

OEF News

Fall 2009

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

Working Together

OKEMOS PUBLIC SCHOOLS SPECIAL UPDATE EDITION

A message from the Chair

Twenty-five years ago this fall, parents, community members and educators looking for a way to fund "good ideas" above and beyond the normal school operating budget came together



Dean Bolton-OEF Chair

to form the Okemos Education Foundation. Since then, the OEF has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars in support of the continuing quest for excellence

and innovation in our schools. This would not be possible without the support of a community that deeply values education.

As you will see in this newsletter, the OEF is not alone in "working together" to support our schools. The list of groups that support Okemos schools and the reach of their impact is wide-ranging. Just about every day and night, parents and community members can be found throughout the district volunteering their time and supporting their children and their children's teachers.

It has been observed by many that Okemos is defined by its schools more than anything else. From kindergarten rooms to the senior center, on the sports fields and in school classrooms, auditoriums and cafeterias, our community comes together through our schools.

A glance at the school calendar gives just a snapshot of how our community has stayed together and worked together over the years to elevate and protect our community's greatest asset – our schools. Every year at football games and orchestra concerts in the fall and the fine arts festival and high school

musical in the spring and at many, many more events, children, parents, and our community join together to appreciate and celebrate the many examples of excellence our schools produce. Also evident are the many ways our community provides funds throughout the year. These events could not happen without community support.

While the OEF awards monetary grants for educational purposes at every grade level in the district, there are many other support groups that direct their support to specific areas or grade levels. Included in this news-

“

Coming together is a beginning.

Keeping together is progress.

Working together is success.

-Henry Ford

. ”

letter is more information about all of the Okemos Public Schools support groups and how you can help with the important work they do.

Earlier this year, our community worked together through committee meetings, community forums and Board of Education meetings to create a new master plan for the district. The results, to be implemented in the 2010-2011 school year, will bring profound change along with new opportunities for our schools. In this newsletter, Okemos Superintendent Dr. Cheryl Kreger answers questions about the new master plan as well as other important district initiatives.

Here at the OEF, we are already hard at

work this year recognizing excellence and promoting innovation in Okemos Public Schools. Last year, we were able to give over \$36,000 in support across the district. We awarded a wide range of grants including science equipment and student response systems at the high school, English language learning materials and a greenhouse at the middle schools, and robotics equipment and literature materials at the elementary schools. These were just a few of the ways OEF funds were put to use last year.

Each year, the OEF honors the exceptional contributions of Okemos teachers, staff and community members at the OEF Awards Banquet. I hope you'll join us on November 19 at the Country Club of Lansing to celebrate our award recipients and all that is great about Okemos Public Schools.

This year we hope to fund even more through our awards, grants and professional development fellowships. **I invite all of you to become our *Partners in Education* by contributing to the OEF (an envelope has been included in this newsletter to receive your gift).** Every dollar donated does make a difference as we all work together to fulfill the district's mission: *"Together... educating with excellence, inspiring learners for life."* **OEF**

Mark your calendar!

November 11:

Last day to buy tickets to the OEF Awards Banquet

November 19:

OEF Awards Banquet

January 4:

Next mini-grant proposal deadline

OEF Trustee changes announced

The OEF is pleased to announce the addition of two new Trustees this fall: **Ron Styka**, who will serve as the Okemos Board of Education's representative to the OEF, and Edgewood Montessori Principal **Sue Hallman**. We look forward to working with both of these exceptional people.

We are, however, very sad to say goodbye to former OEF President **Kathy Schalter**, who ended her term last spring. Kathy was a strong leader who helped strengthen the OEF's fundraising effort by introducing the **Partners in Education** donor recognition program. Kathy greatly values the OEF's ability to impact the quality of education for each and every child in the district, and she worked tirelessly to increase educational resources for all OPS students. Kathy and her husband Rich are the 2009 recipients of the Dan C. Wertz Founder's Award (see page 7 for details).

Also leaving the OEF are **Catherine Westfall**, who chaired the OEF Grants committee for many years, **Gary Kinzer**, Principal

of Hiawatha Elementary, and **Donna Kregelka**, Social Studies teacher at Kinawa Middle School. **Amy Crites** has also stepped down after serving as the Okemos Board of Education liaison to the OEF for the last three years. We thank these Okemos community members for their years of service and dedication to OPS kids.

About our new Trustees


Sue Hallman has been the principal of Edgewood Public Montessori for five years. Previously, she taught fourth and fifth grade at Bennett Woods for ten years. Sue earned her B.A. and M.A. from Michigan State University. Sue and her husband Dave are Okemos residents and have three children, two dogs, and three granddogs. All of their children, Kevin (Alana), Chad (Liz), and Chelsea, as well as their daughter-in-law Alana, attended Okemos Public Schools. Sue is a 2003 OEF Commitment to Excellence Award recipient.

Ron Styka moved to Okemos with his

family in 1978. Residents of Briarwood, Ron and his wife Georgia have four sons who all attended Okemos Public Schools from kindergarten through graduation from Okemos High School. Georgia teaches history at Okemos High School.

Ron has a B.A. in political science, economics, and history from the University of Detroit and a law degree from the University of Michigan. He has been an Assistant Attorney General since 1971 and is currently legal counsel to the Department of Community Health.

An active community member, Ron has served as president of Briarwood Association, coached Eastside soccer for nine years, and has been active in OAKS, scouting, Indian Guides, Music Patrons and Athletic Boosters.

Ron was first elected to the Board of Education in 1990. He was re-elected in 1994, 1998, 2002, and again in 2006. He currently serves as Vice President and as a member of the board's Policy Committee. 

OEF

Okemos Education Foundation

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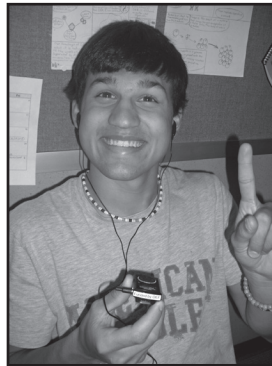
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**Board of Education Representative

*** Superintendent of Schools

(Below): A 2008-09 OEF mini-grant funded Auditory Accommodation Systems for Christine Skoutela's students!



(Above): A 2008-09 OEF mini-grant provided funding for alphabet, language, and reading development tutoring kits. Nichole Berridge writes: "We are so excited to have the kits! Even though the kits just came in last week we have several teachers inquiring when they can check them out to support their current classroom work!"

(Below): A 2008-09 OEF mini-grant funded TI Nspire calculators for students in Michelle Filipiak's math classes.



(Above): A 2008-09 OEF mini-grant funded a mat cutter for students in Janet Boniface's art classes. Janet writes: "The students' work definitely looks more professional, and has been entered into competitions due to these new tools that we are using. The finished pieces look incredible, and we couldn't have done this without having the grant."

Q & A with Superintendent Cheryl Kreger



*Dr. Cheryl Kreger, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools*

1 What are the major initiatives and challenges facing Okemos Public Schools this coming year?

This coming year's initiatives include:

- Transitioning to and planning for a new configuration for our K-8 schools in 2010-11
- Continuing to improve learning for each of our students as our teachers look at performance data and work more closely with peers
- Utilizing federal stimulus ARRA funds for special training and programs
- Reviewing our reading curriculum
- Continuing to work on world languages to make a recommendation to the Board of Education
- Evaluating options for professional development for our teachers and administrators

Our major challenge is school finances in this unstable economy while we continue to maintain excellence in every area.

2 The economic challenges we are facing this coming year are possibly the most challenging in the history of Michigan schools. What changes can we expect this year as we continue to meet these challenges as a district?

A budget was passed in June that reflected budget reductions as well as a conscious decision to utilize our fund balance to support programs. Some reductions were seen in every area of the budget. (Complete budget information can be found on the district's website www.okemosschools.net.) Resulting changes include but are not limited to:

- Reduction of the Board of Education conference fund
- Cuts to the athletic budget (could be offset by fundraising and raising of fees)
- Elimination of a clerk at the elementary level
- Restructuring of the middle school assistant

principal position

- Hiring of contract administrators to fill a limited number of positions
- Reduce the use of substitutes
- Elimination of some standardized tests
- Reduction of textbook funds
- Elimination of district funding for school clubs (other sources of funding will be sought)
- Elimination of one elementary reading consultant
- Elimination of a 4/5 counseling position at the high school
- Energy savings by removal of all appliances that are not educational in purpose
- Elimination of the assistant director of operations position
- Closing of the Chippewa Middle School pool

3 How did we decide to make these changes?

I must begin by saying that the Okemos Schools have been very aggressive and proactive historically in finding solutions to our budget challenges. Six years ago we did a study and implemented a plan which served us well, and the board reinitiated formation of a long range plan again.

