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Bishop Ready to Face Challenge

VP Moves Into OEA President's Position

By Stacy Martin

Oklahoma teachers have a new advocate in their corner in Roy Bishop, who assumed the presidency of the Oklahoma Education Association this summer.

"I will fight to restore funding, and I will redouble our efforts to build respect for the teaching profession," said Bishop. "If we can accomplish these two objectives, it will be a huge win for teachers."

Bishop takes the helm of the some 40,000-member OEA during a rocky period in state history. A troubled Oklahoma economy has led to the loss of almost 6,000 education jobs in the state, a fact that is not news to most teachers.

Bishop has been preparing for his leadership role for a long time. He has served as vice president for the past



"I will fight to restore funding, and I will redouble our efforts to build respect for the teaching profession."

Roy Bishop,
OEA President

six years. During that period, he has been a vital member of the OEA leadership team headed by Carolyn Crowder. Crowder was recently elected to the National Education Association's executive committee.

Bishop has played a pivotal role in an OEA leadership team

whose accomplishments include winning a \$3,000 across the board raise for teachers, the largest in state history, and the creation in the flexible benefit allowance. However, state bud-

See "Bishop Expects" on page 2

Crowder Elected to NEA Executive Committee

Oklahoma's teachers now have a home-grown voice at the National Education Association.

In early July, Carolyn Crowder, the Oklahoma Education Association's immediate past President, became the first Oklahoma teacher elected to the NEA's Executive Committee. She won the office on the first ballot, collecting 69.6 percent of the vote from the nearly 10,000 delegates attending NEA's Representative Assembly in New Orleans.

Crowder begins her three-year term September 1. The NEA Executive Committee consists of nine members – three executive officers and six mem-

bers elected at large by the Representative Assembly. The committee formulates policies and procedures for NEA at its highest levels.

"It has been an incredible privilege to serve OEA members these past six years," said Crowder. "Likewise, it will be a great privilege to bring Oklahoma's voice to public education at the national level."

The professional advances won under her tenure continue helping Oklahoma attract and retain top teaching talent despite persistent funding challenges.

"If teachers, families, communities and elected leaders work collabora-



Carolyn Crowder receives congratulations on her win at July's NEA Representative Assembly in New Orleans.

tively, Oklahoma can achieve educational excellence," Crowder said. "That's exactly what I will work for at the national level."

Prior to serving as OEA President from 1997-2003, Crowder taught in

See "Crowder Wins" on page 2

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The Education Focus
OEA's all-member publication

State's Funding Crisis Is Our Highest Priority

*By Roy Bishop
OEA President*

It's a well-known fact that Oklahoma teachers exemplify the highest quality in teaching excellence. For this reason, one of the goals of my administration will be to restore the respect to the teaching profession that is so richly deserved.

Because our members are the best and the brightest, it is my incredible honor to represent them as president of this organization. When I taught in the Stillwater Public Schools, it was my goal to achieve excellence each and every day. I know the rest of our members do too.

These are difficult times. Public education is suffering from the biggest budget shortfall in over a gen-

eration. Thousands of our colleagues are out of jobs. The human toll in our schools is staggering, extending to educators, administrators and students.

Solving this crisis has been and will continue to be our highest priority. Our task will probably not be any easier than last year, and could prove to be even more challenging. It will be essential that we redouble our efforts to convince elected leaders and all Oklahomans of the gravity of the education funding crisis.

This means mobilizing our entire membership. Everyone has a role in our Association. It is even more critical that we continue building membership ranks so that decision makers can hear our collective voice as one.

Members can support the Oklahoma Education Association's efforts by writing letters to the editor, contacting legislators, the governor and other key leaders and lobbying at the Capitol. Even more effective, OEA members can lead the way to a solution by building local coalitions in their communities to help in this fight.

Our goals are to restore adequate funding today, while finding long-term funding solutions for the future. Our students, communities and all Oklahomans are depending on us.

Beyond that, we must continue to highlight the tremendous importance of the teaching profession to all Oklahomans. Today's educators are up



Roy Bishop

against incredible challenges. Performing this job each day is nothing short of an act of heroism. For that, teachers should be commended and highly valued.

Bishop Expects To Make a Difference

Continued from page 1

get problems have delayed full implementation of the flexible benefit allowance.

Bishop began his career as a teacher in Oklahoma City. Declining enrollment in his school district caused his contract to be non-renewed – twice.

The experience gave Bishop an idea of what laid-off teachers have been ex-

periencing in Oklahoma lately.

“Putting a stop to this troubling trend will be a high priority of my administration,” said Bishop. “Quality teachers are a valuable resource we must protect, not put out on the streets.”

Eventually, he did land a teaching position that stuck in Stillwater. In the following years, he worked hard to become an excellent teacher and enjoy his students.

He decided to run for OEA vice president and won that office in 1997. After the conclusion of his two, three-year terms, he ran unopposed for OEA President in 2003. It was a difficult decision for him to give up the classroom he loved, but he wanted to make a contribution to the greater good.

“I knew I was making a difference for 120 students,” said Bishop. “Now, it's time to make a difference for thousands of students and teachers.”

Bishop is a collaborative leader who places a premium on teamwork.

“We need input from everyone to make the association work,” said

Bishop. “Right now, we've got a unique opportunity to get a lot of people involved in issues who may not have been involved before.

“For instance, take the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): You could have 12 years experience in business, and you're considered qualified. Yet, you could have 20 some odd years of experience as a teacher, and still not be highly qualified. There's something wrong with that.”

After hours, the new OEA president enjoys playing golf, watching baseball, and spending time with his new wife Katherine, a Lake Park Elementary special education teacher.

Meanwhile, Bishop is tackling his new leadership role with zeal, holding fast to the values he learned as vice president.

“The thing I enjoy the most is the interaction with members,” said Bishop. “Second to that, when I'm not interacting with members, I like to go out on their behalf, and let people know there are quality people in Oklahoma classrooms.”

Crowder Wins NEA Executive Committee Seat

Continued from page 1

Oklahoma for 19 years. Her last assignment was as a fifth grade teacher in the Mustang School District, and she will return to the classroom this fall to teach first grade at Mustang Valley Elementary School. She will have a full-time teaching partner at NEA expense so that students will have continuity when her duties call her away. This practice is consistent with NEA's philosophy of keeping its leadership close to the classroom.

OEA

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Providing Support for Members Will be VP Felts' Priority

By Stacy Martin

New Oklahoma Education Association Vice President Becky Felts has a clear vision about her goals as a member of the association's leadership team.

