up)

Delta Dental of Michigan
Clark & Kathleen Manning
Richard & Kathy Schalter

Platinum Partners (\$2,500 - \$4,999)

Spartan Chassis, Inc.
Summit Community Bank

Gold Partners (\$1,000 - \$2,499)

Dr. and Mrs. Charles Bill
Warren Culver
Tracey Holland (United Way)
Dr. Cynthia Hollenbeck & Dr. Paul Flynn
Terry and Anne Hughes
Cheryl and John Kreger
Peter and Beth Janick
Brad and Shirley Naghtin
National City Bank
JoAnne Sorlie and Subhash Gupta
Wal-Mart of Okemos

Message from OEF Chair

I am honored and very excited to be involved with the OEF and to work alongside the other OEF trustees in fulfilling our mission of recognizing excellence and promoting innovation in Okemos Public Schools. I look forward to building upon the outstanding accomplishments of my predecessor, Kathy Schalter.

Under Kathy's tenure as chair, the OEF underwent tremendous growth – strengthening the structure of the foundation, building strong bonds with the community, creating an endowment for the future, and focusing our fundraising efforts which has allowed us to triple the amount of funding provided across the district - all in an effort to ensure a vital role for the OEF in the education of our children. We are very fortunate that Kathy will be with the OEF for one more year as a trustee before finishing her extraordinary term of service.



Dean Bolton- OEF Chair

Anne Readett and Jerry Fine finished their terms as trustees in June and I would like to thank them for their many years of service to the OEF. Both Anne and Jerry contributed greatly as hard working members of the OEF board and are exemplary of the dedication that all of our trustees have for Okemos Public Schools. I would also like to welcome Kim Burzych and Craig Lazar as new trustees. Both Kim and Craig are featured elsewhere in this newsletter.

In this newsletter, you'll find evidence of both the innovation and excellence that makes our school district so outstanding. Last year through the generosity of individuals, families and businesses, the OEF was able to give over \$26,000 in support throughout the district and increase its endowment fund by \$20,000. With the creation of the Lee Gerard Professional Development Award last year, we have expanded our scope to provide professional growth opportunities for our dedicated faculty. Our goal this year is to increase our funding through grants and awards to \$34,000.

*We look forward to
working this year on your
behalf to support our
schools and our children's
education.*

The OEF grants are central to our role of promoting innovation. It is an opportunity for us to support teachers as they implement creative, inventive projects that not only benefit students and enhance curriculum, but also continue to grow Okemos School's reputation as an outstanding public school system. The OEF has a role in helping bridge funding gaps but our support also gives teachers the opportunity to try out new ideas and keep Okemos at the forefront of education.

Each year, at the Commitment to Excellence Awards Banquet, we honor the exceptional contributions of Okemos teachers, staff and community members. Recognizing the excellence of Okemos Schools is easy given the incredible teachers and staff

of our district. I hope you will be able to join us on November 20, 2008 for this meaningful event.

When my wife's job brought us to mid-Michigan nine years ago, like many others, we chose to live in Okemos solely based on the outstanding reputation of the public schools. Now, with a fourth and eighth grader, we are certain we made the right choice. I know it is true because I have seen it first-hand. As a stay-at-home dad, I have been lucky enough to have the time to volunteer in my son's schools and with district-wide groups. One of the benefits of this has been to see the passion the district's staff has for their work and our children's education.

Parents want the best for their children and businesses want the best for their community, proven by the financial support the OEF has received for the last 23 years. But, ultimately the OEF would not be able to raise the funds needed to fulfill our mission if the Okemos School staff did not bring such commitment and dedication to the work they do for our children.

Thank you all for your past support and I invite all of you to become Partners in Education this year by contributing to our Grants fund or our Endowment fund. Watch for information in your mailboxes or visit our website to find out how you can make a difference in Okemos schools.