For this year, however, budget decisions and ensuing changes were made through the usual budget process. This process includes constant monitoring of funds and enrollment, a review process which leads to a recommendation and considerations for the board. The recommendations are based on our best "guess" of variables such as future funding and enrollment as well as the impact of any cuts on our programs and students. Students and their learning are always on our minds when decisions are made.

A different approach was used to plan changes that will occur in the 2010-11 school year. A comprehensive process was developed that began in July 2008 with a search for a facilitator. In December 2008, the work began in earnest and concluded in a committee recommendation in March followed by board action in April 2009. The process involved six steering committee meetings and three community forums that were working sessions that shaped the final recommendation. Supporting data, documents and the full reports are located on the district website. We will realize major savings in 2010-11 by the reconfiguration of our schools and efficiencies created.

4 What will not change as a result of our finances?

Some things that will *not* change as a result of our finances will be:

- Our commitment as a district to our primary goal of student learning
- The employment of highly qualified and excellent staff at every level
- The safety and quality of our buildings
- Strong community support for our students and programs
- The desire to constantly improve delivery of instruction and programs for our students
- Use of the latest technology in instructional programs and to improve business functions and communication

5 What can parents or community members do to help their children and the school district meet these changes?

Parents are critical to their children's success in school and can also take an active part in the success of the Okemos Schools as a whole. I would like to highlight some of the wonderful things that our Okemos parents do already and ask them to continue.

- Set routines at home that emphasize the importance of learning and school performance
- Demonstrate a positive attitude about school and changes that are occurring- these attitudes are "catchy"
- Attend parent conferences and contact school when you have a question about your student
- Make time when possible to attend school events in which your child participates
- Join an organization that supports your child's interests (PTO, athletic boosters, band boosters, art patrons, etc.)

6 We have a school election coming up in November. What will be on the ballot?

There are two major areas of importance on the ballot. The first is to **elect a school board member** to fill an empty seat. We have had two candidates run for the vacancy and their biographies are highlighted in this newsletter and more information can be found on the district website. The second issue is the **renewal of the Headlee Millage Restoration, which will not increase taxes**. A thorough explanation of this proposal and the actual language can be located in this newsletter and on the district website. It is important that all voters learn about the candidates and the

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

Headlee Millage Restoration proposal so they can make informed choices, as these decisions are critical to our district's leadership and finances.

7 One element of the district's Vision Statement refers to a learning community that embraces "Okemos residents from preschoolers to senior citizens". What experiences do we provide community members?

We provide many learning and recreational experiences for our community members through Community Education Programs. Additionally, we provide quality child care opportunities for infant and toddlers through middle school age students. We also have a senior center that is operated at Chippewa Middle School from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM every day. Our comprehensive programs are again listed on the web but to highlight a few of the areas of our programs:

- Adult fitness and recreation- kayaking, kick-boxing, yoga, Pilates, weight training Zumba
- House and home- electricity, interior design, woodworking, remodeling
- Music and dance- couples dancing, guitar basics, holidays
- Personal interests- voice-overs, writing memoirs, college planning, dog obedience
- Travel and trips- Mackinac Island, Birch Run and Bronner's, Chicago overnight
- Ed 2 Go- Online learning

8 The vision statement also talks about imbuing our students with a "sense of social and community responsibility". How are our students volunteering or making an impact outside the school buildings?

Service is a big part of our students' lives. Beginning in elementary grades, students have raised money for cancer, collected money and items for our troops, performed in senior residences, adopted zoo animals, and donated money and food to the food banks, to mention just a few activities.

By high school, our students may actually take on physical jobs at the homes of senior citizens, as well as collect money and give service through clubs such as ACTION. In the past, a group developed a "Green Club" dedicated to leaving less of a carbon footprint and saving energy. Many of our students volunteer at their places of worship, or develop community projects through scouts. Their efforts are many and of great significance to the community.

9 Voters approved a Technology and Transportation Bond in 2007. How has the school district been using that money?

With the passage of our technology and transportation bond, Okemos Public Schools has resumed its position as a leader in educational technology.

Okemos has a well developed technology plan and is making great progress toward implementation of the plan. The plan includes curriculum and technology integration, professional development, parental communication and community relations, infrastructure, hardware and software, and budgets.

Initial steps of the bond involved creating the infrastructure and capacity to support a sophisticated technology system. After that, we have initiated such things as new computers, sound systems, Smart Boards and projectors in our classrooms. (There is a link on our website with complete information.) Most recently, the auditorium lighting at Kinawa and Chippewa has been completely updated. The multimedia installation at the high school and the middle schools has been completed. The high school has received two new labs of computers and each middle school one lab each. At last report, we are moving forward with COWS (computers on wheels!) and want our efforts to reflect the newest technology.

We have purchased distance learning equipment through a grant from the ISD and have initiated wireless access in our libraries. Gymnasiums are to soon be included with wireless as well.

Power School, a student management system which allows communication between home and school, has been installed. Now middle and high school students, teachers, and parents have real-time access to student grades, assignments, attendance, discipline records and teacher comments. In the words of Errin Chapman, our Director of Technology, "it is an amazing product and we have only begun to scratch the surface."

Don't forget that we have also been able to purchase busses through the bond and Todd Sharp, Director of Transportation, ordered four new busses this past spring at reduced rates because of our timing.


10 In the past, voters approved a Sinking Fund millage. Part of the millage has expired and the balance ends in 2012. How does the district use the money and how important is it to have this type of financial

support?

I will begin by answering the second question. Our sinking fund is critical to our district because it is money that is dedicated to capital projects and cannot be used for anything else. This allows us to keep our buildings in good structural shape and free up money from our general budget for instructional purposes. Additionally, it is one of the few examples of funding that is locally controlled by voters with direct application to the district. It will be critical that voters support another sinking fund in the years to come, so that we can maintain the investment we have in our buildings and utilize our foundation allowance for instruction.

As for the projects themselves, Steve Lathrop, our Director of Operations, plans for several years in advance, leaving some money for emergencies and reprioritizing as needed. Sinking projects for this summer included asphalt at several elementaries, concrete for various curbs and walkways, carpet, fixing the east section of the Bennett Woods roof, and renovating the exterior window and wall system at Chippewa.

11 What can the OEF do to help the district adapt to the challenges it faces?

The Okemos Education Foundation has been in existence for 25 years and has truly made a positive difference for our students. I would encourage the OEF to continue to support innovation and new ideas as well as recognize excellent teachers, community members and support staff for efforts above and beyond the ordinary. I commend the OEF for showing by example how community members can support schools and I encourage them to sustain their commitment to the schools. The OEF has offered hope and opportunity in "tough times" through their encouragement and grants. As superintendent I am grateful for this support. 

Be our Partner!

Becoming an **OEF 2009-10 Partner in Education** (see gift envelope in this newsletter) is a simple way you can help OPS students succeed.

Your generous support *can* and *does* make a difference for Okemos students- now more than ever!

Thank You (again!) 2008-09 Partners in Education!