"My priority is giving those working in our public schools the support they need to do their jobs and work effectively with children," Felts said. "I believe that is how I really help our members."

Felts is a 27-year classroom teacher. A native and longtime resident of Tahlequah, she has taught at the elementary level in the Tahlequah and Peggs public schools. She has served in leadership roles in the Tahlequah Education Association, including President, professional development committee chair and bargaining team member.

The new OEA vice president is looking forward to visiting educators

in their buildings. On these visits, she plans to explore with members how OEA's support system has helped them and how they might benefit even more from membership.

She served on the OEA board of directors and concluded two terms as one of Oklahoma's National Education Association directors. Currently, she is on the program approval and accreditation committees for the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation.

Felts said she became increasingly active in her professional association after she realized the importance of political involvement.

"I saw how everything happening to me as a classroom teacher was based on political decisions," she said. "I knew I had to become involved if I wanted to try to change things for the better.

"Building relationships with



"I saw how everything happening to me as a classroom teacher was based on political decisions. I knew I had to become involved if I wanted to try to change things for the better."

**Becky Felts
OEA Vice President**

elected officials who impact education decisions was what ignited the fire in me to speak out for public education and become an Association leader," the new vice president said.

Felts considers her experience with the National Education Association a major asset.

"I understand the NEA and how it works, having served on the board of

directors," she said. "I'm already networked with active leaders from across the nation. That way, when we need assistance from the larger NEA family, I'm already connected to them."

Felts said she looks forward to working side-by-side with new OEA president Roy Bishop to forge a strategic plan to help guide the association during these challenging times.

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Advocacy Center Offers More Than Legal Protection

By Doug Folks

There are many intangible reasons to belong to OEA/NEA.

"I'm a professional and I need to belong to my professional organization," or

"My college professor/colleague next door/mentor said I should," or

"I've just always belonged."

Many times, the question of why one should belong to the OEA is answered simply, "For the protection."

While some members define protection as the \$1 million liability policy that comes with membership, the real security comes from having someone ready and willing to stand at your side during the tough times. The \$1 million liability is certainly a great benefit, but you might be surprised to know that no OEA member has ever come close to using the full amount of the policy. In fact, Oklahoma's Governmental Tort Claims Act now limits damage amounts for negligence to \$125,000 per occurrence.

What makes OEA membership priceless is having access to a staff member who will sit with you during a disciplinary meeting with your princi-

pal or supervisor. It's having an expert help you write a response to a less-than-flattering evaluation. It's having a calm voice on the other end of the phone tell you things may look bleak, but your situation is not the end of the world – in fact, you can survive this bump in the road.

There are eight advocacy specialists at the OEA, one each for the Northwest, Southwest, Northeast and Southeast geographic regions, and two each for the Tulsa Metro and Oklahoma City Metro regions. In addition, other OEA staff on the regional teams are capable of assisting members with advocacy matters. If a situation reaches board-level action on your employment, a staff attorney is ready to help.

Advocacy specialists assist members with any number of situations that arise from the day-to-day tasks of job performance, such as those mentioned above. But the assistance doesn't end there. There are several areas where the Center for Advocacy helps local leaders and rank and file members alike.

Research – With the help of OEA's network administrator Debbie Moore,

Advocacy publishes the Green Book, a compilation of school district finances that bargaining teams utilize during negotiation preparation. There is also a comparison of extra duty pay schedules for the state's 32 largest districts and a comparison of salary schedules for districts in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area.

Training – Advocacy specialists offer locals a number of various workshops, including the Worm in the Apple, a look at adult bullying; Prepared, Not Scared, which explores methods to avoid classroom violence; Safe Schools; and It's the Law, reviews of Oklahoma laws affecting education. The center also offers several different workshops specifically

for bargaining teams.

The annual Advocacy Conference is one of OEA's most popular training weekends. It features outstanding keynote speakers and breakout sessions for teachers and support professionals, and topics beneficial to the average member as well as bargaining locals. The 2004 Advocacy Conference returns to the Oklahoma City Waterford Marriott January 23-24.

Legal Assistance – OEA's Center for Legal and Corporate Services provides members with an attorney for legal matters associated with on-the-job situations. In addition, OEA is the only education association to offer its members legal assistance for personal issues (see Page 12).

What Do I Do Now?

If you have a work-related problem for which you need assistance, call the Advocacy Specialist in your geographic region first. That information is listed on this page.

If the matter requires a lawyer, the OEA staff person will inform Legal and Corporate Services of your situ-

ation, and an attorney will contact you.

If you need legal help for a situation away from work, access the Personal Legal Services Program by calling Legal Services at OEA Headquarters in Oklahoma City at 800/522-8091, or 528-7785.

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It Takes Teamwork

The OEA Board of Directors annually meet to orient new board members, develop a strategic plan for the coming year and to develop a team spirit. This summer, the board and OEA management participated in a ropes course at the Postal Technical Training Center in Norman. Above, (from left) OEA Vice President Becky Felts, NEA Director-elect

Greg Johnson, and Student OEA President Amy Castro provide a base of support for a team on the climbing wall while Elk City's Linda Long (SW-A) looks on. On the opposite page, OEA General Counsel Richard Wilkinson, NEA Director Linda Hampton and Broken Arrow's Cheryl Kelly (Tulsa Metro-E) reach the top of the wall.

Politics Influence The Fate of Education

Stacy Martin

The quality of every classroom teacher's job relies upon the decisions made at the Oklahoma State Capitol, say Oklahoma Education Association leadership and lobbyists.

As difficult as it might be to accept, politicians deeply influence the fate of all Oklahoma teachers. Therefore, it is imperative that the OEA and education employees make their voices heard.

One thing is abundantly clear: OEA members can influence their jobs for the better by becoming informed and active in the political arena. Sitting idly by is to accept the fate that others construct.

It all begins with becoming registered voters, and voting for the candidates and issues of your choice. Each year, members of the OEA interview political candidates to determine if

they are friendly to public education issues.

Using a variety of tools, OEA keeps its members informed about critical political issues affecting them and their professional lives. OEA advocates for its members constantly, but our efforts can be more powerful with member support and involvement.

"Elected leaders listen to their constituents," said Bruce Hunt, OEA associate executive director. "They cannot afford to ignore the wishes of those who vote for them – especially when they contact them in large numbers."

OEA utilizes the talents of its six, full-time lobbyists, plus the association's leadership to monitor and influence State Capitol developments.