Finally, on behalf of all 24 OEF trustees, thank you so much for your past support. We look forward to working this year on your behalf to support our schools and our children's education. **OEF**

Highlight on Award Nominees

We thank all the parents and faculty who wrote so many wonderful Commitment to Excellence and Special Recognition nomination letters, and would like to congratulate the **2008 OEF award nominees: Beth Bishop, Melinda Derby, Laurie Johnson, Eugenia Pocalujka, Dean Bolton, and Jeanette Yurkinas.**

2008 Commitment to Excellence Educator Award Nominees

As an extraordinary guidance counselor, **Beth Bishop** has, in the words of her principal, "left a permanent and influential imprint on the people of the Cornell community." Tara Fry, her principal, continues. "She is a trusted problem solver, a loyal confidant, a courageous negotiator, a calm and compassionate voice of reason, a strategic planner, a confidence builder, and an extraordinary teacher and leader to our entire school community." Beth retired at the end of the 2008 school year and the OEF congratulates her on 33 years of amazing service and her commitment to excellence.

Since 2001, **Melinda Derby** has played a very crucial role in the development of young learners with special needs in the Okemos Early Childhood Special Education classroom. Several parents, supporting Melinda's nomination, spoke of the hope she inspires and the extraordinary

difference she has made in the lives of their children. Robert Greenhoe, the Central Elementary building principal remarks, "Minda exudes a special warmth, love, and sincerity to each child she interacts with. In the eyes of Mrs. Derby, each child is a special gift that deserves the very best that education has to offer."

Lauri Johnson, currently teaching first grade at Central Elementary, has, for the past twelve years, used her gentle, patient, positive, and caring demeanor to encourage young learners to be the best that they can be. Her principal, Robert Greenhoe states, "Laurie continually goes beyond her day to day expectations, often working countless hours to make certain that a job has been completed or that she is prepared for the following day. Her understanding and compassion towards others is indescribable; taking every situation to heart."

The elementary school parents who nominated **Eugenia Pocalujka**, Hiawatha Fourth Grade Teacher, all agree that, in spite of her incredible reputation, she has inspired and motivated their children beyond their highest expectations. One parent states, "I am truly impressed with her ability to balance being an incredibly caring teacher while at the same time maintaining the deepest respect from her students. She truly motivates them to be their best not only in academics, but also

as individual people."

Special Recognition Award Nominees

The Central PTO, with support from the principals of Central Elementary and Chippewa Middle School, several parents, and a teacher, enthusiastically nominated **Dean Bolton** as a "one of a kind" dedicated parent volunteer. A partial list of Dean's present activities includes: Chair of Central Elementary Book Fairs, President of Chippewa PTO, Vice-President of Central PTO, and now chair of the Okemos Education Foundation. In each leadership role, his efforts reach far beyond his stated responsibilities. As one parent noted, "Dean is the kind of man every community wishes they had. He is a quintessential leader and volunteer. He is truly committed to the community."

Jeanette Yurkinas, the Administrative Assistant at Hiawatha Elementary School for the past 14 years, is someone greatly appreciated by students, parents, staff, and especially by her administrator, Gary Kinzer. Mr. Kinzer notes, "While Jeanette is obviously proficient with the technical part of her job, it is the human part that our teachers respect, admire, and appreciate the most. What makes Jeanette an exemplary employee is her commitment, dedication, and loyalty to Hiawatha Elementary School." **OEF**

Commitment to Excellence Banquet Ticket Order Form

Name _____
 Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____
 Phone _____
 E-mail Address _____

Please make checks payable to:
Okemos Education Foundation

Ticket order forms and payment can be turned in to any school, or mailed to:

Mrs. Cindy LeVine
4552 Sandstone Dr.
Williamston, MI 48895

	# Tickets	\$ Total
Adult \$30/ticket		\$
Child (12 and under) \$12/ticket		\$
TOTAL	#	\$

Vegetarian Meals requested: _____



Ticket orders must be received by November 12.

Questions? Call 517-655-6307

2007-08 OEF Grants and Awards Summary

Each year, the OEF distributes thousands of dollars by way of grants and awards to the Okemos school community. **Last year alone, over \$26,000 was awarded to benefit Okemos Public Schools students!**

Mini-grants are awarded three times a year, in the fall, winter, and spring. The mini-grant application form is online at www.oefsite.org. **The next mini-grant deadline is approaching fast-October 20, 2008.**

The Commitment to Excellence Awards are given once a year to the six recipients

of the educator award as honored at the Commitment to Excellence banquet. The awardees may use their award as they



desire to benefit their classroom students and school.

The Lee Gerard Professional Development Award is a new award. The deadline for the 2008/09 school year is also Oct. 20, 2008. More details about this award can be found on page 1.