The Okemos Education Foundation thanks the many individuals, families, professionals, and businesses that so generously supported the foundation's 2008-09 *Partners in Education* program. This is a program intended to recognize donors on an annual basis for different levels of giving. Our Partners played a key role in supporting the ongoing classroom grants that supplement the excellent staff and programs at Okemos Public Schools. If you are wondering how you too can become a partner- you are in luck! The **2009-10 Partner in Education** campaign is just getting started! Look for a remittance envelope in this newsletter, or find detailed campaign information online at www.oefsite.org. **Thank you!**

Emerald Partners **(\$5,000 and up)**

The Deits Family
Delta Dental of Michigan
Clark and Kathleen Manning
Richard and Kathy Schalter

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

Spartan Chassis
Summit Community Bank

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

Dr. and Mrs. Charles H. Bill
Warren Culver
Mary and Peter Graham
Tracey L. Holland
Peter and Beth Janick
Cheryl and John Kreger
Mary L. Rhodes

Silver Partners **(\$500 - \$999)**

Kim and Mark Burzych
Sanjeev and Anuradha Deshpande
Dr. Lawrence and Agnes Drzal
Monica Martin Goble
Sue Hallman
Kathleen Hoffman
John and Kristen Hood
The Hopping Family
Terry and Anne Hughes
John and Kathryn Lanzetta
Carol and Rick Laub
State Representative Mark Meadows
W. Thomas Melton
Jeri Mifflin
National City Bank
Edwin Loh and Joyce Parker
Karen L. Sedatole
Jeff Theuer and Sally Sproat
Patricia Trelstad
Peter and Sherry Trezise
Robert and Tiffany Tucheck
Steven and Marna Wilson

Bronze Partners **(\$250 - \$499)**

Wayne Abbott and Patricia Sorenson
David Annis and Andrea Bozoki
Paula M. Audas
Deborah and Michael Baughman
Allan Beegle and Suzi Yunker
John Beck and Ann E. Austin-Beck

(Bronze Partners- Continued)

Dean Bolton and Helen Taylor
Kathy Joyce Branch
Amy and Bill Brehm
Meridian Township Treasurer Julie Brixie
Dr. Blake and Sheryl Casher
Central Michigan Inns
Wanda Derochowski
Ellen Dohr and Scott Loveridge
Joel C. Eddy
Keith and Jo Anne Froelich
Lee and Linda Gerard
Heat 'n Sweep
Susan Schef Hopper
Daniel T. King
Pamela Kliever
Smruti Parikh
Therese and Rod Poland
B.J., Jill & Isabelle Rycus
Lisa R. Webb Sharpe
Francine and Brig Sorber
Amy and Steve Stag
Jeffery Stuckey and Mary Pat Jaracz
Deven and Manasi Upadhye
John and Carol Voss
Kathy Warner and Tony Lopez
Drs. West and Burkhardt, DDS
Yimin Xiao

Friends **(\$50 - \$249)**

Anonymous
James A. Ault
Deena Agree and Fred Gifford
Judy Barton and Scott MacGuidwin
Wolfgang and Diane Bauer
William and Sheri Beecroft
Jane H. Bell
Mr. Steve Betterly and Dr. Joanne Mahony
Roger and Paula Bjornstad
Gerard Breitzer
Arlene and Jere Brophy
Marianne Bubolz
Rosemary Buscetta
Kelly Cesar
Deb Chamberlain
David Chapman
Chivukula/ Simmons Family
The Christman Company
Patrick and Jody Corbett
Dan and Amy Crites
Bill and Linda Dansby
David and Sandra Detrisac
Dr. and Mrs. Nikolay Dimitrov
Carolyn Dudley
In honor of Darby Dudley
Donald L. Eitnrear
Steven and Laura Elias
Roy and Alice Erickson
Karen and John Everett
Jan and Joe Foster
Amit Ghose
Lisa and Steve Gold

(Friends- Continued)

Kevin and Sheri Gunns
The Hadlock Family
Tom and Christine Hammond
Lauren Harkness
Douglas K. Hartman
In honor of Alexandra Hayward
Todd Hickox and Carmen Ventocilla
Hedlun and Stephanie Hirschert-Walton
Mr. & Mrs. Rudolph Hirt
David D. Horner
Randy and Charmain Hull
In honor of Sara Kim
Jordan J. Kingdon
Gary and Marcy Kinzer
Cecelia Kramer and Richard Baderstadt
Lee and Mary Kroos
Michael A. Krumm
Patricia and Thomas Lack
Craig and Catherine Lazar
Cynthia LeVine
Stephen and Iris Linder
Bill M. Luoma
Paul Franc Mantica
Will and Jean Maples
Martha Marzero
Steve and Marie Matusz
William and Vicki Mead
Don and Martha Meaders
Chuck and Terry Miller
Deborah S. Mitin
Tom and Linda Muncie
John and Kari Naghtin
In honor of Tracy Nogle
Beth Ann O'Brien
Gary and Teresa Olson
Eleanor Omoto
Margo Parker
Eann and Alison Patterson
Nancy Plum
Anthony Recca
Ritta Rosenberg
Ed and Sue Rosser
Mr. and Mrs. Walter Roth
Krista Saldivia
Kimberly Savage
Michelle Selby
Neal and Kara Schmitt
Mary Schnepf
Mrs. Irene K. Schutt
Joni Steinhaus
Ron and Georgia Styka
Mr. And Mrs. Jay H. Smith
In honor of James Taggart
Jeff and Kathy Tavormina
Jim and Marlaine Teahan
In honor of Kevin Vermeesch
Fredrick W. Vogt
Pankaj Vij
Cheryl and Joe Wald
Annette and Richard Weiser
Pamela Williams
Cynthia Wolff
In honor of Abby Wood
Ping Xing
John Zappala

2009 OEF Award Recipients

Commitment to Excellence Award Recipients

Bob Bullock

Bob Bullock has been the Assistant Principal at Kinawa Middle School, and now Chippewa Middle School, for over 15 years. He has been instrumental in implementing the Homeland Security procedures and promoting the welfare of teachers and students in all their activities.

According to his colleagues and principal, Mr. Bullock has that special quality to listen, understand, and use disciplinary opportunities to teach and reinforce life skills. He inspires students to become productive citizens, active participants in their school, discerning thinkers, and sympathetic human beings. Students know that they will be treated firmly, fairly, and with respect. Principal John Hood states, "It is clear that Mr. Bullock achieves the goal that every educator has for his/herself – to make a lasting difference in the lives of our students. Bob's commitment to excellence in the Okemos schools is exemplary and his commitment to our staff is truly immeasurable."

Jennifer Holcomb

Jennifer Holcomb is a Fifth Grade Teacher at Cornell Elementary School. On the very first day of school, she tells her students that her hope for them is to have the "Best Year Ever." That goal is reached by the sense of community that she develops in her classroom, the expectations and encouragement she gives her students to strive for more than they believed possible, and the solid foundation her students receive to move on as independent learners for middle school. A colleague uses 3 C's to summarize Jennifer's teaching: "Compassionate, Charismatic, and Conscientious."

Tara Fry, Principal of Cornell, refers to Mrs. Holcomb as a "teacher leader." She supervises and mentors MSU interns in her classroom, is the Drama Club teacher, has been the School Improvement team member and *Failure is Not an Option* team member for many years. "Her colleagues highly value her opinion and she is greatly admired by parents in our community," says Principal Tara Fry.

Beth Josephson

Beth Josephson has demonstrated extraordinary expertise in counseling youth for 12 years at Okemos High School. Colleagues and parents describe her as a dynamic individual with many skills and strengths. She is highly regarded for her patience, compassion, integrity, and knowledge. She is constantly reading, researching, and brainstorming ways to open doors for students.

Beth's creativity inspired her to develop the Okemos Family Outreach Committee (OFOC) to provide for families that may need support and have little in the way of funds to provide for themselves. Dr. John Lanzetta, OHS Principal, says that Beth has provided leadership in their North Central accreditation efforts and was the architect of "Flex", a class period held once a week to provide students with access to their teachers for special help, re-teaching, make-up work and more. Additionally, on her own time during the summer, Beth has visited dozens of colleges and universities to develop and catalog information concerning college admission policies. This information is extremely helpful to all OHS students seeking college admission.

Christopher Smith

Christopher Smith is an extraordinary Economics, U.S. History, and A.P. History teacher at Okemos High School. For the past three years, Mr. Smith has served as the Social Studies Department Chair and leads with his ability to identify goals for the department and fulfillment of that vision with a commitment to excellence.

Okemos parents value Mr. Smith's deep understanding of history and how he teaches it to young adults in ways that motivate them to want to learn more. He inspires students to academic excellence. A colleague states, "Students trust him to be fair, kind, as well as academically rigorous. Because of this, Mr. Smith is highly respected and very well-liked by his students. He is a beloved mentor to many." Dr. John Lanzetta, OHS Principal, says, "Mr. Smith's relationships with students, parents, colleagues and administrators are exemplary, and we are fortunate to have him as a member of our faculty."

Deborah Sprecher

Deb Sprecher has a true gift for teaching music. Over the past 15 years, she has taught at Wardcliff Elementary School, and currently teaches at both Central and Edgewood Elementary Schools. The parents are in agreement when they say that Mrs. Sprecher teaches "from the heart" and has made music fun for her students.

