

OEA

An affiliate of the
National Education Association

In this issue

Retirees Beware!
Social Security
Benefits Can Vanish
Page 3

Synopsis of Key Bills
from 2003
Legislature
Page 5

HB 346 Not All It
Promised to Be
Pages 6

SDE Working on
"Highly Qualified"
Definition
Page 7

Bad Faith Ruling
Favors Crutcho
Teachers
Page 10

Periodical
Post Paid at
Okla. City, OK

The Education Focus
OEA's all-member publication

The Education Focus

For the membership of the Oklahoma Education Association

June/July 2003

The Making of a President

Carolyn Crowder Ends 6-Year Tenure

By Marty Bull

When Carolyn Crowder began her teaching career in 1978 in Mustang, she wasn't thinking about becoming an active member of her local Association, she just wanted to teach music. But a few twists and turns along the way catapulted her into Association leadership, and she began her journey to the OEA Presidency.

Once she calculated her expenses on a beginning teacher's salary, Crowder chose not to join the Mustang ACT her first year.

"The woman I was carpooling with everyday advised me to impress the principal, not the teachers," recalls Crowder. "And though I knew about the Association, no one asked me directly to join, so I didn't."

During that first year, she observed the flurry of activity among MACT officers in her building.

"I was very impressed with how MACT's leaders worked for us and

represented our concerns to the administration. Our building rep – Vicki Schwartz – did a fantastic job of keeping everyone informed," she said. "I joined my second year out of guilt."

In her fourth year, Crowder joined the legislative committee and ran for a spot on the bargaining team. She lost that election, but the winner

dropped out and Crowder was asked to serve in her place. That bargaining team negotiated Mustang's second-ever contract. The training provided by then UniServ Director Lela Odom, now an OEA associate executive director, was her first introduction to the Association

See "Only Excitement" on page 8



Carolyn Crowder inspired crowds of 25,000 and 30,000 at two state Capitol rallies during her tenure as OEA president. Her advocacy resulted in the largest teacher salary increase in state history as well as state-paid single premium health insurance for teachers and support professionals.

Funding Early Didn't Mean Funding Properly

By Stacy Martin

Common education's budget was determined earlier than ever this year when the Oklahoma Legislature agreed to a \$1.95 billion appropriation in April.

Early? Perhaps. Adequate? Hardly.

Funding education early did not translate to funding it well. Proud of themselves for "funding education first," the Legislature said the appropriation was \$80 million more than

what schools had received for 2002-03. What Republicans and Democrats both failed to mention is that Oklahoma's schools have already suffered more than \$250 million in funding cuts the last two school years. And the \$80 million increase? Even if schools do receive the entire appropriation, they will still fall \$90 million short of what lawmakers promised for '02-03.

Add it all up and the state's com-

mon schools will have suffered more than \$340 million in funding cuts over a three-year period.

The fallout from the Legislature's failure to act is catastrophic. Oklahoma has lost more than 5,000 education jobs, representing nearly \$100 million in payroll.

"If this had been an industry such as General Motors or Dayton Tire, no one would have let this happen," said OEA President Carolyn Crowder. "We are stunned and disappointed that our schools are less important than sport utility vehicles."

See "OEA Pushed" on Page 4

The Top Five Things I've Learned As OEA President

By Carolyn Crowder
OEA President

#1 – Never Underestimate the Ability of OEA Members and Staff

I'll never forget standing on the capitol steps wondering if we could really put 10,000 people there – and then an hour later, seeing three times that many OEA and Coalition members!

When I became president in July of 1997, Oklahoma teachers had never seen a \$3,000 raise, the state did not contribute a dime towards education employees' health insurance, we didn't have any nationally certified teachers (we have 635 now), and there wasn't an Oklahoma Education Coalition. I've gotten to watch you and our staff put together these and many other initiatives to achieve gains that otherwise wouldn't have happened.

#2 – Partisan Politics Destroy Progress

Since January 2002, schools have been cut \$269 million, 5,877 education jobs have been eliminated and the class size reforms of HB 1017 are becoming a thing of the past. These lost jobs represent an estimated \$100 million in payroll statewide. If this had been General Motors, American Airlines or Dayton Tire, we would have seen a huge outcry and legislators would

have scrambled to "Save Our Economy."

But when it came to "Saving Our Schools" state leaders avoided or voted down numerous reasonable plans while engaging in an unprecedented partisan battle. One of the few things they agreed on was to make a big deal out of setting aside \$1.95 billion for schools – not enough to meet current needs and \$80 million less than was promised last year. Some legislators had the audacity to claim this figure was an increase over last year! Those standing in unemployment lines or moving to Texas aren't falling for it.

#3 – Sometimes, It's What We Kill

It's easy to get discouraged when you can't seem to get an under-achieving legislature to make things better. However, if it hadn't been for OEA staff and member lobbyists this session, things could have been a lot worse!

Among other things, OEA killed legislation that would have increased an education employee's liability while on the job. We kept the legislature



Carolyn Crowder with husband Terry and Jake

from using the Teacher Retirement System to solve the budget crisis. And, we stopped proposals that would have eliminated our state minimum salary schedule and our fringe benefit allowance.

#4 – Never, Ever Give Up!

The other time during my presidency that the legislature really let us down was the year they passed HB 1759, a bill full of unfunded mandates that threatened to destroy our curriculum. Remember what we did? We made the legislators miserable while we garnered support from other education groups and the public. We then came back the next session, changed HB 1759, and also rallied for the largest teacher raise in state history!

We can do that again – if we don't give up! We must not let the neglect of state leaders continue to inflict untold damage to our state and our

future! We can start now, building the momentum for a special session and/or the 2004 session!

#5 – I Hate Good-bye!

In fact, I refuse to say it! Instead, I will continue to advocate for you and with you. The only difference will be that my title will be changed. Instead of OEA president, it will be First Grade Teacher and, hopefully, NEA Executive Committee Member. That's right, by July 5, I'll know whether I've been elected to the NEA Executive Committee. But even if I don't win the election, I know I will be teaching first grade at Mustang Valley Elementary.

Whatever my title, my mission will be to make sure OEA/NEA members never learn how to say good-bye to our dream of quality public education!

OEA

The Education Focus

Volume 20, No. 8
A production of OEA's
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The Education Focus (ISSN 1542-1678) is published nine times annually with issues in September/October, November, December/January, February, March, April, May, June/July and August for \$5 by the Oklahoma Education Association, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Periodicals postage paid at Okla. City, OK, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to
The Education Focus
PO Box 18485
Oklahoma City, OK 73154

June 30: Deadline for Committee Nomination Applications

One of Roy Bishop's first duties as OEA president will be appointing members to various Association committees. June 30 is the deadline for nominations for committee appointments.

Committees meet at least twice a year to review nominations for various Association awards, study OEA policy and make recommendations to the Board of Directors and the Delegate Assembly on action items. Each

committee is comprised of 10 members, including a board liaison, plus a staff liaison.

Positions will be filled for the following committees: Affiliate Relations, Budget, Collective Bargaining, Communications, Constitution, Convention, Credentials, Education Support Professionals, Elections, Forces on Education, Human and Civil Rights, Instruction and Professional Development, Legal Services, Legislative,

Member Benefits, Standing Rules and Resolutions.

Members may nominate themselves by filling out a form and sending it to Committee Nominations, OEA, PO Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK 73154. Forms can be found on the OEA Web site at www.okea.org/Governance/03commnomform.pdf.