Your donations make this possible- without the generous support of the Okemos Education Foundation, our children's educational experience would not be as enriched. Thank you for your support!

OEF

Mini-Grants

1.	Interactive Field Trips to Colonial Williamsburg	Hiawatha	\$570
2.	Water Testing Kits for the "Red Cedar River Project"	Central	\$400
3.	Touch Phonics Program	Edgewood/Cornell	\$925
4.	Cougar Commons	Cornell	\$1,000
5.	Multisensory Reading and Language Program	Cornell	\$1,000
6.	400 Super Reader Books	Bennett Woods	\$1,000
7.	Leveled Readers for 2nd and 3rd Grades	Bennett Woods	\$1,000
8.	Cart/Storage Unit for Printing Press	Edgewood/B.W.	\$535
9.	Teach and Store Centers	Bennett Woods	\$612
10.	Dry Erase Marker Board Kits	Hiawatha	\$207
11.	Tactile & Arts Centers	Cornell	\$1,000
12.	Rosco Image Pro (Stage Lighting Equipment)	OHS	\$364
13.	Musical Instruments	All Pre-School/Keep	\$660
14.	Reader Theatre Kits	Cornell	\$1,000
15.	College Recommended Books	OHS	\$1,200
16.	Preschool Science Curriculum Materials	Edgewood	\$1,000
17.	Picture Books	Hiawatha	\$1,000
18.	Classic Children's Literature Books	All Elementary	\$1,200
19.	Astronomy & Geography Books	All Elementary	\$1,200
20.	Visiting Author Program	All Elementary	\$3,000

Lee Gerard Professional Development Award

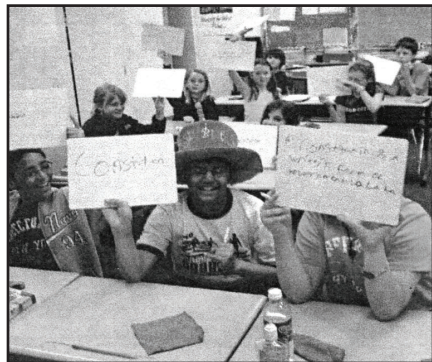
1.	Music Curriculum Consultant	All Pre-School/Keep	\$340
2.	Collaborating for Math in Kindergarten	Central	\$900

Commitment to Excellence Educator Awards

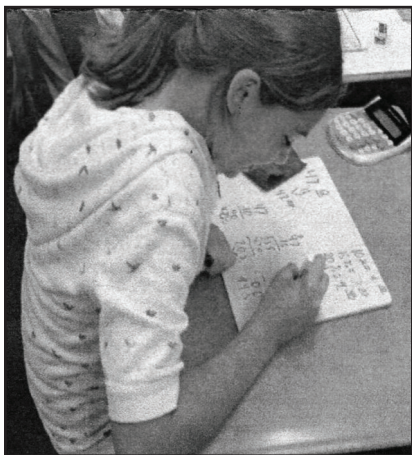
1.	6 Awards given yearly		\$6,000
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Your support is making a difference for OPS kids!

Hiawatha 5th grade teachers Molly Francis, Michelle Kroll, Marian Murembya, and Kris Schoen write that the **Dry Erase**



Marker Board Kits (white boards) are really useful in the classroom and are being used on a daily basis in every area in the curriculum. They write they *"appreciate the ease of the whiteboards and the opportunity they provide to engage every child in activities. Each child can work at his/her own pace, hold up the board for feedback, and move on."*



Their students had positive things to say about the whiteboards as well: *"The whiteboards save paper. They are also easy to use because, unlike paper, you can erase quickly and write your new answer"* and *"The boards help because they save you some humiliation. For example, instead of going up to the big whiteboard, you just use the little one."*



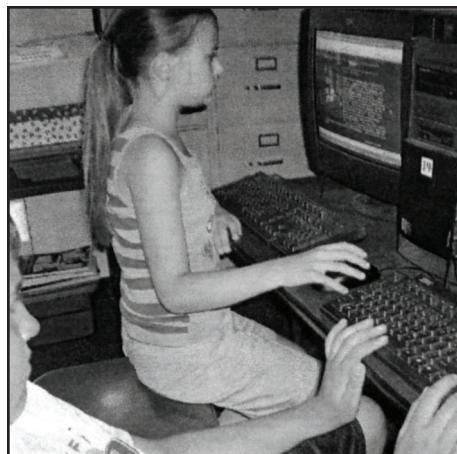
THANK YOU!