Her colleagues applaud her talents as a musician and teacher. She is inspiring, conscientious, dedicated, and enthusiastic, with a wonderful imagination and a gentle way of bringing out the very best in every child from 3 year olds on up to 5th graders. Parents echo, "In return, she has students that adore her and are confident and eager to learn from her and share her love of music." Mrs. Sprecher's music classes and many student performances (including concerts, PTO Family Fun Night performances, Appreciation Luncheon programs, Grandparents and Family Tea programs) are always enjoyable examples of Mrs. Sprecher's commitment to excellence.

Marc Vickers

Marc Vickers came to Okemos High School during the 2001-2002 Fulbright Teacher Exchange program. He was hired in 2004 - 05 to fill an opening in the English Department. He has taught Lit/Comp 9, Lit/Comp 10, American Literature, Contemporary Fiction, Essentials of Writing, British Literature, and Drama. A colleague says, "Students in his classroom and in the Drama Program have benefited from his ability to reach them on both personal and intellectual levels. He challenges students to think and grow, to care, and find their passions. He teaches by example and expertise and is a role model for his students."

Mr. Vickers brings a remarkable level of talent and professionalism to his role as Drama Club Sponsor and director of the OHS Fall and Winter plays. Dr. Lanzetta says, "His leadership, organizational skills, as well as his creativity, are evident in his flawless productions." Because of Mr. Vickers commitment to excellence in his approach to life, people, his subject matter, and theater, the students refer to him not only as their teacher and director, but as a mentor and friend.

2009 OEF Award Recipients

Special Recognition Award Recipient

Todd Sharp

Todd Sharp is the Director of Transportation with Okemos Public Schools. He has worked for the district for 28 years. He is the "unsung hero" in being responsible for the safety and routing of approximately 1,800 students every single day. Mr. Sharp puts innumerable hours into developing bus schedules, maintenance, and repairs of busses. He also keeps up on the latest trends, research, and advances in the field of student transportation. As a result, all Okemos busses are equipped with video cameras for increased student safety and protection, and have Diesel Oxidation Catalysts installed to reduce diesel emissions.

Mr. Sharp provides leadership that exemplifies the courtesy and concern exhibited by all members of the transportation department. Jeri Mifflin, Principal of Bennett Woods, stated, "Todd's hard work, willingness to work in partnership with parents and school personnel, and his commitment to our district and community have helped ensure that our students have a positive transportation experience and, more importantly, reinforce the skills they need for success."

Volunteer Service Award Recipient

Rekha Sambamurthy

Rekha Sambamurthy is a volunteer Debate Coach and started the Debate Club at Kinawa Middle School. She has worked diligently to provide quality coaching to Kinawa sixth grade students. Ms. Sambamurthy challenges students and puts in countless hours organizing meetings, coordinating with the Capital Area Speech & Debate League, helping pick debate topics, and researching ideas on imparting debate skills.

Under Ms. Sambamurthy's coaching, the students have had success learning the essence of making logical arguments and detecting fallacies based on evidence. A parent says, "Ms. Sambamurthy has instilled a love for debating in the kids." Others comment, "She is solely motivated by her passion for debating and community service." Ms. Sambamurthy plans to include all three grades in the future.

Dan C. Wertz Founder's Award Recipients

Richard and Kathy Schalter

Richard and Kathy Schalter raised three children in Okemos schools. Their oldest daughter Lindsay graduated from OHS in 2005, their son Adam graduated in 2008, and their youngest daughter is currently a sophomore at Okemos High School. They feel that the Okemos community has been a wonderful place to live and raise their kids. Kathy says, "We started out at Wardcliff Elementary and quickly grew to appreciate the wonderful environment that their outstanding staff made for kids. We were grateful for the passion and excellence the teachers there brought to their classrooms and were impressed by the staff. As our kids grew and we became more involved with the whole district in other ways, we recognized that not only was excellence a characteristic of Wardcliff, but of the whole district."

The Schalters became involved with OEF initially because of the Commitment to Excellence Dinner (now called the *Awards Banquet*). They believe that educators do a great service for our society and families, and thought a dinner dedicated to honoring them for their commitment and sacrifice was a great thing.

Because of their wonderful experiences in the district, the Schalters were motivated to "give back and say thanks." They enjoy being partners with for OEF for many reasons. They appreciate that the OEF fills an ever-increasing need for resources; strengthens core academic programs; and benefits every child in the district. They also appreciate the fact that the OEF is an all-volunteer organization and that it continually highlights the many positive things that go on each and every day in our schools. Kathy says, "It was a privilege to serve as a trustee of the OEF for 6 years and to work along side of so many kind hearted, altruistic and giving people. We have just been blessed and inspired by the people in our community." 

A history of giving...

The Okemos Education Foundation is celebrating its **25th anniversary** this year!

1984-2009

We invite you to join us in honoring the 2009 OEF Award Recipients at the



OKEMOS
EDUCATION
FOUNDATION

2009 Awards Banquet

Thursday,
November 19, 2009

Country Club of Lansing
2200 Moores River Dr, Lansing

Social Hour 5:30 pm

Dinner 6:30 pm

Ticket prices for this exceptional evening:

Adult \$30.00

Children \$12.00

(12 and younger)

Tickets are available for purchase in school offices until Wednesday, November 11th, or by calling (517) 655-6307. A mail-in order form is also available online at www.oefsite.org.

**Tickets are limited-
so don't delay!**

OEF grants: Making an impact!

As the school year came to a close last spring, the OEF awarded seven more grants bringing our total of support to **\$30,450 for 2008-2009**. This last round of grants provides an accurate snapshot of the kind of support we provide.

This fall, high school students found new equipment, purchased with OEF funds, in two classrooms. Spanish teacher Kari Hiner will use her **new document camera** to project more than just 2-dimensional objects in the classroom. This projector replaces her old overhead projector and enables her to share not only images from books or magazines, maps, and student work but also 3-dimensional objects such as artwork. The document camera will be hooked up to the digital projector that was installed in her room over the summer, thanks to the technology bond.

Social Studies teacher Matt Morrison is also increasing the capabilities of technology in his classroom with an OEF grant to purchase a **student response system**. The student response system is a set of individual keypads which allow students to answer questions and interact with PowerPoint and Word documents instantaneously on the classroom's smartboard (an interactive blackboard provided with funds from the technology bond). The response system increases student interactivity during lessons and allows the teacher to immediately identify misunderstood topics as well as students who may need more assistance.

At the beginning of their educational


journey, kindergarten and 1st grade students at Cornell who are in need of extra help to master reading skills will benefit from the **intervention tutor materials** purchased by Nichole Berridge and Cindy Erickson with OEF funds. These materials include alphabet, language, and reading development activities for targeted, one-on-one tutoring to enable children to be more successful in the classroom.

Wardcliff second grade teacher, Julie Bellinger, is also using OEF funds to **enhance early childhood literary skills by creating work stations** that will offer students the ability to work independently and/or interact with others to explore and expand their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.

Grants were also awarded from the OEF's Connie Osborn Deits Science Enrichment Fund that impacted classrooms from the elementary schools to the high school. In the fifth grade classrooms at Hiawatha this year, teachers have purchased **new bar magnets, a remagnetizer, a magnetic field demonstrator, and a solar oven**. These materials will be used in the 5th grade magnet/electricity/motor and solar energy curriculum units. The materials are non-consumable, so they will be used for many years to come and can also be shared by the 3rd grade when they do their magnetism curriculum unit.

Another Deits Fund grant will benefit both high school and elementary school students with the purchase of supplies, including

Lego Mindstorm NXT kits, in order for the OHS Robotics Club to conduct community outreach enrichment classes. The club will travel to interested elementary schools in Okemos to run 4 week afterschool sessions. These workshops will enhance the high school students' ability to use Lego Mindstorm NXT. It will also enable them to develop leadership and teaching skills for teaching elementary students mathematical and scientific concepts. Students will learn to design, program and control fully-functional models. They will use software to plan, test and modify sequences of instructions for a variety of life-like robotic behaviors as well as analyze data from sensors on the models.

These and the other 27 OEF grants and awards given out last year would not have been possible without the generous support of Okemos parents, and community members and businesses. We look forward to continuing to share with you the results of your support. Together, we can make a difference. Information on how to join us as a *Partner in Education* can be found in this newsletter and at www.oefsite.org. 