For more information on committee charges, visit www.okea.org/Governance/Committee.htm.

Retirees Beware!

Social Security Benefits Can Vanish Under WEP and GPO

By Doug Folks

Willie Smith taught in Oklahoma for 10 years. He also worked construction as a college student and for four years with Horace Mann. During his 18 years as an employee for a variety of Oklahoma schools and companies, his employers dutifully deducted Social Security.

Willie, whose wife Barbara was president of the Oklahoma Education Association from 1989-97, retired after 22 years of teaching in Joplin, Mo. – a city and state that does not pay Social Security for public employees. But Willie and Barbara knew that, comfortable in the knowledge that one day they would draw from what Social Security he had paid in, as well as her contributions from teaching and working for the OEA.

“When it came time to retire, I called about my Social Security and they told me to expect about \$1,000 a month,” he said.

But when Willie officially applied for Social Security and they plugged his work history into the computer, the Smiths were given an altogether different and disturbing answer.

“They told me that since I retired from Missouri that I would only receive about 35 percent of my Social Security,” Willie said.

With that shocking news the Smiths learned they were two of the thousands of public employees who have fallen victims of the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). Congress enacted the WEP in 1983, intending to remove a perceived advantage to people who also had pensions from non-Social Security employment.

The original Social Security formula was intended to help low-paid workers by replacing a higher proportion of their earnings than for workers with higher earnings. However, the formula could not differentiate between those who worked in low-paid

States in which public employees are not covered by Social Security

Alaska • California • Colorado
Connecticut • Georgia* • Illinois
Kentucky* • Maine • Massachusetts
Missouri • Nevada • Ohio
Rhode Island* • Texas
* -- certain local governments

jobs throughout their careers and those who appeared to have been low paid because they worked many years in jobs not covered by Social Security. The WEP was intended to remove this advantage. Yet, instead of protecting low-earning retirees, the WEP has unfairly impacted retirees with only slightly higher earnings.

Bad News Gets Worse

The Smiths were devastated to learn Willie would draw only \$340 a month, instead of nearly \$1,000 a month.

“All we expected to draw was what Willie had paid in,” she said.

But the bad news didn’t end there. “The really horrible thing is that if Willie survives me, he won’t receive any of my Social Security benefits,” Barbara said.

In addition to being slapped by the WEP, the Smiths will suffer the rules of the Government Pension Offset (GPO). The GPO reduces public employees’ Social Security spousal or survivor benefits by two-thirds of



Former OEA President Barbara Smith and her husband Willie were shocked to learn he would receive only about one-third of his Social Security benefits because he retired from Missouri, which doesn’t pay into Social Security for its teachers.

their public pension. Since Barbara’s Social Security benefits are greater than Willie’s – because she paid more into the system over for more years – he will receive none of her Social Security should he outlive her.

“A lot of women, and a lot of school teachers, fall into this situation,” Barbara said. “This law hurts the people who need the benefit the most.”

Estimates indicate that nine out of 10 public employees affected by the GPO lose their entire spousal benefit, even though their deceased spouse paid Social Security taxes for many years. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the GPO reduces benefits for some 300,000 individuals by more than \$3,600 a year.

“What is really sad is that if Willie had never worked a day in his life and never paid a single penny into Social Security, he would receive all of my benefits if I were to die first,” Barbara said. “I fail to understand what his work history has to do with receiv-

ing my benefits.”

The WEP and GPO affect public employees – teachers, policemen and firefighters – who retire from a state or organization that does not pay into Social Security. Oklahoma neighbors Texas and Missouri are two of the 15 states that do not pay into Social Security, and there are 53 Oklahoma school districts that do not pay in, either (see boxes on this page).

Oklahoma teachers who retire and then teach in Texas or Missouri could be affected.

What You Can Do To Help

The NEA and state affiliates are lobbying Congress to repeal the WEP and GPO. So far, there are 223 House of Representative sponsors of a measure that would repeal the two laws, including Oklahoma Reps. Brad Carson, Tom Cole and John Sullivan. Support is slow coming in the U.S. Senate where neither of Oklahoma’s two senators are among the 18 who

See “Ask Congress” on Page 9

Oklahoma School Districts Which Do Not Pay Into Social Security

Arapaho	Goodwell	Lookeba-	Norwood	Shady Grove
Balko	Grandfield	Sickles	Olney	Tenkiller
Butler	Hammon	Lowrey	Olustee	Terral
Caddo	Hardesty	Maryetta	Pittsburg	Texhoma
Caney	Harmony	Midway	Ravia	Tipton
Carter	Haywood	Moffett	Reydon	Tupelo
Colbert	Indianola	Moseley	Rock Creek	Turner
Davidson	Kaw City	Mulhall-	Rocky Mountain	Tushka
Denison	Kenwood	Orlando	Ryal	Tyrone
Farris	Keys	Nashoba	Ryan	Vanoss
Glover	Lone Wolf	Navajo	Salina	Woodall

OEA Pushed Legislature For Several Revenue Generation Plans

Continued from Page 1

Other ill effects of the crisis include larger class sizes, cancelled programs, curtailed extracurricular activities, reduced bus services, elimination of substitutes and a host of unpaid, extra responsibilities for teachers.

Still, the results could have been worse. Difficult as it is to believe, the budget cuts could have been even more brutal. Teacher pay and benefits could have been slashed.

The OEA fought for several revenue measures, including a penny sales tax increase, removal of tax exemptions, reallocation of state funds, as well as any other taxes the Legislature could support.

“But it wasn’t to be,” said Crowder. “In the end, no one had the courage to raise new revenue to solve the budget crisis.”

The OEA will continue fighting for solutions. Most likely, leadership will soon begin lobbying for a call for a special session. If necessary, the issue will be taken into the 2004 Legislative session.

Meanwhile, in the 2003 session, the OEA killed a host of negative legislation that significantly threatened educators’ working conditions. In fact, some of the most significant “wins” gained only modest media attention.

Indeed, sometimes the most important thing OEA does at the legislature is help kill destructive bills. This year, one of the biggest victories involved killing bills containing what some referred to as the “seven deadly sins.”

The items that would have hurt teachers most would have allowed school districts, during lean times, to suspend payments to the Teacher Retirement System, and to avoid their

obligation to fully fund the flexible benefit allowance, the \$3,000 pay raise and step increases.

Late in the session, there was House Bill 1767, which cleaned up many loose ends for teachers. OEA lobbyists worked closely with House Speaker Larry Adair to ensure passage of the bill.

Among the bill’s key provisions:

- Effectively cuts administrative costs by expanding the items included in their definition. The effect is a decrease, since administrative costs are limited to a percentage of school districts’ overall budgets. This results in a net decrease in allowable administrative expenses. The penalty for violations takes effect in one year.
- Streamlines the process for nonrenewal or dismissal of career teachers for quicker resolution of the issue.
- Protects children and public funds by expediting the review process for poorly-performing charter schools.



Communities in Crisis Town Hall Meetings

(From left) Jennifer Thornton, Ponca City ACT President Pat Lutz, Ponca City ACT Bargaining Chair Mary Ann Sudbury and Thomas Luckingbill took part in the Communities in Crisis Town Hall Meeting. The Ponca City meeting was one of several around the state on May 1. OEA leaders and members joined city and county government leaders and members of local police and fire unions to visit with legislators about the possibility of eliminating some of Oklahoma’s tax exemptions and exceptions in an effort to raise new revenue for the state. The CIC town hall meetings were just one of several efforts the OEA initiated as a way to find answers to the state funding crisis.