This proactive approach is essential to protect members' best interests. It is also a key component in the consistent success of the Association's political work. It is no accident that the state's largest daily newspaper has called the

OEA the most influential lobbying organization at the Oklahoma State Capitol.

Each spring, the OEA fights for and against legislation deemed significant – either positively or negatively - to

public education.

In 2003, the OEA helped educators dodge many bullets, as well as win several major victories. The OEA:

- Opposed the School Protection Act, which would have exposed teachers to greater personal liability in lawsuits.
- Protected teacher salaries and benefits by passing legislation prohibiting school districts from reducing teacher compensation.
- Supported a bill redefining school district administrative costs. The bill's net effect will help reduce and streamline overhead, freeing up more resources for the classroom.
- Opposed a bill restricting the ability of OEA and its local affiliates to protect and promote the interest of school employees through such procedures as grievances, collective bargaining and lobbying.
- Supported a bill enabling educators to take a partial lump sum at retirement.
- Supported a bill providing that if the people approve a lottery, the proceeds will be earmarked for public education. The bill also prohibits the Legislature from using lottery proceeds to supplant or replace the common education appropriation.



Voluntary Political Contributions Help Elect Friends of Education

Friends of public education need the support of those they intend to help in the political arena. For this reason, the Oklahoma Education Association operates the OEA Political Action Committee (OEA-PAC) and the National Education Association has the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education (FCPE).

OEA members may voluntarily become more involved in the political process by choosing to make political contributions to candidates through the PAC. The funds are entrusted to the OEA-PAC, which uses the money prudently to help elect friends of education to state and local office.

This must be done via special con-

tributions, because member dues are not used for contributions to political candidates. Members must notify OEA of their decision to do so by filling out the appropriate form. Contributions can begin at \$5 and continue up to any level the member chooses.

Similarly, members may also elect to become involved at the national level through the NEA FCPE. Again, contributions can begin at \$5 and graduate to whatever level is desired. The FCPE uses donations to elect friends of education to national offices.

Contributions to both the state and national PACs can be payroll deducted.

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Are You Highly Qualified?

ESEA Requires All Teachers and Paraprofessionals to Meet Lofty Standards

By Marty Bull

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) mandates numerous requirements that states must meet in order to continue receiving federal funds.

While the act was being designed in Washington, D.C., representatives of the National Education Association worked diligently to try and minimize the financial burden at the state level.

“Without NEA’s watchdog approach, this legislation would be even more burdensome than it is,” said OEA President Roy Bishop. “As educators, we agree with the tenets of every child having the opportunity to succeed in school, but we want those tenets based on sound educational judgment and to be fully funded.”

At this summer’s NEA Representative Assembly, NEA President Reg Weaver took aim against the flaws and broken promises in the No Child Left Behind Act. Weaver announced plans for a lawsuit challenging unfunded mandates imposed on the states by the law’s federally mandated corrective actions, including the costs of open enrollment and private tutoring for schools designated as in need of improvement.

Here in Oklahoma, OEA staff has aggressively monitored the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s implementation strategy.

“As the most active supporter of education quality we will continue to work with the state department as well as assist our members in understand-

ing this legislation,” said Bishop.

The Act not only affects the classroom teacher but support professionals as well. By 2006, paraprofessionals working as teacher assistants are required to be *highly qualified*. In Oklahoma, a paraprofessional is considered highly qualified if he or she meets certain state requirements. The requirements are an associate’s degree, 48 hours of college credit *or* passing the Oklahoma General Education Test (OGET).

The Adult Education and Literacy program of the Lifelong Learning Section of the Oklahoma State Department of Education will offer content knowledge in the areas of reading, writing and math. These courses will be offered in 40 locations and help

prepare teaching assistants for testing.

To assist our paraprofessional members, the OEA Teaching and Learning Center has developed a three hour course designed to alleviate test anxiety. The training is designed to focus on test taking strategies, attitudes and disposition needed to be successful on the OGET. Each participant will receive an OGET study guide.

For more information on how to meet the highly qualified requirements of ESEA, or for other professional development opportunities, contact the Teaching and Learning Specialist in your area. (See box below.)

ESPs Find a Wealth of Benefits in OEA Membership

By Bruce Treadaway

Each year educational support professionals are asked to join the OEA by local leaders. Each year the same ESP’s ask the question, “Why should I join the OEA? Isn’t the OEA a teachers’ organization?”

Quite simply, the answers are that indeed all ESP’s should join the OEA, and that the OEA is not just a teachers’ organization.

The OEA offers numerous benefits to support professionals who join the OEA. To start, ESPs receive the same benefits as teachers at half the cost, and no other association represents ESPs like the OEA.

Consider these benefits, too:

- Six lobbyists are at the state Capitol each day of the legislative session, fighting for not only teachers and public education, but for support professionals as well. Fully paid individual insurance is now a reality for ESPs because of the OEA’s efforts.

- Advocates in each of the regional

areas represent ESP’s when they have employment issues and when their lo-

Two education support professionals serve on the OEA Board of Directors, working year-round for ESP issues.

cals go to the bargaining table.

- As an OEA member, support professionals have access to an OEA lawyer during dismissal hearings.

- Support professionals, their spouses and dependent children are provided access to OEA’s Personal Legal Services Program (PLSP), which helps with a multitude of off-the-job legal issues. No other education organization offers this valuable benefit.

- Membership comes with a \$1 million liability insurance policy.

- The OEA is only a phone call away, either to someone on your regional team or at state headquarters.

- OEA offers professional trainings free of charge to members.

- There are two education support

professionals on the OEA board of directors. They are elected by the mem-

bership, and serve with ESP members’ needs in mind.

- Every ESP

should belong to a professional organization, and the OEA should be that or-

ganization. OEA’s ESP member numbers are growing.

Many other ESP benefits are in the OEA membership materials. Check them out when the materials are delivered at the beginning of the new school year, and then make a decision to belong to the OEA.

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Gov. and Mrs. Henry Sign on as Honorary Chairpersons for RAA

By Bruce Treadaway

Governor Brad Henry and First Lady Kim Henry join a growing list of celebrities who have been OEA "Read Across America" honorary chairs. They will be the honorary chairs for the OEA's RAA program for the 2003-2004 school year, and it should be the best year ever. Past RAA chairs have been Bob Stoops, Eddie Sutton, and Sherri Coale.