(Below and right): Students are making new discoveries every day as a result of a 2008 grant that the Edgewood Montessori Enrichment Program received to improve their pre-primary science curriculum. Please visit the OEF website to see a beautiful slide presentation they created to thank the OEF as well as to share a portion of their journey in the life sciences!



Your support makes a difference!

"Thank you very much for everything that the OEF does for our students."

-Melissa Samluk

"Each year I attend the awards banquet and leave feeling re-energized and understanding again how powerful educators can be in the lives of students."

- John Hood

"With the OEF award, we were able to purchase musical instrument kits and enhance the early childhood experience. Of course, children and their parents loved it! It was a treat to see 2, 3, and 4 year olds on their way to becoming musicians!"

-Martha Chubb

"Many thanks for your support in bringing Denise Rodgers to our school. The students really enjoyed her presentation and working with the older students afterwards was an added bonus. Thank you for your continued support of our schools."

-Sue Hallman

"Thank you for your generous grant which will support the learning of many students for many years."

-Carmen VanAlstine

"Thank you once again for the fabulous opportunity that you provided for us. We are certain that the parents will really appreciate the skills we have learned and will be teaching in our parent and teacher sessions."

-Dorean Brazier

"The Family Hands On Science Night and Student Science Fair are a fun tradition and this funding will really enhance the experiments and activities we can do to showcase science!"

-Jeri Mifflin

"Thank you so very much for all of your support. The Alphasmarts are a wonderful support and motivational tool."

-Sheryl Hudler

"The class is super excited! Thank you so much for your help and support for this project."

-Matt Prinz

Students are saying...

Thank you for donating the wonderful books. Every one crowds around them when we go to the library. I'm interested in reading The Secret Garden. Once again, thank you for the books.
Sincerely,
Kendra

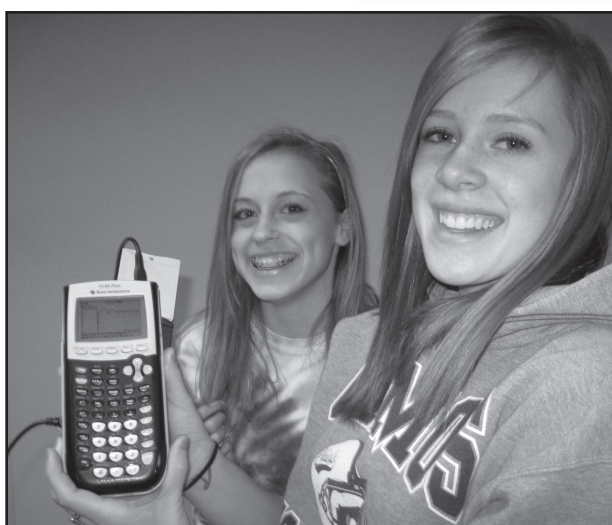
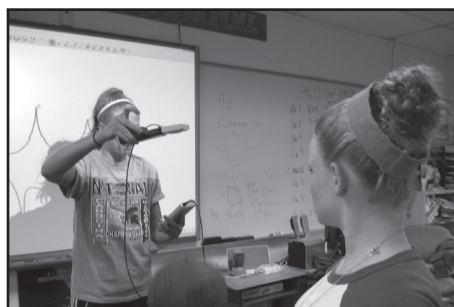


Thank you for donating a lot of new books for our school library. I thank you even more for letting us kids check out the books. I appreciate your kindness.
Sincerely,
Makenzie

Thank you for all the new books. I really like a lot of them, especially the new Egypt book. All of the books you donated are great, I can't wait to read them all!
Sincerely,
Keon

Thank you for the new books in our library. The books that we had before were old and some torn. You donated The Book of Three, I love that book. I want to check it out as soon as I can. Plus, Hatchet is a great book. You donated it! We also needed more space and Egypt books. Thank you very much for the new books for our library!!!
With thought,
Isaac

Students in Michelle Filipiak's math class enjoyed learning about parabolas thanks to an OEF 2008-09 mini-grant providing calculator-based rangers (CBR-2s) to record parabolic data.



Michigan Teacher of the Year: Rob Stephenson

On May 14, 2009 Wardcliff Elementary students and staff gathered in their school gym for a surprise visit from Mike Flanagan, State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Flanagan came to Okemos to announce that Rob Stephenson, a third grade teacher at Wardcliff for the past 15 years, had been selected as the 2009-2010 Michigan Teacher of the Year.



Rob Stephenson

Words of praise were plentiful, including those from Governor Jennifer M. Granholm. "Great teachers make an incalculable impact on the

lives of our children," said Governor Granholm. "We honor Rob not only because he's a great teacher but also to recognize the tremendous contribution that teachers are making in classrooms across our state."

While the visit was a surprise, it was no shock to students, parents, and staff that Mr. Stephenson would receive this honor. Mary Seeterlin, parent of three children who had Mr. Stephenson as their third grade teacher, said, "Mr. Stephenson creates an environment where students thrive and enjoy their education... he has the ability to make students feel great about themselves and their work."

Fellow teacher Julie Bellinger said, "I can say without a doubt, he is truly the most gifted educator I will ever work with and one of the most trusted colleagues and friends I have. His child-centered approach allows him to relate, connect, and build relationships with all of his students, as well as their families."

Flanagan congratulated Mr. Stephenson, saying, "Rob is an energetic example of our Michigan teachers. He believes in connecting with individuals and challenging them to reach their highest potential. We look forward to his continued contributions to teaching and learning."

Created by the Michigan Department of Education, the Michigan Teacher of the Year program provides an opportunity for an outstanding teacher to serve as an ambassador for all Michigan teachers, act as a role model for innovation in education, and inspire and challenge colleagues through professional development sessions and keynote addresses. As Teacher of the Year, Rob will represent Michigan educators as a non-voting member of the State Board

of Education and assist with policy development as requested by the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and members of the Legislature.

Rob had a busy summer with his new responsibilities - meeting with legislators, doing media interviews and several speaking engagements. Rob believes that his mission as an educator is, "to treat each child with respect and dignity, to accept each child with understanding, and to have faith in his or her abilities... to help students learn to value themselves, value others, and develop a love and enthusiasm for learning... to attain their full potential, while striving for their personal goals." As Michigan Teacher



of the Year, Rob plans to work to broaden the number of schools embracing innovation and creativity within the classrooms. He is also conducting trainings for educators on the hands-on integration of the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics content areas.

Rob has been recognized in the past for his success in integrating science and engineering into his classroom at Wardcliff. In 2005, Rob was the Michigan Science Teachers Association Elementary Science Teacher of the Year, and in 2006, he received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

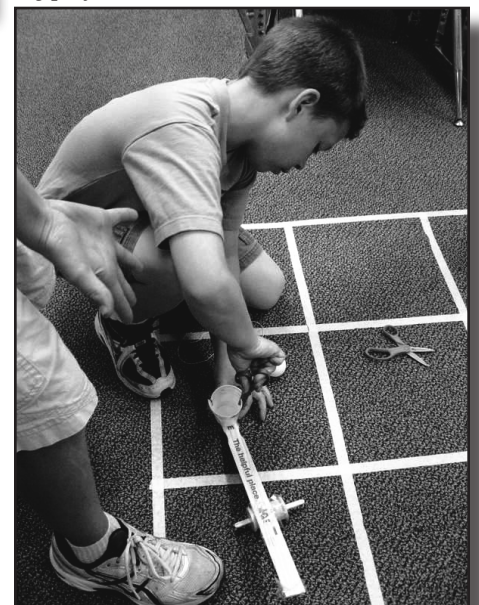
Okemos Education Foundation funds have been instrumental in allowing Rob to bring innovation into his classroom. In 2008,

Rob received an OEF grant for an Elementary Engineering Program for 3rd graders. Every 2 to 3 weeks, students begin a new engineering project using materials purchased with the grant that reinforces innovative design, analysis of data, and the integration of cross-curricular concepts. Rob remarked that, "The kids love the projects and I've been so pleased by their critical thinking skills and the problem-solving strategies that they are refining." In June of this year, Rob received a grant from the OEF's Connie Osborn Deits Science Enrichment Fund to purchase robotics equipment to integrate into his Engineering Program. Rob was also a 1998 recipient of the OEF's Commitment to Excellence Award.