- Codifies in law a provision in existence for over a decade prohibiting school districts from cutting teacher pay. Teacher pay is agreed to under contract and should not be subject to cuts. Before, this item had to be negotiated yearly at the Legislature.
- Formalizes a practice that pays counselors and librarians for obtaining national board certification.

The OEA also helped kill HB 346, aka the School Protection Act (see

page 10), which would have exposed teachers to greater personal liability in lawsuits. The opposition cranked up the spin machine to generate confusion and half-truths about the bill, but their efforts ultimately failed.

“OEA legal counsel reviewed this bill extensively,” said Crowder. “They concluded it was an effort to shift liability from school districts and insurers onto teachers. This is not acceptable under any circumstances.”

An Escalating Campaign

The Steps OEA Took Before and During the 2003 Session

Early on, the Oklahoma Education Association recognized the severity of the education funding crisis – and mounted an escalating campaign to solve it. Following are the efforts and events the OEA initiated or took part in over the last few months.

✓ In February 2002, the OEA held press conferences designed to publicize the severity of the education funding crisis.

✓ The OEA joined forces with the Oklahoma Education Coalition to strengthen its lobbying might.

✓ In the fall of 2002, OEC and OEA urged school districts to sign proclamations declaring fiscal emergencies and asking for legislative intervention. More than 341 school boards passed it.

✓ The OEA sponsored legislation calling for a penny sales tax to immediately begin pumping \$25 million monthly into schools. Antitax forces helped kill the measure.

✓ The OEA and OEC sponsored an Education Summit in January to discuss solutions to the funding crisis.

✓ The OEA and OEC sponsored a

February 2003 rally at the State Capitol that drew 20,000 supporters and focused attention statewide on the crisis. Elected leaders immediately opted to give \$25 million in emergency money to education.

✓ The OEA joined forces with municipalities to form the Communities in Crisis Alliance. With Town Hall Meetings and other efforts, the group called attention to the funding crisis at the city, county and state levels. OEA sponsored legislation to tax selected services. Antitax forces helped kill the measure.

Session Produces Some Gains

A Synopsis of Key Bills From the 2003 Legislative Session

Every legislative session OEA fights to pass pro-education legislation and to defeat harmful legislation. The 2003 session was no exception. Following are some of the key House and Senate bills addressed by OEA lobbyists.

Bills We Supported

✦ **HB 1767 is one of the most important bills** passed this session. Among its numerous topics, it places into permanent law protections against school district reduction of teacher compensation from one year to the next without changes in duties or hours. Other provisions include streamlining the review process for the dismissal or nonrenewal of a career teacher, and redefining “adminis-

✦ **HB 1162 sets forth the common education appropriation.** This bill makes specific appropriations of \$1.95 billion for the support of common schools and related education programs for the 2003-04 fiscal year. The total appropriation is \$90 million less than the previous year’s appropriated amount. OEA lobbied for additional funds. Signed by the governor.

✦ **HB 1247 requires lawmakers to fund common education** earlier in the session. This bill provides that the legislature will each year complete the budget appropriation to common education no later than April 1. Signed by the governor.

✦ **SJR 11 would have allowed local communities to vote** for property tax increases to fund educational

programs in their own school districts. It would have referred to Oklahoma voters for their approval or rejection a proposed amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution to permit local school district patrons to approve or reject up to an additional 10 mills of property tax for the general support of schools, such revenue not to be charged against state aid. The measure failed to pass out of the House Committee on Revenue and Taxation.

✦ **SJR 22 provides for the people to vote** on a proposed amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution protecting lottery proceeds for public education. It also provides that lottery funding cannot supplant or replace other common education funding. The OEA supports these additional protections. This proposal

goes to a vote of the people in the 2004 general election.

✦ **SB 201 provides for appropriation of \$14.4 million** to the Ad Valorem Reimbursement Fund, taking \$4.8 million from each of three education revolving funds. Signed by the governor.

✦ **HB 1440 enables teachers to take a partial lump sum at retirement.** The bill provides that a member of the Teachers’ Retirement System be permitted to take a partial lump sum settlement at time of retirement, with a reduced monthly retirement benefit. Up to three years of service may be used for the lump sum calculation. Signed by the governor.

✦ **HB 1278 sends the lottery to a vote** of the people in 2004. This bill provides for a legislative referendum pursuant to the Oklahoma Constitution to approve or disapprove of a state-operated lottery, and to establish the Oklahoma Education Lottery Trust Fund. Signed by the governor.

✦ **HB 1309** would have provided, effective July 1, 2003, that all retiring members of the Teachers’ Retirement System be permitted to **utilize up to 120 days of unused accumulated sick leave** for purposes of establishing creditable service, thereby extending an equal benefit to Rule of 90 system members as already enjoyed by Rule of 80 members. OEA-sponsored. Passed the House, but died in Senate committee.

✦ **HB 1357 would have broadened the tax base** to include certain services and incrementally reduce the state sales tax on groceries, ultimately achieving revenue-neutral tax reform. Increased revenue produced in the first 18 months after implementation into law would have been available for appropriation to public education and other functions of state government. The bill failed to receive enough signatures to get out of con-

ference committee. It remains alive for a potential special session or the regular 2004 session. This was an OEA-sponsored bill through the Communities in Crisis Alliance.

✦ **SB 715 provides for teacher “truth in pay.”** The bill requires school districts to clearly and concisely inform certified employees exactly what they are paid in salary and benefits, either through their contracts or accompanying worksheets. Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, school districts shall report such information in a uniform fashion to the state Department of Education. OEA-sponsored. Signed by the governor.

✦ **HB 1602 provided for a temporary one-penny state sales tax**, with proceeds earmarked for public education. OEA-sponsored. Died in House Committee.

Bills We Opposed

✦ **HB 1276, HB 1652, SB 579, SB 580 and SB 581 would have imposed restrictions** on the ability of OEA and its local affiliate organizations to promote and protect the interests of school employees through grievances, collective bargaining and lobbying. These bills would have prevented a legally recognized bargaining agent from enforcing the terms of a negotiated contract, and prohibited school employees from being involved in lobbying the legislature. Not heard in committee.

✦ **SB 346 would have increased teacher liability** in school lawsuits. “The School Protection Act” would have provided for greater liability protection for schools and insurers, while increasing teacher exposure to legal judgments. Passed the House, defeated in the Senate. (See Page 6 for a complete look at this bill.)

✦ **SB 520 “Oklahoma Tuition Equalization Grant Act,”** provides limited tuition equalization grants, when funding becomes available, to Oklahoma students attending Oklahoma private colleges or universities. Signed by the governor.

Important Gains

HB 1767 codifies in law a provision stating teacher salaries can’t be cut, streamlines the review process for dismissal or nonrenewal of career teachers and opens the way for cutting administrative costs.

trative costs” as a means of bringing about more efficient operation of schools. Due to the revenue crisis, the bill sets a one-year moratorium on implementation of the second phase of an improved teacher flexible benefit allowance. Signed into law by the governor.