Kim has been an educator for years in the Shawnee area, and even now as the first lady she substitutes in the Shawnee area whenever she can. When approached with the idea of being the RAA chairs for this year, neither of them hesitated before they

answered, "We'll be honored to do so." The pictures for the RAA posters have already been taken, and they will be ready in January 2004.

As a culminating event for this year's RAA, the Henrys will host a 100th birthday party for Dr. Seuss at the governor's mansion on March 2, 2004. On that date Seuss characters will take over the mansion, and the best reading celebration ever will be presided over by OEA's 2004 RAA chairs Brad and Kim Henry and OEA President Roy Bishop.

Begin making plans now to join us in celebrating March 2 at the local level by stressing how important reading is to the future of our students.



Governor Brad Henry and his wife Kim (seated) stop and read with OEA President Roy Bishop and the Cat in the Hat (aka Pam Westbrook, OEA advocacy specialist).

www.okea.org Provides Powerful Knowledge

By Jeff Savage

If knowledge is power, then OEA members are masters of their domains. Why? Because they have access to www.okea.org, OEA's award-winning Web site.

Okea.org is a dynamic site, complete with up-to-date news, valuable resource material and quick links to OEA leadership and staff as well as links to other education-related sites on the Internet.

The OEA site is updated frequently with the latest news. Whether you are searching for what happened in the Legislature this week, looking for results from a recent education poll or needing information on a coming OEA conference, okea.org should be your first stop. You can register for most OEA events on the site.

okea.org was designed with the idea that any user can find what he or she is looking for within three clicks. The site is conveniently separated into sections that correspond to OEA's differ-

ent departments.

- "About Your Association" gives an overview of the Association and links to the OEA's beliefs, mission, focus and strategic objectives for making education better in Oklahoma.

This section also contains links to OEA Committees, Legislative Accomplishments and the Awards Program.

- "Executive Officers" profiles OEA President Roy Bishop, Vice President Becky Felts and Executive Director David DuVall. The section includes a link to our President's Message, a frequent article on what's happening either in education in general or in the Association.

- "Legislative" includes weekly updates when the Legislature is in session, a list of OEA accomplishments at the Capitol and a link to the Oklahoma Education Coalition.

- "For Our Members" is chock full of links to OEA Centers, which provide a wealth of services to teachers and support professionals. From this

section, members can find a list of trainings offered by Teaching and Learning and Advocacy; job opportunities and member benefits.

- "Center for Legal and Corporate Services" section includes frequently asked legal questions and an itemized listing of services offered under the Personal Legal Services Program.

okea.org also has links just for par-

ents and students; a section of education news; PDF versions of OEA's monthly newspaper, *The Education Focus*; and a complete section with e-mail links to OEA staff and elected leaders.

In short, OEA's Web site is a wealth of information. Make it your home page today.

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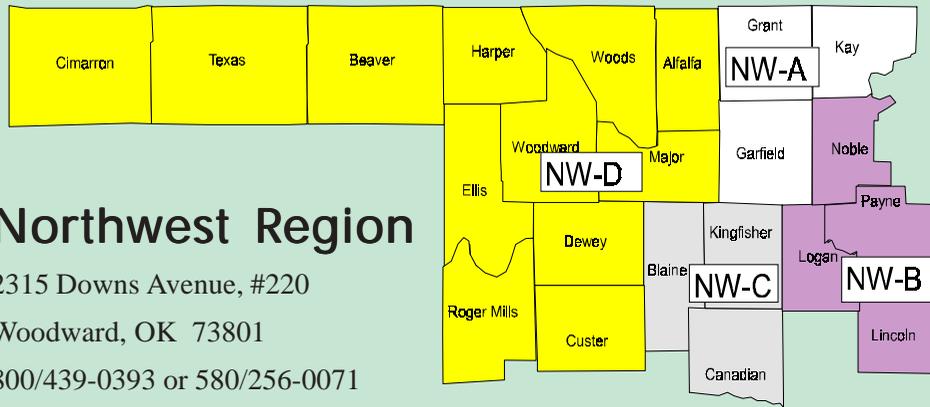
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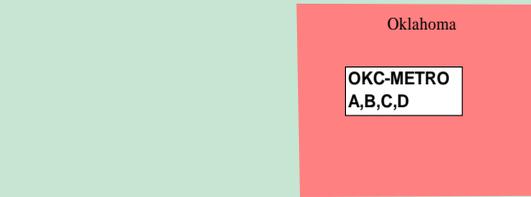
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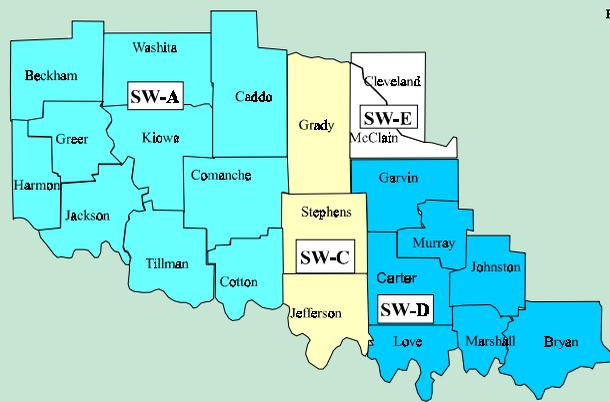
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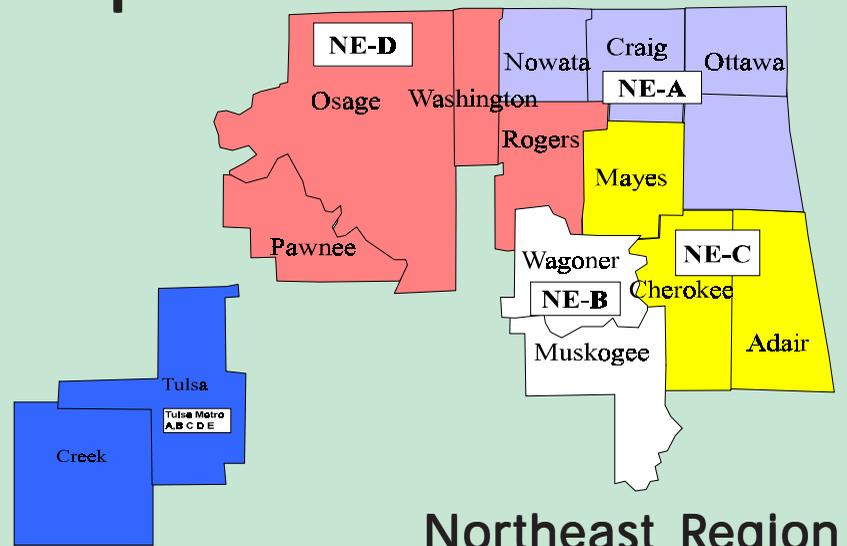
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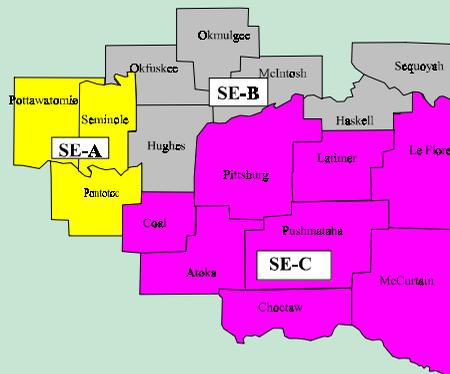
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RA Delegates Take On ESEA