Rob earned both his bachelors and masters degrees from Kent State University. Rob and his wife, Jamie Yeomans, have lived in Okemos for 15 years and have two children, Rebecca and Andrew, that attend Okemos Public Schools. "I am so honored to be able to represent Okemos, particularly in such a positive manner," Rob remarked.

Of course, in addition to his Teacher of the Year responsibilities, Rob will still be busy teaching 3rd grade at Wardcliff this year. As Mary Seeterlin observed, "Mr. Stephenson makes learning fun by incorporating an extraordinary array of hands on experiences. The kids love it, and more importantly - they learn!" **OEF**

(Left and below): Students in Rob Stephenson's 3rd grade class explore engineering concepts with materials provided by a 2008 OEF mini-grant. Visit Rob's classroom website to see a **video "thank you"** from his students, as well as many short videos of their engineering projects!



Okemos support groups: Get involved!

The list of groups supporting the Okemos Public School district is impressive. Volunteers spend countless hours supporting school activities in a variety of ways. The OEF is very pleased to share information about these other groups that support our children, our teachers and coaches, our schools and our community.

These groups focus on specific needs and areas, but taken together, their support plays a major role in maintaining the excellence of our schools and enriching our children's experiences. As Margaret Meade once wrote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does." And, there is no doubt that these Okemos support groups play a powerful role in changing our children's worlds. Okemos support groups form a backbone of excellence in our schools by networking concerned and passionate community members to work together toward shared goals. Please find below a brief overview of the many volunteer Okemos Public School support groups. We encourage you to contact any of these groups directly if you have any questions or wish to help!

Okemos Arts Patrons

Contact: Stacy Christensen,
Kinawa Visual Arts teacher
Phone: 706-4730
Email: stacy.christensen@okemosschools.net

The Okemos Art Patrons is a team of people who are interested in supporting the Okemos Visual Arts program within the Okemos School District. Currently, the OAP team is made up of Okemos parents and Okemos art teachers who work together to showcase OPS student artists in each building, yearlong as well as during the Okemos Fine Arts Festival. During the Okemos Fine Arts Festival the OAP exhibit pieces of artwork created by student artists. The high school halls are converted to gallery walls filled with wonderful pieces created by all ages to represent the talent our student artists have. The Fine Arts Festival ends Saturday with the OAP "Hands On" art day. The "Hands On" program is the main fundraiser for the Okemos Art Patrons. From 1pm to 4pm in the OHS café, art teachers from the district welcome artists of all ages to spend the day creating pieces that they are able to take home and share with family. During this fundraiser the OAP holds a bake sale and a picture sale. Artists are able to have their picture taken in front of a backdrop created by high school artists to remember their day of excitement.

The OAP meet once each month in an art classroom within the district. If you are interested in joining or assisting with the Art Festival please call Stacy Christensen (see contact info above).

Okemos Athletic Boosters

Contact: Lew & Deb Dotterer,
2009-10 Co-Presidents
Phone: 347-0748
Website: www.okemosboosters.org

Over the years, Okemos High School has shown great success and recognition throughout mid-Michigan as one of the premier districts for athletic excellence, in addition to its long-standing reputation for

academic excellence. As a school district with a number of district, regional and state championships in all areas of athletics, we pride ourselves in the well-rounded student-athlete that excels both in the classroom and on the field of competition.

Due to the financial challenges faced by the school district, it is more important than ever to support the Okemos Athletic Boosters.

The Okemos Athletic Boosters is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to raise money to benefit student athletes and support activities related to athletic events at Okemos High School. In support of this mission, Boosters fund-raise by selling season passes and programs, working concessions at sporting events, and organizing exciting activities throughout the school year. Proceeds raised by the Boosters go directly to the athletic teams for supplies, uniforms, and various team projects, including weight room maintenance & improvement, training tables & supply carts, ice machine, ticket tracking/accounting software and hardware. This past year we provided the funding for the new scoreboard for Chippewa Middle School which will benefit both the high school and middle school teams that use that venue in addition to providing ongoing funding each year in support of a uniform rotation for our sport teams.

Okemos Baseball Club

Contact: Brett Cone, President
Phone: 347-6792

The Okemos Baseball Club is a volunteer run organization which provides baseball opportunities for youth in Okemos. The Club works with the Meridian Township Parks and Recreation department to facilitate the Competitive/Tournament teams in Okemos. The Competitive/Tournament teams run from ages U9 to U14 and compete in the Mid Michigan Pony League, playing games against other local community teams. The Okemos Competitive/Tournament teams

also compete in 3-5 tournaments during the spring and early summer.

Okemos Basketball Advisory Group

Contact: Debbie Mashburn, President
Email: mashburnmd@comcast.net
Website: www.okemosbasketball.org

The Community Education Basketball Program is designed to provide all Okemos boys and girls with the opportunity to play organized basketball in a positive environment in which to learn the fundamentals of basketball. Opportunities exist for organized league play for both recreational and competitive programs as well as opportunities for skill development for players age 4 and up. The overall purpose of the Basketball Advisory Group is to provide expertise, support and input to Okemos Community Education for the successful direction and operation of the basketball program. The membership of the Basketball Advisory Group provides a balance of competitive and recreational perspectives, and works collaboratively with Okemos Community Education.

Okemos Community Education Advisory Network (OCEAN)

Contact: John Zappala,
Community Education Director
Phone: 706-5022
Email: john.zappala@okemosschools.net

The OCEAN Team is comprised of community members who play an active role in all of Okemos Community Education's programs. This includes childcare, senior citizens, recreation, enrichment, summer programs and even grant-financed projects. This group has been an influential part of Okemos Community Education and has provided years of advice and good counsel to help make the programs better. Okemos Community Education invites any individual from our community to serve on

(continued on page 12)

Okemos support groups: Get involved!

(continued from page 11)
this team.

Okemos Drama Boosters

Contact: Lisa Mulcrone, President

Phone: 287-1047

Email: lisa.mulcrone@ur.msu.edu

The Okemos High School Drama Boosters organization exists to support, stimulate and promote dramatic arts for all Okemos High School students. The Drama Boosters believe in using their talents and resources to help and support the performing arts program throughout the school and the community. Specifically, a majority of time and resources are spent supporting and assisting with two dramatic productions, a talent show and a musical production each year. Some specific activities include: publicity, ticket sales, concessions, ushering, refreshments, chaperoning, costumes, sets, props, photos and programs.

Membership is open to anyone interested in the OHS drama program.

Okemos Football Advisory Board

Contact: Eric Stelljes, Chair

Email: eric@prestonservices.com

Website: www.okemosfootball.org

The Okemos Football Advisory Board and the Okemos Youth Football program, as part of the Tri-County Youth Football League, are committed to operating its junior football program with integrity, respect, and dignity. They aim to promote positive community spirit and be a source of pride for the community through various sporting events. They are committed to presenting a positive reflection of Okemos Community Education and Okemos Public Schools. They pursue these ideals through good sportsmanship on the part of parents, coaches, and athletes. With support of Okemos Community Education, Okemos Athletic Directors, and High School Football Coach, they aim to maintain healthy attitudes in youth and adults in sports.

Okemos High School Band Boosters

Contact: Lori Beck, President

Website: <http://okemosbands.googlepages.com>

The Okemos High School Band Boosters

provide financial and personnel support to the Okemos High School Band Program through its fundraising and volunteer capacity to enrich the music educational opportunities of all OHS band students. Parents/guardians of all OHS band students are automatically members of the OHS Band Boosters and are encouraged to attend monthly meetings (held September through May in the OHS band room) and to volunteer their time and talents to enhance each band student's musical education.

The OHS Band Boosters work to fulfill the program's numerous needs through activities such as chaperoning and organizing band performance events and provide the majority of financial support to the program through key fundraising events (annual Car Wash-A-Thon, annual KeyCard sales, participating in the Meijer Rewards program, etc.). With the district's budget unable to support the program's growing needs, the OHS Band Boosters are currently fundraising to purchase additional marching and concert uniforms and additional marching and concert instruments for the ever-growing OHS Band program, which now numbers nearly 200 combined members from the ninth through twelfth grades.

The OHS Band Boosters has monthly meetings. It is a 501(c)(3) organization, and contributions to the OHS Band Boosters are tax deductible.