✦ **HB 1153 grants incentives for voluntary school consolidation and annexation.** The bill reactivates the Oklahoma School Voluntary Consolidation and Annexation Act established more than a decade ago to provide financial incentives to school districts electing consolidation or annexation after July 1, 2003. Revenue for the measure depends on voter approval of the Education Lottery in a statewide vote in November of 2004. Signed by the governor.

Don't Judge a Bill by its Title

By Heath Merchen
OEA Associate General Counsel

Most are aware that OEA works tirelessly in the state legislature both to enact statutes that benefit public education and to stop legislation that poses a threat to teachers and students. This job is made extremely difficult by one universal truth that pervades modern politics: few people, including legislators, ever actually read or fully understand proposed legislation before endorsing it. Sadly, many legislators, lobbyists, school groups and even other unions, simply take a bill's title at face value and determine whether or not to support the bill based on its heading alone.

At OEA, however, we actually do read every piece of legislation that comes down the pike, and more often than not we find that the title directly contradicts the substance of the legislation. A prime example of this phenomenon occurred over the last few months in a bill misnamed the "Educator Protection Act," which was later retitled the "School Protection Act." Reading the title together with the description provided by the bill's sponsors would lead most to believe that the bill would protect teachers from liability; however, the text of the original bill did exactly the opposite.

Specifically, the bill required that courts apportion liability between a school district and a teacher for acts the teacher committed "within the scope of employment." Why is this a problem? Well, under the current law, (called the Governmental Tort Claims Act), teachers cannot be held liable for *any* action that occurs within the scope of employment, i.e. action they take at the direction of their supervisor or in the reasonable exercise of their duties.

Let me emphasize: No individual liability whatsoever can be imposed

under current Oklahoma law for teacher actions within the scope of employment. Conversely, the first version of the "School Protection Act" would require courts to apportion liability between the School District and the teacher. In short, where teachers could not be held liable at all before, under the proposed legislation, courts could impose up to 100 percent of the liability on the teacher individually. Obviously, we saw this as a major concern.

And the problems didn't end there. Under current law, Districts and their insurance carriers are required to in-

HB 346 – at one time called the "Educator Protection Act" – would have accomplished just the opposite. Where teachers could not be held liable at all before, under the proposed legislation, courts could impose up to 100 percent of the liability on the teacher individually.

demnify teachers for costs incurred in defending against suits brought for actions that occurred within the scope of employment. Under the original "School Protection Act," however, a teacher would be individually liable for whatever percentage the court assigned. This means neither the District nor the District's insurance companies would defend or indemnify the teacher.

Of course, the bill's sponsors conveniently failed to mention the above provisions in their press releases. After OEA battled with them for weeks, they grudgingly removed portions of the above language. However, the most offensive provisions remained, specifically stating that teachers were liable for actions occurring within the scope of their employment in certain vaguely defined circumstances. Here again, existing law would protect the teachers completely for actions done

in furtherance of their duties, regardless of the circumstances. The new bill still created new liabilities for teachers (and all other school employees), which were simply not acceptable. Additionally, the bill did nothing to limit suits where the teacher's conduct allegedly occurred *outside* the scope of employment, which is where a teacher's real potential liability lies. Hence, we opposed the legislation.

The above explanation is fairly cursory and it would take a great deal more room than what is allotted in this article to detail the long-term detri-

mental impact of the bill. But therein lies the problem. Few organizations or individuals take the time to understand the complexities of this type of legislation or its long-term impact. All too often people base their opinions on short, immediate-gratification-style one liners, rather than the in-depth legal analysis necessary to understand complex legislation.

The above act would have increased liability for teachers,

OECU Ready To "Bridge" Pay Gaps

School will start much later this fall for many schools, some not beginning until after Labor Day. That may mean a whole month without a paycheck for many education employees.

The Oklahoma Educators' Credit Union (OECU) has a unique program ready to combat the problem. OECU members will be able to ap-



Heath Merchen
Associate General Counsel

principals and even superintendents. Despite this fact, we were inundated with calls from other teacher groups, school board associations, principals, and superintendents who came out in support of the bill and questioned why we opposed it. Here again, no one that we spoke with understood the impact of the above provisions and most had never read beyond the bill's title, instead simply gaining their information from newspaper clippings. Fortunately, with a great deal of work on behalf of OEA staff and the assistance of several legislators, the bill did not pass.

The truth is that we do actually read beyond a bill's title and we look out for teachers' interests even when everyone else is heading in the opposite direction. To use my mother's vernacular, "If every other teacher and administrator group were to jump off a cliff, would OEA follow?" That is exactly what has happened with the "School Protection Act," and the answer is a resounding "No!"

ply for a "Bridge Loan" that will help take the burden off that unusual gap in pay periods.

The program asks for no payments for 90 days with up to 36 months to repay and a 6.99 APR (annual percentage rate).

For more information, call 722-2234 in central Oklahoma, or 800/324-8259 statewide.

SDE Working To Determine Definition of “Highly Qualified”

By Bruce Treadaway

As most of the school employees in Oklahoma know by now, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) will begin to have an effect on state schools very soon, if it hasn't already. While most school employees are aware of the ESEA, many may not know what the effect will be and especially how it will affect them personally.

By 2004-05, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that have failed to make progress ensuring all their teachers are “highly qualified” must develop an improvement plan. Teachers of core academics must be highly qualified by the end of the '05-06 school year.

Paraprofessionals hired on or after January 8, 2002, and working in Title I schools, must meet paraprofessional requirements of ESEA. Title I paraprofessionals hired before that date

have until January 8, 2006, to become highly qualified.

Here's what is happening in Oklahoma with joint efforts by the Oklahoma State Department of Edu-

cation and the Oklahoma Education Association:

➤ State Superintendent of Schools Sandy Garrett and the OEA are committed to finding a way for teachers

have not been received, federal interpretation doesn't recognize a special education major as highly qualified unless the teacher passes a test in each core content area he or she teaches. NEA is working at the national level for a special education major to be recognized. At the state level, the OEA has suggested that special education and core subject teachers be connected while the law is being amended at the national level.

The highly qualified definition in ESEA requires all teachers to have a degree in each academic subject they teach or to pass a subject matter test. This definition fails to recognize the multiple teaching assignments of thousands of special educators.

The OEA and the NEA insist that the U.S. Senate must “fix” this definition. OEA and the NEA believe teachers licensed under state law as special educators should be deemed “highly qualified.”

➤ In order for paraprofessionals to be considered highly qualified under ESEA, they must meet one of the following requirements:

- Earn an associate's degree,
- Complete 2 years of college, or
- Pass the Oklahoma General Education test.

As members of the NEA-OEA, rest assured that your professional Associations are actively entering in the debate that surrounds this legislation and are constantly representing their members in areas that have such dramatic effects on their lives and careers. To keep abreast of the latest developments surrounding ESEA, visit www.okea.org or contact Larry Miller, OEA teaching and learning specialist, at lmiller@okea.org, 800/522-8091, or 528-7785 (in central Oklahoma).



ESEA guidelines require that all teachers and paraprofessionals must be “highly qualified” by 2005-06. By Sept. 1, the State Department of Education will build a HOUSSE (highly objective uniform statewide standard of evaluation), which will outline what Oklahoma teachers must do to become highly qualified.

Federal Tax Cut Includes \$20 Billion For State Bailout

The National Education Association has had state fiscal relief on its radar screen for months. In May, an opportunity came to negotiate its inclusion as part of the Bush administration's \$350 billion tax cut.