NEA Plans Lawsuit to Force Funding of Education Act

New Orleans — The National Education Association took aim against the flaws and broken promises in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), highlighting actions of the NEA's Representative Assembly taken here during the first week of July.



SW-C Director Cheryl Dowell (Comanche EA) and outgoing SW-D Director Becki Munholland (Healdton EA) discuss campaign strategy for Carolyn Crowder's bid for the NEA Executive Committee. The entire Oklahoma delegation campaigned for Crowder during the New Orleans Representative Assembly.

NEA President Reg Weaver opened the Association's 2003 annual meeting with a vow to fight politicians' attempts to hold schools accountable without holding up their end of the bargain. Nearly 10,000 delegates left the convention mobilized to meet the laudable goals of the reauthorization of the ESEA, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

NEA also announced plans for a lawsuit challenging unfunded mandates imposed on the states by ESEA's federally mandated corrective actions, including the costs of open enrollment and private tutoring for schools designated as in need of improvement.

"NEA has always been dedicated to leaving no child behind – that is nothing new to us," Weaver said in his key-

note address. "The stated goals of NCLB – closing the achievement gap, ensuring highly qualified teachers, improving academic achievement – are a page from our very own book. NEA's concern with this legislation lies with the implementation of, and the lack of adequate and equitable funding for, these laudable goals."

In his first Representative Assembly as NEA president, Weaver set the tone for NEA's efforts to improve educational opportunities for children. Weaver emphasized the organization's commitment, energy and expertise as crucial to closing the achievement gap and making public schools great for every child.

"Team NEA, we would love to stay out of politics and in the classroom, but as long as Washington favors millionaires over children, we have to fight," said Weaver, a middle school science teacher from Harvey, Ill.

Delegates elected Lily Eskelsen, an elementary school teacher from Salt Lake City, to her first full term as secretary-treasurer. She will oversee the Association's multimillion dollar budget for a three-year term beginning Sept. 1.

In addition, delegates elected two members of the NEA Executive Committee. Former OEA President Carolyn Crowder (see page 1) and Wayne Nadeau, a high school social studies teacher from South Burlington, Vt., were each elected to three-year terms beginning Sept. 1.

Policy Actions

Each year, delegates to NEA's Representative Assembly take action on three types of policy statements – amendments to the Legislative Program, Resolutions and New Business

Items. In addition, delegates overwhelmingly adopted a strategic budget that directs resources to enhance teaching and learning, advocate for children and members, and build partnerships with organizations and individuals who support public education.

Other actions taken included:

- Delegates adopted a new early childhood education policy, urging that every child should be required to attend full-day kindergarten and should be offered free pre-kindergarten education. They also voted to draft and support model legislation to be proposed in state legislatures.

- NEA adopted language in its Legislative Program calling for legislation to prohibit employment discrimination in organizations that receive federal funds, such as religious organizations that act as "supplemental services providers," or tutors under ESEA.

- Changes to the Resolutions included language that specified that standardized tests be used as a supplement to other assessments developed and conducted by teachers and schools, and that tests should be used primarily to evaluate student learning. New provisions also deplore test preparation that impedes teaching and learning or testing regimes that limit opportunities for students.

- Delegates passed a number of

New Business Items, including a number of actions related to strengthening teacher retirement systems and expanding access to health care. Other New Business Items urged NEA to plan a lobby day to influence the government pension offset and windfall elimination provision – federal policies that reduce the pensions of public employees and to participate in the anticipated 40th anniversary of 1963 March on Washington.

- The late Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) received the Friend of Education Award, NEA's highest honor. Wellstone was a tireless champion of meaningful federal support for public education. He died in a plane crash during his reelection campaign last fall.

- NEA also honored 18 leading advocates for human and civil rights, including three educators who pioneered the 1966 merger between NEA and the American Teachers Association, an organization that primarily represented African American teachers. Elliott Palmer, Joe Reed and Horace Reed were among those recognized at NEA's annual Human and Civil Rights dinner.

- Delegates raised almost \$1 million in voluntary contributions to the Fund for Children and Public Education, which is used to support efforts to elect candidates who support children and public education.

The 2004 NEA Annual Meeting and Representative Assembly will be held in Washington, D.C.



Putnam City ACT's Vicki Vaughan (left), Jan Sands (center) and Janie Hollas read over the day's coming events during an early morning caucus meeting for the Oklahoma delegation at NEA RA.

I Am Your Public School

By Frosty Troy

I am your public school, a 200 year-old experiment giving America the strongest economy in world history. We are 88,000 buildings in more than 15,000 districts. And we are as diverse as this great country. This fall I embrace more than 46 million children; for most of them, I am their only hope for future success.

When the buses roll up, my doors are flung open to children of all shapes, sizes, levels of ability, some in wheel chairs, geniuses and the retarded, average and the developmentally disabled. They speak more than 100 languages, including Mong – the Cambodian highland children who came here with no written alphabet. I represent “home schooling” at its best for I am the “home school” of 10 million latchkey children.

Some of you would judge me by test scores, but I would remind you that a test only measures one dimension of a student’s development – only in that subject on that day depending on whether the student tests well. Although, my SAT math and science test scores are at a 33 year high, and my ACT scores are up for 11 consecutive years. I remind you that those tests don’t include foreign language, music, art, drama and other vital extracurriculars.

If some of the children fail, it isn’t for lack of trying by the faculty and staff – among the most dedicated and least paid among the industrial democracies of the world.