The **Colonial Williamsburg Electronic Field Trip Series** was also greatly appreciated by students of Hiawatha 5th grade teachers Molly Francis, Michelle Kroll, Marian Murembya, and Kris Schoen.

Their three classes of fifth graders enjoyed learning about American history through the medium. One of their students said



"My favorite part was learning about history in a cool movie type way." The students also were able to call in "live" and ask the experts questions during the broadcasts. At least one Hiawatha student made it on the air for each of the programs they watched.



Students completed games and activities related to each field trip.



From Rachol Danko (Edgewood Montessori Resource Teacher):

"Thank you for your generous support for the resource room at Edgewood Montessori. The grant allowed me to purchase 176 books and a complete Touch Phonics Kit! My students and I use these items every day. The students love the colorful pictures, controlled vocabulary, and the tactile letters to manipulate. The purpose of a resource room- is to provide strategies and resources and you have certainly aided in this endeavor!"

From Noelle Palasty (former Cornell Resource Teacher):

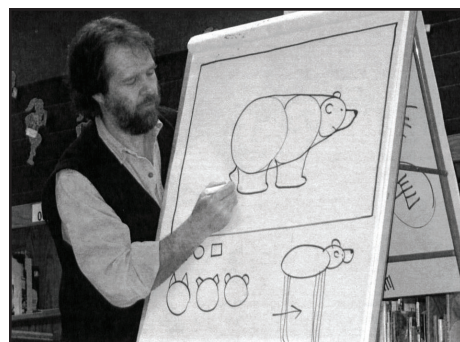
"Thank you for the OEF grant that I received earlier this year. I was able to purchase the S.P.I.R.E reading program which is a research based reading and language arts program designed to help struggling readers. I have received the materials and am using them daily with students. My favorite part of the program is the passages which provide students opportunities to practice reading skills in a controlled reading selection. It is so exciting to watch students apply new found knowledge and feel the success of reading!"



Kay Springer, Reading Consultant at Hiawatha Elementary writes: *"Thank you very much for the generous check to support our elementary schools in presenting our Special Author Day again this year. Gijsbert van Frankenhuyzen was an incredible presenter and the students enjoyed him very much. He spent the entire day at each school and worked with grade levels."*



"Mr. Nick was especially brilliant at knowing how to treat each grade level, including the younger children. This is sometimes hard for a presenter to do. He



gave wonderful ideas in illustrations that convinced the students that everyone can draw. He also stressed the importance of expressing the words to pictures as you read."

OEF News

 **Okemos Education Foundation**
4406 N. Okemos Road
Okemos, MI 48864

**In this issue: Find out the
2008 Commitment to Excellence Award
Recipients and Nominees!**



OEF mission: *“Recognizing excellence and promoting innovation in Okemos Public Schools.”*

OEF

Okemos Education Foundation

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*** Superintendent of Schools

OEF Trustee changes announced

The OEF welcomes 2 new Trustees this fall, Kim Burzych and Craig Lazar, and after many years of service, say goodbye to Trustees Anne Readett and Jerry Fine. Jerry Fine chaired the Commitment to Excellence Banquet's Silent Auction, and Anne Readett did a wonderful job as the Publicity Chair. We thank them for their service to the Okemos school community as Trustees for the OEF. Our new trustees are:

Kim Burzych works part-time as an attorney for the Michigan Department of Treasury. She and her husband Mark are the parents of three Okemos students. Kim has volunteered in numerous capacities in the schools and classrooms, including serving as President of Cornell PTO for two years, President-Elect of Cornell PTO for one year, and President of SOAR (Supporting Okemos Academic Resources). She has also served on the Board of Directors of Child and Family Services, Capital Area, for over 14 years. She was born and raised in Bethesda, Maryland, received her undergrad degree from the University of Richmond (Richmond, VA) and her law degree from

Catholic University (Washington, D.C.).

Craig Lazar and his wife, Cathy, are long time residents of Okemos. They have three children who attend Okemos schools. Craig is a Senior Vice President/Senior Portfolio Manager with Wachovia Securities in East Lansing and West Bloomfield.