Under the accord, an agreement was struck for the federal government to send \$20 billion in fiscal relief to the states.

It comes none too soon. Across the nation, Oklahoma and other states are scrambling to solve huge budget shortfalls. Oklahoma's shortfall is \$678 million. Public education – and educators – have suffered a large percentage of those cuts.

Oklahoma's share of the states'

fiscal relief will be \$219.3 million. About half of that must go toward Medicaid programs. That leaves a little over \$100 million for other purposes.

Elected legislators and the Governor have discussed various uses for the money. One idea gaining favor is to replenish Oklahoma's depleted Rainy Day Fund. No decisions have been made, however.

“This federal aid is significant, but much more is needed,” said Bruce Hunt, associate executive director of the Oklahoma Education Association's legislative and political organizing center. “Education still is not the high priority it must be.”

who began teaching prior to 1982 not to have to take a competency test. The SDE has the responsibility under the law to determine “highly qualified.” Oklahoma is going to build a HOUSSE (highly objective uniform statewide standard of evaluation) for those who have not taken a content area test, and the timeline for building that HOUSSE has been extended to September 1, 2003.

➤ LEAs are required to send parents notice if their child's teacher is not highly qualified beginning with the 2003-04 school year. OEA and the SDE are looking at specific requirements for continuing professional development and employee evaluation as the basis for building Oklahoma's HOUSSE.

➤ Highly qualified special education teachers present a special challenge. Although final regulations

Only Excitement, Never Stress, Could Keep Crowder Up Nights

Continued From Page 1

structure.

“I was so impressed with the training and the bargaining committee,” said Crowder. “I particularly admired the president-elect, Barbara Engle.”

That admiration went both ways, because when Engle’s husband was transferred she and Odom convinced Crowder that she should take over the position. Crowder thought she had a year to prepare for the presidency, but after one month, the president resigned due to health issues, so in four short years she became the MACT president and she’s never looked back.

In 1990, she ran for the OEA board seat in her zone and beat the incumbent. She served in that position for six years. During her last year as a board member, she was encouraged by her peers to continue in state leadership.

“Vicki Vaughan (former Putnam City ACT president and OKC-B director) and I discussed the possibilities of my running for vice president or president at a Western Regional

Conference,” said Crowder. “I thought I should run for vice president first, but when none of the other candidates had any more statewide experience than I did, I decided to go for the presidency.”

Needless to say, her campaign was successful and she was elected OEA President in 1997.

It didn’t take long for the responsibility of the position to become clear to her. On her first day in office, OEA staff discussed possible questions and answers for an upcoming interview, but the reporter asked none of the questions she had been prepared to answer.

“It hit me then that I had been elected to represent teachers and I can listen to all the advice in the world, but in the end I have to rely on the fact that I was a teacher for 19 years and use that to base my answers,” said Crowder. “I’ve tried to remember that in every situation I find myself.”

According to Crowder, that fact has kept her up at night.

“It was never stress that kept me

from sleeping,” said Crowder. “What kept me awake was the excitement of being the voice of OEA, finding solutions and then advocating for a positive change.”

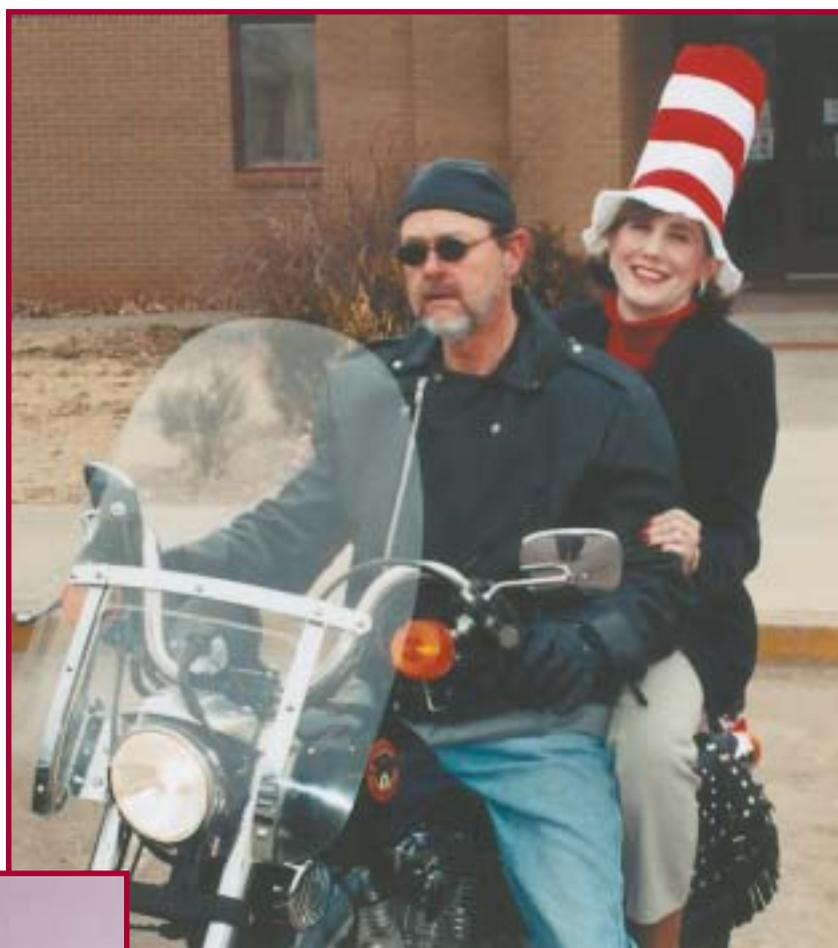
That enthusiasm is the main impetus for her campaign for NEA Executive Committee.

“The challenges we’ve faced in Oklahoma have prepared me for those same challenges at a national

level,” said Crowder. “I believe I can continue to advocate for those issues that school employees face nationwide.”

There have been many highlights during her presidency, but Crowder hopes that people will remember her as being the person they elected, a teacher who knows about them and their wants and needs.

“I want people to believe that my every moment as president was to represent the school employees of Oklahoma and that I did the best I could.”



During her two, three-year terms as president of the OEA, Carolyn Crowder became a major force on the national level, helped give education a stronger presence in the legislature by helping establish the Oklahoma Education Coalition and even managed to have some fun along the way. At left, she visits with then-NEA president Bob Chase prior to his keynote address at the OEA Awards Banquet in 1999; below, she talks with Bob Mooneyham, former executive director of the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, during a Coalition meeting; and above, Carolyn rides into a Read Across America assembly in Alva.



OEA Budget Receives Unanimous Approval

A fond farewell to some beloved leaders, writing postcards to elected leaders and debate on a variety of issues highlighted the 2003 Delegate Assembly.

The two-day meeting in late April drew 324 voting delegates and 14 guests to Oklahoma City from around the state.

It was the last DA for President Carolyn Crowder, NEA Director Stephen Smallwood and a number of board members. Crowder was surprised with a video retrospective of her six-year tenure, including a look back at not only her changing hairstyles, but those of Executive Director David DuVall (with and without a mustache) and Vice President Roy Bishop (no change at all, actually). She also received gifts and best wishes from various zones and her former and future local, the Mustang ACT, where she will be a member next year.