My dirty little secret is that many of the 11 percent of children who drop out are the products of sorry parenting – parents who send me children who are undisciplined, unwanted, unwashed, unloved; some strung out on drugs and alcohol; some abused and neglected; few who have ever been taken to a church, synagogue or mosque. The miracle is that my doors are open to all of them and many are

reached – not by textbooks alone but by teachers who know there is more to a child’s life than rote learning. For thousands of kids, the only hug they ever get they get in school.

It is painful to be accused of failing African American children. That’s a calumny. Our greatest hurdle is that half of African American children are born to single moms, creating a whole new set of problems for the schools.

My plea for more early childhood education goes unheeded, yet there are hundreds of millions of dollars for more tests.

I grieve when I hear critics say I am “secular” because no specific beliefs are taught in this pluralistic system. But when it comes to doing God’s

“I am passionately committed to the belief that God gives children different gifts, and we alone address all children whatever their gifts. We play no favorites, taking all of God’s children.”

work – we’re on duty every day. Last year more than 30 percent of the students got their only hot meal in our cafeterias. Thousands of poor children find decent clothing and underwear in the school clothing closet filled by faculty, staff and PTA moms. Teachers spend nearly \$600 of their own money for things like workbooks and pencils for needy children.

Role modeling, not mantras and Hail Marys come from a teaching profession that provides more Sunday school teachers than any other profession or occupation in America. Aren’t feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, nurturing the little ones spiritual injunctions in all the great religions of the world? No school prayer? I wish you could hear the thousands of reverent, whispered entreaties sent heavenward from students and faculty every day. God’s presence is palpable. One of the prayers I overhear most often is, “Please God, give me the patience to

get through just one more day with these kids!”

Some would mock our athletic programs, yet for many of the boys, coaches are often their only male role models.

Teamwork and sportsmanship are enduring principles that millions of our graduates have translated into successful careers and successful families.

Some say I should prepare more students for college, as though college is for everyone. We are the only education system that educates the student to the level of his or her ability – doctor, mechanic, engineer, nurse, computer manager, carpenter. America is third in the world in college graduation rates –

nearly 25 percent with a four year degree or more.

Who says there are no he-

roes today? Did you see the biographies of those rescuers who died in the World Trade Center tragedy? Firemen, policemen, union members, emergency workers – 90 percent of them public school graduates.

I am passionately committed to the belief that God gives children different gifts, and we alone address all children whatever their gifts. We play no favorites, taking all of God’s children.

My most precious possession is more than 5 million special education youngsters – we alone address their needs. If your heart ever needs a lift, visit with a Downs Syndrome child happily employed thanks to public education.

I suffer the slings and arrows from those who stress my shortcomings in order to defund public education. Yet my students out score students in the average charter school. Repeated studies show that when students are matched in family structure, family in-



Frosty Troy is an OEA and NEA Friend of Education award winner, and one of public education’s staunchest supporters.

come and family education attainment, public school students do as well or better than parochial school students.

Defaming public education in order to promote vouchers for religious schools is an egregious miscarriage of education’s mission. I am held accountable by my school board – every dollar spent. Vouchers require zero accountability.

Yes, my corridors have known random acts of violence, yet the FBI says a child is safer in my arms at school than in his or her own home. Thanks to the vision of our forebears, America had a 100 year head start on every other nation in creating universal free public education. Today, with all its flaws, it is the finest system in the industrial world.

I leave no child behind, but some of you would dim my lights, leaving in the shadows the poor, the halt, the blind, the lame and the special education student.

You would use public school dollars to construct new forms of theocratic education, yet the U.S. General Accounting Office national survey showed that a third of my buildings are dangerous and unsafe – yet no help is forthcoming. Do as you will, but for me, I will stand proudly in my neighborhood, America’s last egalitarian institution, my arms embracing the finest educators, administrators and support personnel in the world – dedicated to helping our children realize the American dream.

(Reprinted by popular demand and by permission of “The Oklahoma Observer.”)

You Decide

This issue's question:
"Is legal protection the only reason to join OEA?"

A monthly column of member opinion.

Yes, Legal Protection is an Important Benefit . . .

By Cathy Lewis

Elk City Public Schools

Why be a member of OEA? The Oklahoma Education Association represents teachers!

The OEA works toward improving areas in the teaching profession as well as in the education of Oklahoma's children. Legal protection is an important service provided for members of OEA, but is not the only reason I became a member. OEA is our voice to the state legislature and without that voice, teacher benefits and pay raises

would, no doubt, be few and far between.

Thus, there are other valid reasons for being a member. If all Oklahoma teachers would support OEA by becoming members, OEA would be able to do even more through dues and involvement of all who benefit from each improvement. It seems there are those who enjoy all the benefits OEA provides for teachers, but contribute nothing in return. Nonmembers never turn down pay raises, which would be nonexistent without representation

from the OEA at the state level.

I remember hearing that OEA came to the aid of some nonmembers concerning a RIF situation. What a deal! I consider it to be an honor to be in the teaching profession and am happy to support an organization that is concerned with my best interest. Why NOT be a member of OEA?



Elk City's Cathy Lewis

. . . But, There is So Much More

When asked the question of whether legal protection is the only reason to join OEA many members agree, but many also find so many more benefits of membership.

Given today's climate, it is only common sense that education employees seek the protection that only the OEA can provide. But, the state's largest education Association offers so much more. From professional devel-

opment, bargaining assistance, and media relations to personal leadership opportunities and a strong voice at the Capitol, the OEA provides a wealth of benefits.

Throughout this issue of *the Education Focus*, you will find examples of those benefits. Discover what all your Association offers, take advantage of its programs and resources, and encourage your colleagues to join us.

Next Issue's Question:

"Should the local Association be responsible for selecting members of the district's staff development committee?"

Columns should be 250-300

words. E-mail your responses to Patti Razien at prazien@okea.org or mail them to her at OEA Northwest Office, 2315 Downs Ave., Woodward, OK, 73801. The deadline is Sept. 10.



SEAS is a computer automated IEP program that was designed to ease the constantly changing demands of state and federal regulations placed on educators in the Special Education field.

SEAS is currently being used in over 1,200 school districts in 15 states, with an estimated 40,000 users accessing the program daily.

The **SEAS** program features:

- € Faster IEP's
- € Measurable Goals & Objectives
- € Oklahoma Child Count
- € On Site In-Service Training
- € Customizable Form Groupings
- € Electronic Student Transfer Feature
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- € Timeline Tracking
- € Unlimited Technical Support
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The SEAS program frees valuable time so you can get back to what is most important...Teaching.