Okemos Music Patrons

Contact: Sulin Campbell, President

Phone: 349-5384

Email: sulin@msu.edu

All parents with children in music programs (K-12) in the Okemos Public Schools are automatically members of the Okemos Music Patrons! For nearly 30 years, this organization has raised funds for student scholarships, musical events, and for instruments and equipment to enrich the music programs in the Okemos schools.

The annual Spaghetti Dinner in February is the Okemos Music Patrons' major fundraiser. Donations collected at school concerts throughout the year make possible the "OMP Scholarships," which are awarded to students at the spring concerts. Scholarships are also provided to students in need to assist them in their music studies. The music newsletter for the school district, INTUNE, is underwritten and published by the Music Patrons.

The OMP board consists of 14 parent

members working alongside OPS music teachers. The board meets six times between October and May, on the second Monday of the month.

Okemos Parent Council

Contact: Mary Michner, President

Email: marymichner@sbcglobal.net

The Okemos Parent Council was established to facilitate a sense of community among the Okemos schools and to increase communication between the administration, staff, school board, parent groups and parents. The Okemos Parent Council is comprised of parent representative(s) from each of the district's schools. These parent representatives are appointed by their respective school's parent group and serve a term of one year.

Okemos Parent Council meetings are held each month at noon at a host school. In addition to members of the parent council, each meeting is also attended by the superintendent, an OPS school board member, the hosting school's principal, and at times a guest speaker. All meetings are "open" and the public is always welcome to attend.

The Okemos Parent Council meeting schedule can be found on the OPS web site at www.okemoschools.net under "Links to School Organizations." They have several special events planned for the 2009-2010 year. They have scheduled another Okemos Parent Council-hosted evening seminar, "How to Talk to Your Kids About Drinking and Drug Use" which will be presented on Thursday October 22 at 7:00 P.M. in the Okemos High School Auditorium. On October 12 they hosted a question and answer session for the candidates running for Okemos School Board which was taped and is being replayed on The Okemos Channel, channel 23.

If you are interested in being a part of the Okemos Parent Council, contact your home school's parent group president.

Okemos Soccer Club

Contact: Bill Boyle, Director of Coaching

Email: bill@bibosoccer.net

Website: www.eteamz.com/OkemosSoccerClub

The Okemos Soccer Club (OSC) is the community representative to the Capital Area Soccer League (CASL), a member of the Michigan State Youth Soccer Association (MSYSA). OSC sponsors youth teams from

Okemos support groups: Get involved!

U9 through U19 for both boys and girls.

All MSYSA teams begin tryouts for the selection of teams on June 15 of the calendar year.

OSC coaches are required to be licensed by either the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) or the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA). They also are required to carry risk management cards that require background check through MSYSA.

Parent – Teacher Organizations

Each school in the district has its own parent support group. They go by different names - PTOs, Parent Groups, or Family Councils - but their purpose is the same. These groups exist to support the children, teachers and staff in a myriad of ways – fundraisers, field trips, staff appreciation luncheons, school directories, chaperoning events, office staffing, school beautification projects, classroom parties, library volunteers and family activities and events.

Meetings are held monthly and offer parents an opportunity to play a part in planning activities and stay in touch with what is going on at school. Parents also deeply value the participation of the principal at these meetings as an opportunity to discuss issues of mutual concern.

All of the parent groups are tax-exempt non-profit organizations and welcome the support of the community. For contact information about the parent-teacher organizations call the individual school offices.

SOAR

Contact: Kim Burzych, President
Email: kburzych@sbcglobal.net
Website: www.soarokemos.com

SOAR (Supporting Okemos Academic Resources) is an organization of parents, educators, and those in the community dedicated to supporting the needs of high-ability students in Okemos.

SOAR is an affiliate of Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education (MAGE). It is for people who: (1) have a child of known high-ability; (2) are looking to enhance a child's academic options and programs; and/or (3) are interested in learning about the many enrichment programs offered inside and outside the school district.

SOAR meets at the Okemos Public Library (4321 Okemos Road) once a month during the school year at 7 pm. Topics typically covered include: "Enrichment Activities & Clubs"; "How to Effectively Prepare for Parent-Teacher Conferences"; "Summer Programs"; and "An Update from Okemos Public Schools with special guest speakers Asst. Superintendent Patricia Trelstad, Elementary Gifted Education Consultant Marsha Chance, and District Coordinator of Gifted Education Deb Chamberlain."

Spartan Swim Club

Contact: Damon Robertson, Head Coach
Phone: 402-2557

Website: www.spartanswimclub.org

The Spartan Swim Club (SSC) is the former Capital Area Swim Team and Haslett Blue Marlins combined!

The club offers mid-Michigan youth opportunities to achieve excellence through swimming and water polo. They help children develop self-confidence, goal setting, sportsmanship and commitment in a positive environment. Regardless of prior ability, there is a place for everyone at SSC!

The club practices and competes year-round at convenient locations in Okemos, Haslett, and Holt. In the summer, senior level swimmers train at the Michigan State University outdoor pool, often alongside the Spartans.

In water polo, the club recently sent 18-and-under-teams and 16-and-under teams for both girls and boys to the National Junior Olympics in Palo Alto, California!

Spartan Swim Club is always accepting new swimmers.

Supporters of Okemos Science

Contact: Tom Deits
Email: deitst@lcc.edu

The Supporters of Okemos Science (SOS) is a parent-community group which supports K-12 science education in the Okemos School District. They sponsor the annual SOS Family Science Fun Day each February. In the past, proceeds from SOS fundraisers have been used to purchase science related equipment for classrooms and to support competitive events such as Science Olympiad.

Did you know?

- All OPS schools made adequate yearly progress under *No Child Left Behind*
- All OPS schools were rated an "A" under *Education Yes!*
- OHS was awarded a "silver medal" by Newsweek magazine, ranking in the top 2.2% in Michigan (26th out of 926 high schools)
- Class of 2009 average ACT Composite was 25.0 compared to the state average of 19.6 and national average of 21.1
- OHS had 15 National Merit Finalists last year and 15 Commended Students
- 96% of OHS graduates are college bound, attending 79 institutions in 27 states; 77% to 4 year programs; 19% to 2 year programs
- Advanced Placement in 2009-355 students (169 seniors, 109 juniors, 77 sophomores, and 4 freshmen) took 611 AP exams; 95% of all 2009 AP scores were a 3, 4, or 5

It's True...

the OEF website has a NEW look!

The OEF website has **changed!** Please be sure to visit for the latest news and information related to grants, awards, and fundraising efforts. You'll find information about past and current award recipients, photos of OEF grants, slide shows, and links to videos, too!

www.oefsite.org

What is the Headlee Millage Restoration?

The November 3rd ballot will include a proposal (see text at right) in which Okemos Schools is requesting authorization to safeguard against millage loss due to a roll-back provision which would be enacted if commercial property values rise too quickly. Without this provision, there is a risk that Okemos schools would not be able to collect the full 18 mils non-homestead tax and would lose funding.

In 1978, voters approved an amendment to the Michigan Constitution that changed the way our schools are funded. Prior to passing Proposal A, school districts relied primarily on locally-imposed property taxes.

Now our primary source of money is an annual foundation grant we receive from the state for each student.

But there's a catch.

The state expects voters in each school district to replace a portion of the foundation grant by levying an 18-mil non-homestead tax on commercial or investment property (18 mils equals \$18 on each \$1000 of assessed property value). In fact, before disbursing the foundation grants, the state automatically deducts the money they assume the school district will raise through the non-homestead millage.

OPERATING MILLAGE PROPOSAL

This proposal will enable the school district to levy the statutory rate of 18 mills on all property, except principal residence and other property exempted by law, required for the school district to receive its revenue per pupil foundation allowance.

Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be assessed against all property, except principal residence and other property exempted by law, in Okemos Public Schools, Ingham County, Michigan, be increased by 2 mills (\$2.00 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for a period of 12 years, 2010 to 2021, inclusive, to provide funds for operating purposes; the estimate of the revenue the school district will collect if the millage is approved and levied in 2010 is approximately \$-0- (this millage is to restore millage lost as a result of the reduction required by the Michigan Constitution of 1963 and will be levied only to the extent necessary to restore that reduction)?