Attending their last DAs as directors were Roma Clark (Oklahoma City-A), Becki Munholland (SW-D), Greer Nichols (Tulsa Metro-E), Denise Rhodes (NE-A), Paula Squires (SW-A) and Janice Stotts (SE-A). Also leaving are Jane Mershon, Retired Teachers at-large; Nela Foster, Student OEA; and both ESP at-large directors, Pat Miller of Noble and Melissa Lee of El Reno.

The delegates participated in two postcard writing activities. One message was sent to Oklahoma's congressional delegation, encouraging them to repeal the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision (see page 3). Also, postcards were sent to state representatives and senators encouraging them to properly fund education.

After a fair amount of discussion about OEA's proposed 2003-04 budget, the delegates unanimously approved its adoption. OEA dues will

remain the same for 2003-04 as they were for 2002-03.

One of the biggest changes in the budget was removing the dedicated fund for an advertising campaign. Even with the cutback, there will be television ads this fall, as the OEA will benefit from a campaign developed as part of a 10-state consortium and produced by the National Education Association. The media buy will focus on cable advertising to stretch the ad dollars further.

Following is a listing of new business items that were passed by the delegates:

New Business Item #1

That the 2003 OEA Delegate Assembly authorize the Legislative Committee and the OEA Legal and Corporate Services Committee to jointly investigate the issue of adequate and equitable school funding and jointly develop a long-term legislative, initiative and litigation strategy.

New Business Item #2

That the OEA Delegate Assembly support the effort to repeal the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision.

New Business Item #3

That the 2003 OEA Delegate Assembly encourage our United States Senators and Representatives to provide at least \$50 billion to assist states in the financial crisis facing them. OEA will work with the National Education Association in achieving this goal.

New Business Item #4

That the 2006 OEA Convention be held in Tulsa.

New Business Item #5

That the OEA Communications Center produce a yearly ESP membership brochure to be included in membership materials automatically.

New Business Item #6

The OEA continue working with the Oklahoma State Department of Education to modify the Title One



Local representatives to the 2003 Delegate Assembly write postcards to elected officials, asking them to properly fund education.

teaching assistant ESEA test using the states of Wisconsin and Alabama as models for testing procedures.

New Business Item #7

That the OEA Board of Directors investigate the feasibility of returning Summer Leadership Academy to Shangri-La Resort.

New Business Item #8

That the OEA President refer to the IPD Committee as one of its charges to examine the effects of mandated statewide standardized testing and provide recommendations for time-sensitive reform. Such committee should consider:

- The use of such test data including scores for disaggregated group, student, teacher and school evaluations,
- The funding for such tests, and
- The scheduling of testing in the academic year.

New Business Item #10

Referred to the appropriate committee to study that OEA support removal of the Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System two-tier benefits calculation method.

New Business Item #11

That the OEA President appoint an Ad Hoc Committee on teacher retirement. The charge of the committee should include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- investigating the Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System salary cap,
- informing members of any inequities in OTRS benefits,
- making recommendations to the Legislative Committee concerning findings, and
- investigating legal avenues available for the remedy of any inequities that affect our members.

enues available for the remedy of any inequities that affect our members.

Ask Congress to Repeal the WEP and GPO

Continued from Page 3
have signed onto the effort.

You can get involved by contacting your Congressman and the House and Senate Leadership, and encourage them to repeal the WEP and GPO. Visit the NEA Web site at www.nea.org/lac/socsec for more information on the two laws, more personal stories of people affected by the provisions and to contact your congressmen.

Barbara Smith and Stephen Smallwood, who recently ended his second term as one of Oklahoma's NEA Directors, conduct workshops on the WEP and GPO around the state. They are willing to make a presentation to your faculty next fall.

To schedule them, contact Barbara at bssmith@onenet.net or 918/542-4306.

Dispute Resolution Ruling Favors Crutchos Teachers

By Doug Folks

The Crutchos School District has found out the hard way that even during tough economic times, a school district must follow state law and may not reduce teacher compensation from the previous year.

After the district refused to accept a fact finding report at impasse and tried to impose a reduced compensation schedule, a Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) recently found the Crutchos School Board was guilty of bad faith bargaining. The board and Superintendent Kermit Jones were assisted during the hearing by Michael Barlow of Barlow and Associates and an attorney from the Center for Education Law.

"I'm really proud that the teachers of Crutchos were willing to stand up for what is right," said Brandon Webb, OEA associate general counsel who represented CACT in the dispute. "It is a terrific victory for these teachers, as well as all teachers around the state."

With OEA Advocacy Specialist David Williams assisting, the CACT began bargaining with the board last summer. The two sides reached impasse in December on four issues. The board wanted to:

- Freeze the salary schedule, offering no step movement for 2002-03,
- Eliminate a \$400 holiday stipend the teachers had successfully bargained in '01-02,

- Eliminate a \$2,800 increment for experienced teachers that dated back to 1989-90, and

- Eliminate the district-paid portion of Teachers' Retirement Contribution.

CACT accepted the fact finding committee's report when it was issued in mid-January. The report stated that the district could not afford to give step raises or the \$400 holiday stipend and that it was not obligated by law to do so. But the report did find in favor of CACT when it said the \$2,800 experience increment and the TRS contribution were part of the teachers' total compensation package and therefore could not be eliminated according to state law.

House Bill 1049, which was the

general appropriations bill regarding school funding for 1989-90, specified a certain amount of state aid money each district had to use for salary and/or fringe benefit increases for certified and support personnel. Most schools added this money to their district certified compensation schedules; but in Crutchos it was paid as a \$2,800 experience increment to teachers as long as they continued to teach in Crutchos Schools. Only five teachers still qualify to receive the stipend.

The district, as per the negotiated agreement, pays the teachers' portion of teacher retirement (7 percent of total compensation) as part of their total compensation. The district sought to cease paying any portion of the TRS benefit.

"Throughout the course of negotiations, the District had insisted on lowering teachers' salary and fringe benefits," Webb said.

It was repeatedly expressed to the district that Section 29 of the 2002-03 State Appropriations Bill prohibits districts from paying teachers less in salary and benefits than it did in the previous year. The Crutchos Board argued that such language was not codified in law. But the DRC said current legislation served the same purpose. (That language was codified during the 2003 session, and will not have to be negotiated with future legislatures.)

In his ruling, Attorney Michael Scott Fern said, "Having so found, it is the unanimous determination of the members of the Dispute Resolution Committee that the School Board has acted in bad faith in its collective bargaining negotiations in this matter."

The ruling is significant because it protects the rights of employees and does not allow school districts to unilaterally change the rules.

OCEA Poll: Public Believes Schools' Lack of Financial Support is Serious

By Jeff Savage

Oklahomans believe their local schools are above average and that their children are receiving a better education today than was available in the past. They also believe the lack of financial support for public education is a serious problem and that teacher pay should be higher.

Those opinions come from a recent statewide survey conducted by the Oklahoma Commission on Educational Administration (OCEA). The annual poll, conducted by Newton Marketing & Research, seeks to provide up-to-date data regarding public opinion about public education.

More than half of the respondents 56 percent -- gave their local schools an overall grade of "B" or higher, a grade given in past surveys. Fifty-one percent said children today are receiving a better education than they have in the past.

How serious a problem would you say these issues are to the public schools in your community?