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For more information contact:
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An Invitation

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**FOR INFORMATION CALL
(405)270-0501 EXT. 5784**

Located in the VA Medical Center

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PLSP Offers Members Valuable Services

By Joe E. White, Jr.
The White Law Firm

The Personal Legal Services Program (PLSP) was designed and implemented by your OEA General Counsel's Office and the White Law Firm. Great care was taken to ensure PLSP would be easily accessible and offer the type of legal services that would meet the needs of OEA members and their families.

Teachers and Education Support Professionals (ESP) across the state who maintain an active OEA membership receive a variety of valuable legal services, typically at *no charge*. For example, drafting of wills (including amendments), uncontested divorces, uncontested modifications to divorce decrees (including child support), consultation and assistance in creditor disputes, name changes and misdemeanor cases are fully covered and require no out-of-pocket costs to an OEA member, his or her spouse or dependent children.

Other legal services are provided at a substantially reduced rate resulting in a huge savings to OEA members and their families. Reduced rate services include personal injury cases,

nursing home negligence and insurance bad faith, just to name a few.

The White Law Firm takes great pride in the legal service we provide to our clientele. We have had the pleasure of representing OEA members and their families through this program for over seven years. Since 1996, we have represented in excess of 4,000 teachers or their loved ones in a wide variety of cases. The level of service that we provide to all OEA members and their families has led numerous OEA members to recommend us to their friends and other family members. Even with this large volume of cases, the White Law Firm takes the time to provide personal service to each client we help.

The White Law Firm carefully evaluates each case to ensure that we obtain the maximum compensation for the loss suffered by our client. Our results in helping clients with personal injury, nursing home negligence and insurance bad faith cases by way of judgment or settlement currently exceed \$30 million dollars. We have found that juries across this great state appreciate the education employees in their communities that are working

hard to educate the next generation of Oklahomans. Personally speaking, any time I am fortunate enough to represent a teacher who has been injured through someone's negligence, juries appear more willing to fully compensate that person because of who he or she is and what he or she represents.

Please familiarize yourself with all of the available benefits that accompany your OEA membership. I particularly encourage you to review the OEA membership benefits associated with the PLSP. The White Law Firm maintains three attorneys and one paralegal who are ready, willing and able to assist at a moment's notice.

In closing, every teacher should know the ABC's of protecting themselves and their loved ones and who to



Attorney Joe White

turn to when help is needed. We are proud to be associated with the OEA and the members it represents. Our goal is to keep you informed that we are here for you and to keep PLSP in mind the next time you need help.

Personal Legal Services Program

The OEA is the only state organization to offer legal assistance to its members for off-the-job legal problems. Through the Personal Legal Services Program, members have access to free legal services, or services at discounted costs.

If you need help for one of the following services, call OEA's Center for Legal and Corporate Services at 800/522-8091, or 528-7785 in central Oklahoma.

Free services include:

- Wills, including amendments;
- Name changes;
- Uncontested modifications to divorce decrees;
- Defense of misdemeanor charges;

- Paternity support enforcement;
- Powers of attorney;
- Uncontested divorces;
- Uncontested adoptions; and
- Consultation and assistance in creditor disputes.

Other situations allow a member five hours of free legal service, with any additional time covered at a reduced rate. Those situations include:

- Personal injury;
- Felony charges;
- Contested modifications to divorce decrees;
- Wrongful death;
- Nursing home neglect;
- Contested divorces; and
- Contested adoptions.

OEA Brings Quality Training To You

OEA's Center for Teaching and Learning provides our members with a number of diverse professional development opportunities. Following is a list of workshops and seminars we can bring to your district or your building.

To schedule a training, contact the T&L specialist in your region. See page 6 for a staff roster.

- ▣ Birth Order
- ▣ Brain Based Teaching
- ▣ Bullying/Harassment Prevention
- ▣ Communicating With Families
- ▣ Cooperative Learning
- ▣ Dealing With Angry Students
- ▣ Dealing With Difficult People
- ▣ Decision Making
- ▣ Gung Ho!
- ▣ I Can Do It!
- ▣ Keeping Schools Safe

- ▣ Leadership Styles
- ▣ Mentor Training
- ▣ Multiple Intelligences
- ▣ Professional Development Committee
- ▣ Resident Teacher Training
- ▣ Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
- ▣ Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens
- ▣ Stress Management
- ▣ True Colors
- ▣ Who Moved My Cheese?

Vital Link Training Modules

- ▣ Self-esteem
- ▣ Communications-sending
- ▣ Communications-receiving
- ▣ Communications-styles
- ▣ Assertiveness
- ▣ Decision making
- ▣ Organizing your worksite

Center for Legal & Corporate Services

Richard Wilkinson, General Counsel
Heath W. Merchen, Associate General Counsel
Brandon Webb, Associate General Counsel

Marian Bottoms, Paralegal, mbottoms@okea.org
Jo Davis, Administrative Assistant, jodavis@okea.org
Melanie Engh, Legal Assistant, mengh@okea.org

NEA Member Benefits Programs & Services

Association Provided Insurance

Your membership includes \$1 million in civil liability insurance, and \$35,000 in criminal liability. Also, you receive \$1,000 in accidental death and dismemberment (AD&D) insurance, plus an additional \$4,000 if the accident occurs on the job with additional coverage available through American Fidelity Assurance. (800-637-8489)

Life Insurance Programs* (800/637-4636)

NEA Preferred Term Life Plan – Provides \$100,000 to \$500,000 of very affordable life insurance for healthy members.

NEA Term Life Insurance Plan – Provides decreasing term insurance with benefit amounts ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000. Optional spouse and dependent coverage.

NEA AD&D/AD&D Plus Insurance Plan – You can cover your entire family with AD&D insurance. Choose from plans with rates starting at \$19 per year and coverage options up to \$520,000.

NEA DUES-TAB® Insurance – Free coverage for eligible members. DUES-TAB is a special benefit that pays up to \$50,000 in AD&D insurance or dismemberment that occurs on the job or while acting on Association business, and a \$150,000 benefit for death due to unlawful homicide while actively engaged in their occupation.

NEA Guaranteed Issue Life Plan – For NEA Members 50 and older – you cannot be turned down for coverage.

NEA Level Premium Term Life Insurance Plan – Provides up to \$250,000 of decreasing term life insurance coverage with a premium that does not increase. Receive a special 20% discount when you purchase a minimum of \$40,000 or \$100,000, depending on your age.

NEA Home Protection® Plan – Life insurance benefits of up to \$300,000 with optional disability benefits.