Because of this, voters in every school district in Michigan routinely approve the 18-mil non-homestead property tax when it comes up for renewal. Okemos voters voted to renew it for 15 years in 2006.

But there's another catch.

The Headlee Amendment to the state constitution rolls back the effective non-homestead tax rate if commercial property values rise faster than the rate of inflation or 5%, whichever is lower. This happened in Okemos during the 1998 - 1999 school year and the effective non-homestead tax rate fell to 17.69 mils, costing the district

thousands of dollars.

If the same happened this year, the roll-back provision would cost the district over \$146,000. And the state would not increase the foundation grants to make up the difference.

Realizing that this quirk in the law can financially harm their school districts, Michigan allows voters to create a safety net. This allows the district to levy and collect the full 18 mils each year, regardless of how fast commercial property values rise.

Headlee Restoration Millage F.A.Q.

1 Why is this millage approval necessary?

Currently, the district is able to levy the full 18 mills on non-homestead property authorized by law. It is possible that in the future the relative values non-homestead properties could increase faster than inflation, which would result in the district not being able to levy the whole amount. Such an event would result in a Headlee Reduction. If that occurs, the State of Michigan will not "make whole" amounts levied less than 18 mills. The proposal asks voters to approve an additional 2 mills of safety net in order to protect the full 18 mills in the event of a Headlee Reduction.

2 Will this result in higher property taxes?

Absolutely not. There is no tax increase as a result of approval of the ballot proposal. The request is to provide the ability to protect what is currently in place. The 18 mills currently levied on non-homestead property is capped at that level.

3 Has Okemos ever experienced a Headlee reduction before?

Yes, during the 1998-1999 school year, when the district's allowable

non-homestead millage fell to 17.69. The full millage was restored by voters in 1999, giving the district an additional 2 mills of "safety net". The restoration millage expired in December, 2006.

4 How much revenue could the district lose if the restoration millage is not in place?

Using 2008-2009 property values, the district would lose approximately \$116,000 per .25% of millage reduction. A reduction to 17.69% such as occurred in 1999 would cost the district about \$147,000 in current dollars.

5 If approved, how long would the millage restoration last?

Authorization would be for a period of 12 years (2010 through 2021), which coincides with the expiration of the current 18 mill non-homestead millage.

6 How likely is it that the restoration millage will actually be needed?

A few local areas district have experienced a Headlee reduction over the last 5 years. The current economic downturn makes it somewhat unlikely that Okemos will face a

situation similar to what happened in 1998-1999 in the near future, but an eventual upturn in the economy could trigger value increases 'ahead of the curve' in a district that historically experienced high than average property values.

7 Doesn't the State of Michigan guarantee a certain minimum amount of funding per student?

Yes, the State does provide a minimum foundation allowance per student, but assumes that the district will levy and collect the total available 18 mills for non-homestead property. If the district is unable to levy the full millage authorized, the State will not make up the difference.

8 Will this millage proposal impact Sinking Fund, Debt Fund, or Technology Bond revenues?

No. The 18 mill non-homestead millage affects only general operating funds. This ballot proposal will have no impact on levies or bonds previously approved and currently in place.

[Many thanks to Robert Clark, Director of Accounting Services, Okemos Public Schools, for providing answers to our questions.]

Meet the School Board Candidates

The November 3rd ballot will give voters an opportunity to fill one vacant Okemos school board position. School board member Deborah Baughman has chosen not to seek election to her appointed seat.

Two candidates, **Damian Fisher** and **Andrew Saultz**, are vying for the open four-year term on the school board.

Damian Fisher

Email: damian4okemos@yahoo.com

Website: www.damianfisher.com

Damian Fisher is a semi-retired attorney who has practiced with Legal Aid of Lansing, served as assistant prosecuting attorney for Gratiot County, and clerked for Ingham County's Circuit Court Chief Judge. He's been a tribal attorney for the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians and served as Gaming Commissioner for the Torrez-Martinez Tribe of Cahuilla Indians in California.

Damian grew up a navy brat, traveling the country from Illinois, New England, Virginia, and Florida to California, Hawaii, and Japan. He earned two Associate degrees from Grossmont College in California; and graduated from San Diego State University with a BA in English (modern lit) and a minor in American Indian Studies. He finished Cooley Law School and passed the Michigan Bar in 2001. He continues to work toward a Master of Science in Administration from Central Michigan University.

Appointed by the Michigan State Bar, Damian served six years on the Michigan Indian Legal Services Board of Trustees, the last two as president. He also served eight years as a regent on the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College board. During that time the college grew from a small satellite campus classroom to a land grant, community college fully accredited by the North Central Association. Damian has also served on the tribal Education Advisory Board, which functions as the school board for their K-12 education, including a pre-primary to 5th grade elementary program, an alternative high school, and until recently, a Montessori middle school program.

Damian is a member of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan who moved to Okemos from the Isabella Reservation in Mt. Pleasant in 2002. He has a strong connection with Chief Okemos, a Pottawatomie, who was a Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe chief. He currently consults with private businesses, governmental agencies, and individuals who do business with Michigan's 12 Indian Tribes.

Damian and his wife Bonnie of 19 years have 3 children in Okemos schools; a seventh grader at Chippewa and a freshman and a junior at Okemos High School. An older son just received his MBA from Humboldt State University after earning his BA in Psychology. Since moving to Okemos, Damian has enjoyed coaching OAKS baseball, softball, basketball and flag football, and junior Chieftains football. He currently is coaching football at Okemos High School. While his children went to Cornell, he helped with Mileage Club, Family Fun Nights, and as a classroom/parent volunteer. Recently, Damian has substitute taught Math, Social Science, Health and PE at Okemos High School and Chippewa Middle School.

Andrew Saultz

Email: andysaultz@yahoo.com

Website: www.votesaultz.com

Andrew Saultz lives in Okemos with his wife, Jenny, a medical student at Michigan State University. They relocated because they were drawn to the strong tradition of excellence in the Okemos Public Schools, and wanted to raise their family here. Andrew graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in political science from Oregon State University and summa cum laude with a Master's degree in Teaching Social Studies from Lewis and Clark College.

Andrew worked at Okemos High School as a social studies teacher until 2009 when he accepted an invitation to join Michigan State University's Educational Policy program as a doctoral candidate. During his years with the high school, he taught US History, Comparative World Religions, Current World Issues, and World Geography. He also researched, proposed and taught Advanced Placement World History. Andrew traveled on a Fulbright Program Abroad to Ecuador and has taught English in southern Poland. He was also honored to deliver the 2009 Baccalaureate Address.

Andrew helped coordinate the high school accreditation process, coached the freshmen baseball team, and was a member on the Building Planning Team during his time at the high school. Andrew has also volunteered for Sparrow Hospital, and is a member at Faith Lutheran Church in Okemos.

Currently, Andrew is a University Distinguished Fellow at Michigan State University. As a doctoral candidate in the department of Educational Policy, his research interests include student achievement, standardized testing, educational funding models, district accountability and curriculum design. Andrew hopes to teach at the college level.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL BOARD

The Okemos Board of Education is comprised of seven elected members. Board member terms are staggered, and each lasts for four years.

Current board members are: **Jeffrey Theuer**, President; **Ron Styka**, Vice President; **Amy Crites**, Treasurer; **Bob McDonough**, Secretary; **Mary Graham**, Parliamentarian; **Deborah Baughman**, Trustee; and **Peter Trezise**, Trustee.

Okemos school board meetings begin at 7:00 P.M. in the Community Conference room in the Administration Center (2nd floor Central school).

Public comment is always welcome at school board meetings during the designated times per the meeting agenda.

Meetings are broadcast live and are replayed daily at noon on The Okemos Channel (23).

The remaining scheduled meetings for the 2009-10 school year are as follows:

- **October 26, 2009**
- **November 9, 2009**
- **November 23, 2009**
- **December 7, 2009**
- **January 11, 2010**
- **January 25, 2010**
- **February 8, 2010**
- **February 22, 2010**
- **March 8, 2010**
- **March 22, 2010**
- **April 12, 2010**
- **April 26, 2010**
- **May 10, 2010**
- **May 24, 2010**
- **June 14, 2010**
- **June 28, 2010**

For more information about the school board, including a summary of the most recent board meeting, minutes, meeting agendas, and board member contact info, please visit the school district's website: www.okemoschools.net.

OEF News

Okemos Education Foundation

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