Issue	% responding "very" or "fairly serious"
1. Lack of financial support	77%
2. Adequate teacher pay	73%
3. Ability to get good teachers	58%
4. School discipline	58%
5. Drug usage	57%
6. Students bullying others	51%

May 7, 2003 OCEA Oklahoma Education Poll 2002 11

One of the public's overwhelming concerns, according to the survey, is the lack of financial support. When respondents were asked to rate a specific list of issues and grade how serious they perceive the problem in public schools, the following issues were graded either very or fairly serious:

- ☉ Lack of financial support – 77 percent
- ☉ Adequate teacher pay – 73 percent
- ☉ Ability to get good teachers – 58 percent

- ☉ School discipline – 58 percent

- ☉ Drug usage – 57 percent

- ☉ Students bullying others – 51 percent

Clearly, lack of financial support of schools and adequate teacher pay are the

major issues of concern among the public. When linking quality of education with the amount of money spent, 48 percent believe these two items are related. That is four percentage points higher than the 2001 survey.

An overwhelming majority of citizens would favor an increase in state funding for certain common education items including raising teacher pay to meet the regional average

More details of what Oklahomans are thinking regarding education can be found at: www.okea.org/PPt/OCEAsurvey.ppt.

A monthly column of member opinion.

Later Start Doesn't Bring Expected Savings

*By Lorie Hill
Tulsa Public Schools*

No! As having experienced starting school this year after Labor Day, several things have come up which were not thought through or even considered.

The district's rationale was that money would be saved on utility bills. In the end, this decision proved to be invalid. Only if the school calendar were shortened, would this theory prove true or worthwhile.

As for the old, "we always started school after Labor Day," things have changed since way back when. Teachers are different. Students, parents, lifestyles, family scheduling and activities are different. Starting school



Lorie Hill

after Labor Day was to help those who farmed and needed the extra help from their children.

I saw a noticeable change in student behavior this year. When school began, there was the usual great ex-

citement, which set the tone to be carried throughout the school year. (But) students did not have a "calming" time. When school begins in late August, students have time to adjust to their new routines. When students returned from Labor Day weekend, they appeared calmer, adjusted and ready for learning.

If you start later, then you should have a later Spring Break. Behaviors change when Spring time arrives. We had 11 weeks of school to complete after Spring Break this year. More time had to be devoted in dealing with inappropriate social behaviors and maintaining student interest.

Beginning school after Labor Day

has interfered with work schedules for many teachers who have summer and part-time jobs, not to mention the effect on the businesses.

Personally, starting after Labor Day will cost me an extra \$600 in child care. My son and daughter both attend different schools and will be out in May. I, on the other-hand, will continue teaching until June 9. They will be missing out on Bible School and some library programs because I will be unable to take them.

Starting school later to save money has not had the savings many expected. Schools need to take patrons and staff into consideration in planning school calendars that affect everyone.

Start School After Labor Day? Bring It On

*By David Hollar
Coyle High School*

You want to start school when? How late? Won't that violate Title IX? Will it meet PASS? Is it up to my great expectation and will it be subject to site management?

The first classroom that I could call my own originally had a high ceiling and tall windows. These windows had sections that could be opened high and low to allow air circulation through convection. The office had an air conditioner for the heat. I had a fresh breeze off the street and across the green grass. Starting school in September made good sense at the time.

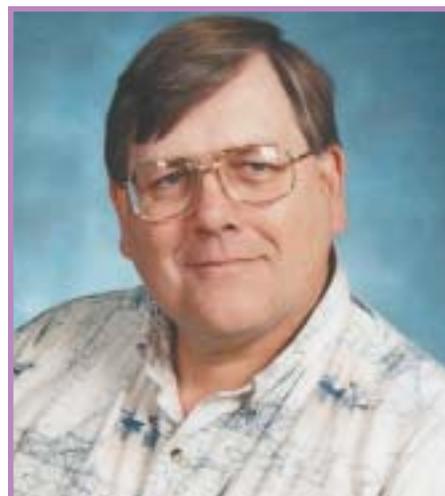
The school year has appeared in many incarnations. The driving force behind this variety has ranged across a spectrum including heat, harvest of broomcorn and wheat, deer or dove season, ski trips and the start of sum-

mer school. Now we add the need to save money.

During the last decade, I have started school as early as August 7 and dismissed May 15. I have experienced life in districts that started early and late depending on your perspective. I see a clear need to start the school year after Labor Day.

By starting our year after Labor Day, my classroom air conditioning system will have to run less. This translates into money that can be used to fix the roof leak in the counselor's office. Elementary students will not have to spend as many days riding a hot bus home.

By starting after Labor Day, the first nine weeks ends around Halloween. The semester will end in the third week of January. This means that I have the holiday break to finalize plans to complete the semester



David Hollar

and avoid mixing semester tests with elves and reindeer.

The end of the third nine weeks will shift to later in March and reduce the conflict that sometimes develops

with the state basketball competition. The end of the year is late in May and the weather is usually much more temperate during the day.

Students and staff both have the opportunity to gradually adjust to warmer temperatures in the classroom as opposed to the sudden smothering heat that is experienced for an equal number of days in August. If I have just completed the process of inventory and summer check out, I better appreciate my wedding anniversary (May 31).

Start school after Labor Day?
Bring it on.

Next Issue's Question:

"Is legal protection the only reason to join OEA?"

Our next issue is the Benefits of Membership issue in August. In the spirit of that theme, tell us why you are a member. 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 July 9.

Love Of Storytelling Takes El Reno Librarian to the Publishing World

By Patti Razien

Una Belle Townsend has always had a love for storytelling. In addition to using books students can find in her library, she has also been known to tell a tall tale or two from a notebook of real life adventures.

It was one of those unpublished stories – the true story of Grady the cow and her famous accident – that has placed Townsend in the spotlight and given the publishing world a new star.

For years, Townsend has told the much-loved story of Yukon's most famous cow. In 1949, Bill and Alyne Mach's cow, Grady, jumped into a silo after receiving an injection from Dr. Crump, a veterinarian. Once in the silo, Grady couldn't get out since the doorway was above her. Letters from every state and five foreign countries poured in to the Machs with suggestions on how to save the cow from the silo. Finally, a man from Colorado came up with the solution to sedate her, grease her up and slide her up a ramp.

Townsend's students loved the story and pleaded each year for her to get out her "Grady notebook" and read to them. It was one day after such a reading that Townsend de-

cidated she would write a book detailing the actual events that had unfolded during the days that Grady had been stuck in the silo and her eventual rescue. After interviewing people who had witnessed the incident, she put together a unique tale entitled *Grady's in the Silo*. It's full of charm and will delight anyone who reads it.

After first being rejected by a New York publishing firm, Townsend persisted and submitted her story to Pelican Publishing Company in Gretna, La. With minor revisions, her book was accepted and printed in February, almost exactly 54 years after Grady's unfortunate accident.

"I have had a love of writing since I was a young girl," said Townsend, a 21-year career teacher now working as the librarian at Riverside Elementary in El Reno. "My teachers (in Marshall, Texas) encouraged me to write plays, stories and poetry."

Her professors at East Texas Baptist College continued to impress upon her the importance of writing by insisting that every student write a book. She continued writing after college, and eventually won several state contests.

Townsend and her book have received some high-profile media



El Reno's Una Belle Townsend has turned the true-life story of Grady the Cow into a book, and it's receiving great media attention.

coverage. She was featured on the PBS program "SUNUP," and Galen Culver of Oklahoma City's NBC affiliate, KFOR Channel 4, featured her on a segment of "Is This a Great State, or What?" Townsend continues to make book signing appearances at bookstores around the surrounding

states.