Health and Disability Insurance Programs (800/637-4636)

NEA MemberCare® Critical Illness Program – Up to \$100,000 protection against the financial disaster caused by catastrophic illness. Pays a lump-sum benefit to member upon first diagnosis of a wide array of critical conditions.

NEA MemberCare® Long-Term Care Insurance Program – Provides financial support in paying for necessary long-term care services like nursing home, home health care and assisted living facility care.

NEA MemberCare® In-Hospital Plan – Helps you pay the “extra” expenses associated with a hospital stay.

NEA MemberCare® Medicare Supplement Program* – Coverage for hospital and medical expenses not covered by Medicare after age 65. It includes a supplemental discount package and hard-to-beat prices. You get to choose your own doctor.

NEA Income Protection® Plan – Helps replace your income if you are out of work due to illness or injury.

Casualty Insurance Programs

NEA Members Auto & Home Insurance™ – An auto and home insurance program designed to meet the needs of NEA members, with exclusive rates and excellent benefits. It’s all made possible by NEA Member Benefits and a unique collaboration of insurance providers managed by California Casualty. (800/800-9410)

NEA Homeowners® Insurance – Provided through Horace Mann, this plan offers inflation-proof protection for owners and renters at school and at home. (800/999-1030)

Savings, Deposit and Investment Programs (800/637-4636)

NEA-sponsored, FDIC-Insured Money Market Account – Superior yields with easy access to your funds.

NEA-sponsored GoldCertificate® CD – Some of the highest yields in the

nation. FDIC insured up to \$100,000 per depositor, with terms from 6 to 60 months.

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NEA Credit Card Program®*** – Superior benefits exclusive to NEA members with the NEA Platinum Plus MasterCard®, NEA Premier Gold® MasterCard®, or the NEA School Days® MasterCard®. Benefits to members include no annual fee, low introductory rates, travel benefits and competitive interest rates.

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*Provided by the NEA Members Insurance Trust®

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***You may contact the issuer and administrator of this program, MBNA America Bank, to request specific information about the costs associated with these credit cards by calling 800/468-7632 or writing to P.O. Box 15020, Wilmington, DE 19850. Certain restrictions apply. Platinum Plus is a federally registered service mark of MBNA America Bank, n.a. MasterCard® is a federally registered service mark of MasterCard International Inc. used pursuant to license.

Liz Picone, NEA Member Benefits Consultant
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NEA Member Benefits Member Service Center
800/637-4636
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
(Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., ET)

Hearing-impaired members call 800/445-1269 TTY

www.neamb.com

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- Permanent cash value insurance through Horace Mann. 800/999-1030
- Whole life plans available through American Fidelity. 800/637-8489
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ticipating Jiffy Lube service center. Just show your OEA membership card. 405/613-1921

- American Automobile Association – AAA will waive the onetime enrollment fee of \$15 for any OEA member when joining. Access this discount by contacting Carol Turner Bales at AAA, 800/926-9922.

- “Oklahoma Today” Magazine – Subscribe to “Oklahoma Today” and learn about the people and places of Oklahoma. Members receive seven issues full of award-winning stories and photographs for \$15 per year. Call 405/521-2496 or 800/777-1793 and mention OEA to receive this rate.

- Vantage Deluxe World Travel – The largest organization providing affinity group travel. As such, it can offer the best values and the highest quality programs in the market place to OEA members. 800/634-2180.

- Oklahoma Breast Care Center – Providing discounts on mammograms, ultrasound and litescan. 405/755-2273, or 877/349-8677

- AmeriPlan Vision Care – Members can save up to 60 percent on vision care. Membership is only \$8.95 per month for individual coverage, and \$12.95 per month for family coverage.

- AmeriPlan Dental Services – Members can save up to 80 percent on dental services. An individual membership is \$11.95 per month; and the entire household can be covered for only \$19.95 per month. 877/349-8677

- College Funding Solutions – A financial aid consulting company that offers private workshops to locals, at no cost, as a benefit of OEA membership. The sessions are designed to help parents of college-bound students with vital information on financial aid. 405/948-0800, www.cfsok.com

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OREA Joins Forces with NEA Retired

The Oklahoma Retired Educators Association (OREA) recently completed a merger with the National Education Association-Retired (NEA-R). While all newly retired OEA/NEA members will now be required to join NEA-R when joining OREA, current OREA members will not be required to join NEA.

Members of OREA voted late this spring to merge with the national organization. With nearly 13,000 members, the OREA is now one of the larger NEA affiliates, said Joyce Drew Parsons, executive director for the Oklahoma retirees organization. She says the merger will be a big plus for OREA members.

"I think the merger will give our people access to better benefits, like the credit cards and life insurance," she said.

NEA Member Benefits offers a number of insurance programs at very competitive prices that retirees may find beneficial, including guaranteed issue life insurance, critical illness protection and a long-term care policy.

(See Page 13).

Under the new alignment, OREA members who retired prior to June 1, 2003, and those retired but not a member of NEA at retirement, have the option to join NEA-R if they so choose. Any person drawing benefits from the Oklahoma Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) after June 1, 2003, who is a member of OEA/NEA at the time of retirement must continue to be unified. Any person not a member of NEA at time of retirement who joins OREA will have the option of whether to join NEA-R.

"Our retired members are and always will be an integral part of our Association," said Roy Bishop, OEA president. "The affiliation with NEA-R will strengthen the OREA as it battles through those issues that affect our state's retirees."

People 45 years and older who are employees of public education institutions and are members of the TRS are eligible for membership in OREA. For membership information, call 800/522-8091 or 405/528-7785.

Convention to Include Special Panel of Children's Authors

Have you ever wanted to meet the authors of some of your students' favorite books? Come October, you may get your chance.

A unique opportunity will be presented to OEA members attending the 2003 OEA Convention, October 16 when OEA brings a group of well known authors for a special author's panel. Members will be able to munch through lunch with Bill and Carol Wallace, Darleen Bailey Beard, Gwendolyn Hooks, and Anna Myers. Each of these writers are published Oklahoma authors of children's books.

The OEA Convention returns to the

Tulsa Convention Center. The Downtown Doubletree Hotel will once again serve as headquarters for the annual day of professional development.

The writers' panel discussion is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in Conference Room A. Admission to the special event will be \$10 and tickets will be sold on a first-come basis the day of the convention. Seating will be limited.

A complete Convention guide will be published in the September-October issue of *The Education Focus*, and posted on OEA's Web site, www.oeka.org, in late September.