



Oxford Educational Foundation (OEF) celebrates 20th Year Anniversary

The Oxford Educational Foundation (OEF) is a private non-profit community organization founded 20 years ago for the purpose of assisting the Oxford Area School District. The OASD, with almost 4,000 students, is located in southeast Pennsylvania within commuting distance of cities such as Philadelphia, Baltimore, Lancaster, Wilmington and Newark. As a result, this quiet, rural region with a diverse population is growing.

The mission of the OEF is to enhance the quality of education in the Oxford Area School District. By generating financial support to maximize the use of community volunteers/mentors in the schools and by providing professional grants to staff for innovative programs, the OEF strives to contribute to the success of Oxford students.

The OEF came to life in October of 1994 after a year of diligent work spearheaded by John Pittenger, then a resident of West Nottingham Township and former Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of PA. Well connected to important political and legal networks, “Pitt”, as he was known to his friends, knew how to get things done.

The seed that germinated into the OEF was planted a year earlier at a Hershey, PA educational leadership conference hosted by the PA Association of School Administrators (PASA) and the PA School Boards Association (PSBA). Richard Winchester, then a school board member of the Oxford Area School District and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Lincoln University, attended these mid week sessions.

The workshop that caught Winchester’s special attention was entitled “Making an Education Foundation Work for You” – the ABC’s of how to begin and operate an educational foundation in your school district. Presented by Dr. Margaret Kuypers and George Plosa, administrators in the Hatboro-Horsham School District, this seminar covered most of the nuts and bolts.

The presenters described the origins of the public school foundation movement in places like Wisconsin and Minnesota, and explained the many ways non-profit foundations could generate support for the schools. They could, of course, attract money for special purposes, but they could also recruit parents, alumni, and retired citizens as mentors, tutors and role models, especially for children at risk.

These themes resonated with Winchester. The father of two daughters who graduated from Oxford in 1983 and 1984, he was also an educator at Lincoln University and anxious to improve the educational pipeline. Fired up by this experience at Hershey, Winchester returned to Oxford and looked for allies who might help with the birthing process.

Colleagues on the school board, Nancy Andress, Bob Domzalski and Phil Leyman were early recruits. Oxford alumni and community activists, people like James Gordon, Kathy Elters, Pam Donnelly, Etha McDowell, Rowena Jenkins, and Denise Fritsch, also signed on. Together with Pitt, Winchester and Charles Lewis, the business administrator of the Oxford Area School District, these were the people who formed the “steering committee” for the OEF.

Meeting regularly from late fall 1993 through the summer of 1994, this group, under the leadership of Pitt, found others in the community to help with the labor. School superintendent Robert Meckes, assistant superintendent, Ray Fischer, former school board member Steve Roberts, and alumni Jim McLeod and Jim Herr were among them. Perhaps most importantly, Pitt persuaded Randy Sebastian, Oxford alumnus who Pitt mentored during his high school years and steered into Harvard Law School, to lend his professional talent pro bono.

A partner in the firm MacElree, Harvey, Gallagher, Featherman and Sebastian, Randy guided the steering committee through the maze of paperwork. Between January and September 1994, OEF By-Laws, Mission Statement, Articles of Incorporation, PA Charter as a Non-Profit Corporation, IRS 501.c.3 status, and membership application were all approved. Finally, in October, 1994, the steering committee went out of existence and the first annual meeting of the OEF membership elected its first Board of Directors.

The first directors elected to three year terms were Jim Herr, Jim McLeod and John Pittenger, for two year terms—Kathy Elters, Robert Strong, Pam Donnelly and for a one year term Vanessa Phipps, Randy Sebastian, and Dick Winchester. These nine in the incoming weeks would appoint another six directors as stipulated by the By-Laws. Among these were Carrie Ellen Underwood, an Oxford senior after her graduation in June 1995, she was replaced by Nile Alford a rising junior. The other appointed directors were: Denise Fritsch, Carl Fretz, Ray Fischer, Rowena Jenkins and John H. Ware IV.

In January 1995, the Board of Directors, now at a full complement of 15, elected officers John Pittenger, President, Jim McLeod, Vice President, Denise Fritsch, Secretary and Charles Lewis was appointed as Treasurer. A generous contribution from the Oxford Area Educational Association and a gift from John and Marion Ware established a financial foundation for the fledgling OEF.

In its first three years, with John Pittenger as President, the Foundation formed its board committee structure, hired a Volunteer Coordinator to recruit volunteers and mentors in the schools, purchased a satellite dish for use by the schools, assisted the High School in its organization of a Career Day, attended alumni reunions, and provided an OASD and OEF bi-annual joint publication of the Oxford School News.

With this strong foundation the OEF continued to build on its accomplishments over the years by:

- Creating an Oxford Alumni data base
- Providing an Annual Report
- Setting up an Endowment Fund (to date, totals are approximately \$400,000)
- Providing teacher professional grants (since 2001, supporting innovation in the classroom with over \$130,000 in grants to professional staff)
- Strengthening mentor/tutor/volunteer program
- Instituting an annual grant to an OASD school(s) in memory of John C. Pittenger
- Establishing the Randy Sebastian Volunteer Person of the Year Award in memory of Randy Sebastian
- Organizing an annual Oxford Area Education Association and Oxford Educational Foundation Breakfast (RSVP Award is awarded at this event)
- Creating an Oxford Educational Foundation website
- Being recognized as an Educational Improvement Organization through the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC), which assists in the funding of AP Chemistry Project REEL
- Organizing a mentor/mentee annual picnic
- Acting as a catalyst to connect sources of funding with special needs and projects

As the year 2012 began, the Oxford Educational Foundation was the recipient of an anonymous \$1 million gift. The gift would assist the school district in expanding its educational mission and strategic plan over the next five years. It would be used to increase technology use, update curriculum resources, provide professional development for staff, replace equipment in the music department, sponsor summer art and music academies and to refurbish each school media center with books, e-books, etc. The donors expressed great enthusiasm in being able to support the important work being done in the Oxford Schools, as well as great confidence in the leadership and staff of the OEF and the OASD to successfully implement the initiatives undertaken by this donation.

In December 2012, the OEF initiated a self assessment in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of the Foundation, as well as to focus on any needs. After several months, it was concluded that an Executive Director would be able to address those needs, strengthen the organization and help provide more support to the Oxford Area School District. The Board voted unanimously to appoint to this position Dr. Ray Fischer, recently retired Superintendent of Schools and charter member of the OEF.

Recently, the OEF Board of Directors began looking for new ways to support the efforts of the school district. They are currently working to expand a list of experts who can enhance education by volunteering to be guest speakers or e-mail pen pals. Entitled "OEF CAREs" (OEF Community Adults as Resources for Education) the program allows connections to be made between careers and classrooms, which in turn will expand students' thinking beyond its four walls.

The current members of the OEF Board of Directors bring backgrounds rich in engineering, business, farming, justice and education, all of which help to meet the goals of the OEF. You, too, can help by volunteering your time, talents, and/or treasures. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, mentor, or tutor or in learning more about OEF CAREs, please contact the OEF Volunteer Coordinator at (610) 932-7200 or e-mail us at oxfordedfound@yahoo.com. Information can also be found on the OEF website at www.oxfordeducationalfoundation.org

Investing in education is a vital part of the community. The OEF invites you to join in this mission in the Oxford Area School District so that we can continue to be “Oxford Proud”. We look forward to the next twenty years!!

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