The success has inspired her.

"I have plans to write more stories," Townsend said. "This has been a lot of fun."

If the success of *Grady's in the Silo* is any indication of what's to come . . . look out Beverly Cleary.

An Invitation

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Johnson, Barnes Win Board Seats in Runoffs

Mustang's Greg Johnson and Union's Sherrie Barnes have earned seats on the OEA Board of Directors after winning runoffs for NEA Director and Education Support Professional At-Large positions, respectively.



Greg Johnson

Johnson, who has taught music for 19 years, defeated Tulsa CTA's Karen Dawson for Oklahoma's junior NEA Director spot. Barnes won the ESP seat over Henryetta's Vernon Moore.

"I'm terribly excited to be serving as an NEA Director," Johnson said. "It's a tremendous honor to be elected by my peers. I'm a little overwhelmed by all this, and I have

the warmest regards for all of my opponents for this position. They are all wonderful people."

The choir director at Mustang High School for the last 15 years (after four years in Henryetta), Johnson has a strong background in local Association leadership. He has been president or president-elect for Mustang ACT (MACT) over the last eight years, and has served as the local's lead negotiator for seven years.

Johnson has a bachelor's from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, and a master's in music education from Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

His wife, Diane, is the music teacher at Mustang Trails Elementary and is treasurer for MACT. They have two boys. Jordan will be a freshman next year in Mustang, and Cam-

eron will be a sixth grader.

Sherrie Barnes is relatively new to leadership, but comes with a great deal of energy and drive for support professional issues.



Sherrie Barnes

A native of Tulsa, she wanted to become a secondary mathematics teacher, but she fell in love with computers and changed her major.

After a six-year stint at University Center in Tulsa, Barnes went to work in the Technology Department at Union Public Schools in 1995. Today, she is the Technology Help Desk Specialist in the I.T. Department, answering help calls, providing software support and supporting personnel training.

Her work with the Union Support Personnel Association (USPA) started in 2002. Right after joining, she was appointed to the Executive Committee. Three months later, she was appointed interim secretary when the vice president took over the presidency and the secretary moved up to vice president.

Barnes was selected last October to represent Oklahoma at the NEA-ESP Emerging Leaders Training at the NEA-ESP Conference in Orlando. Only two ESP members were picked from each state to attend.

"They taught us to speak from our hearts. Speak the truth and people will follow," Barnes said of her experience in Orlando. "The support from my local Association and other association members was wonderful. I can't wait to get started."



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Almost everyone knows someone who has experienced a critical illness of some sort. Fortunately, with the advances in medicine, most individuals who have experienced a critical illness survive the medical event – but it is very expensive. Regular health insurance does not begin to cover all the expenses.

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This Critical Illness Program provides NEA members and their

families with valuable benefits to help pay for expenses such as:

- Home health care needs,
- Copays and deductibles,
- Travel and lodging for family members,
- Experimental treatments, and
- Lost income of yourself, spouse or caregivers

The NEA MemberCare Critical Illness Benefit can protect your whole family, even your parents, from expenses resulting from a diagnosis of:

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- Cancer,
- Paralysis,
- Multiple sclerosis,
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- Renal failure

For more detailed information regarding coverage and rates call 800/637-4636.

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Marathon Oil's Support of PC Schools Honored

By Bruce Treadaway

When one reads the letters of recommendation from the different elementary schools and individuals in the Putnam City School district, it is easy to see why the Marathon Oil Corporation is the 2003 recipient of the Tuskahoma Brown Miller Award.

The award was presented in late-April at the OEA Awards Banquet.

The first criterion is that Marathon Oil has made "a significant contribution of time, money or material for the advancement of education."

In the words of Mickey Wilson, principal of Tulakes Elementary School, "Marathon has done an exemplary job in supporting us through tutors, hosting the school chorus, helping at special events and by providing grants for instructional materials and equipment."

The second criterion is that Mara-

thon has a "commitment to equal education opportunity and develops, initiates or participates in educational improvement."

John Lunn, Lake Park principal, says, "Another need ... was in the area of an outdoor classroom. Marathon provided expertise in helping us to plan this hands-on learning environ-

Professional Development and a Vacation, too

Your trip to OEA's annual Convention doesn't have to be just one day of great professional development. The event can serve as a springboard for a fabulous four-day vacation for your entire family.

Convention is Thursday, October 16 at the Tulsa Convention Center, but you may want to stay longer.

Tulsa and northeast Oklahoma offer a world of fun. In the Tulsa area,

they also provided assistance when the entire school community volunteered to work at the school."

The fourth criterion is that Marathon "recognizes that schools operate in a changing social order, and that they must deal effectively with all groups."

Kimi Barnes, Tulakes music spe-

cialist, says, "The greatest impact ... was when they gave the students a chance to tour their building. This is a valuable opportunity to show the students ... the possibilities of working in a corporate environment. It is a window of opportunity for the students to see what the corporate world is like and encourage their dreams."

there's the new Oklahoma Aquarium in Jenks, Tulsa's River Parks and world-renowned museums like the Philbrook Museum of Art, the Gilcrease Museum and the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame. Shangri-La Resort on Grand Lake and the Will Rogers Memorial Museum in Claremore are short drives from Tulsa. The kids may want to visit The All Star Sports Complex, Hot Wheels Skate Center

or Celebration Station in Tulsa.

Plan to take part in the professional development workshops on Oct. 16, and bring your family for a great weekend in northeast Oklahoma. For more information on Tulsa and northeast Oklahoma, visit www.tourism.state.ok.us. Details of Convention will appear on the OEA Web site by September, and in the October issue of *The Education Focus*.

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Tulsa's Nancy Christy Makes Television History

By Marty Bull

American television history was made when Tulsa CTA member Nancy Christy, a 49-year-old single mother and teacher at Carver Middle School, became the first woman and the first teacher in America to win \$1 million on a TV quiz show.

After auditioning for "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire" last August, Christy flew to New York to tape "Millionaire."

"My students and family encouraged me to try out," said Christy. "I've got a good head for facts and figures and it finally paid off." Christy came

home a winner but was not allowed to disclose the exact dollar figure until the show aired during May Sweeps. She then shared the moment with students and friends in the school auditorium.

Like most contestants, Christy used her lifelines to get to the big money but the one-million-dollar question posed no problem for her.

"This is a life-changer! As a teacher it would take me nearly 40 years to earn this much money," Christy said.

Christy has received both local and national media attention as the first



Christy's students predicted how much money she had won and how she could spend it. Both were displayed on a bulletin board outside her classroom.

woman and first teacher to win a \$1 million prize. She was featured in *People* magazine, numerous newspapers, interviewed on radio and television stations in Oklahoma and across the county, and will be featured in the October issue of *NEA Today*.

Although she hopes to realize a dream by working on an archaeological dig some day, she's not giving up her day job.

"I'll definitely keep teaching because I love my job and my students. Now, I'll just be doing it in a much cuter car!"

Nancy's Million Dollar Question

Do you know the answer to the question that won Nancy Christy \$1 million?

Who did artist Grant Wood use as the model for the farmer in his classic painting 'American Gothic'?

- A) Traveling salesman
- B) Local sheriff
- C) His dentist
- D) His butcher