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# HIGHMARKS

SUMMER 2007

Recognizing and encouraging academic excellence in Oklahoma's public schools.



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## Banquet Honorees Receive Surprise, Hear Address by Ruth Simmons

"Roots and Wings" was the theme of the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence 21st annual Academic Awards Banquet, which featured a keynote address by Brown University President Ruth Simmons and a surprise announcement for this year's Academic All-State and Medal for Excellence winners.

The gala celebration, held May 19 in Oklahoma City, honored three outstanding Oklahoma teachers, a superintendent and an alternative education program, along with 100 of the state's top public high school seniors.

Foundation Chairman David Boren drew enthusiastic applause when he made a surprise announcement that scholarships for this year's Academic All-Staters were increased from \$1,500 to \$2,000 and that cash awards for Medal for Excellence winners were raised from \$7,500 to \$10,000 each. The foundation recently met its goal of raising \$5 million for its academic awards endowment fund, providing the opportunity to increase cash awards and match a portion of the funds provided by All-State Scholarship Partners.

Another highlight of the evening was Simmons' keynote address. The first African American and first woman to serve as president of an Ivy League institution, Simmons reflected on the factors that helped lead her – the youngest of 12 children – from

a sharecropper's shack in east Texas to the presidency of an Ivy League university.

"As impoverished as my neighborhood was when I was growing up, those who attended schools in that neighborhood point proudly to them as central to becoming the successful people they are today," she said. "My neighborhood school did what we want schools to do today – to rescue individual children and families in need by exemplifying care and concern for them, by

providing opportunities that families often cannot provide, by instilling pride in their membership in the community and by being a safe place to focus on intellectual development ..."

Simmons also credited her teachers with helping her see that outside the safe cocoon of her neighborhood was a world of possibility and cultural change.

Speaking to the banquet's theme, "Roots and Wings," Simmons told the Academic All-Staters to recall the roots which link them to their community and remember those who have made their success possible. "You achieve because of a long history of devoted effort by reformers, public figures, family and community members," she concluded. "As you soar, make an effort to extend the privilege of learning to the least of our citizens. Support excellence in all of our schools for all of our children."

A transcript of Simmons' speech and profiles of this year's honorees can be seen online at [www.ofe.org](http://www.ofe.org).



*Brown University President Ruth Simmons delivers the banquet's keynote address.*

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## From the President



Serving this past year as president of the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence has given me the opportunity to see up close how our programs are truly making a difference in the lives of Oklahoma students and teachers.

Last October, I had the honor of helping present our inaugural Outstanding Program Awards for Local Education Foundations to four recipients at the Fall Forum. The award-winning programs were truly innovative and have provided inspiration and ideas for other foundations to emulate.

In the past year, our new David and Molly Boren Mentoring Initiative has promoted youth mentoring opportunities through a statewide publicity campaign, including many television spots. We also provided valuable training by bringing national mentoring expert Susan Weinberger to our Fall Forum and hosting a spring workshop on "How to Start a Mentoring Program."

We celebrated our 15th year of sending Oklahoma teachers to the Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute by hosting a reunion and workshop for teacher institute alumni, complete with a visit from "George Washington" and other special Williamsburg guests. The reunion also honored the many contributions of our late trustee Edward C. Joullian III, founder and benefactor of our Williamsburg scholarship programs.

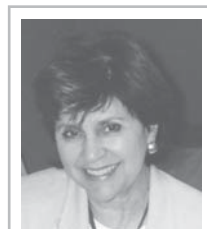
We have received e-mails and postcards from dozens of Oklahoma teachers who received Teacher Scholarships for Professional Development to further their training and from Oklahoma-Fund for Teachers recipients who were able to explore destinations around the world – all for the ultimate purpose of bringing a world of knowledge and new experiences to their students.

What a thrill it was to see the faces of our award-winning students and educators at this year's Academic Awards Banquet when David Boren announced that Academic All-State Scholarships were being increased from \$1,500 to \$2,000 and Medal for Excellence Awards were boosted from \$7,500 to \$10,000. I am grateful to all our academic awards endowment supporters who helped us meet this important milestone in our foundation's history.

As I look back on the year, I am thankful to serve an organization that is doing so much to encourage and support Oklahoma teachers and students. I appreciate the generosity and loyalty of all our donors and volunteers. When we support quality public education, we are all winners.

— Ken Ferguson

## From the Executive Director



Gov. Brad Henry will declare 2008 as the Year of Creativity in Oklahoma. Leading up to his announcement, the team spearheading the Creativity Project has been holding numerous sessions to define and organize the yearlong celebration. How creative Oklahoma's education system is or becomes will be a major part of the success of the project.

Many Oklahoma educational programs, such as A+ Schools, are already strongly promoting the value of creativity to the process of learning. It is inspiring to us at the foundation to participate in programs that encourage ingenuity and inventiveness. Our Oklahoma Fund for Teachers is such a program. The opportunity for teachers to receive grants for summertime self-designed learning activities—anywhere in the world—has brought forth remarkable applications.

One of my favorites was a team of teachers from Mayo Demonstration School in Tulsa who received a grant last summer to travel to Italy to study the art and inventions of Michelangelo, Leonardo and Galileo. Their goal was to create a yearlong curriculum for their classes that tied in to their upcoming school theme: Imagination. Promoting Albert Einstein's quote, "Imagination is more important than knowledge," the teachers ended their year with a school-wide "Invention Convention." Included in the displays were three-dimensional student replications of several of Leonardo's inventions the teachers had viewed in Italy.

The more imaginative we at the foundation can be with the presentation of our programs, the better they will be received. The committee for the Fall Forum, to be held Oct. 23, is trying to "think outside the box." They have created a new format, with a wider variety of topics and increased number of sessions—all for the purpose of helping local education foundations in the work they do for their local schools.

None of our programs could happen without our wonderful volunteers or without our loyal donors. Your commitment to the Foundation for Excellence makes all the difference in the quality of programs we are able to bring to Oklahoma's teachers and students. As always, we look forward to saying "thank you" to our trustees and special guests at the Annual Meeting on Sept. 5. We hope to see you there.

— Emily Stratton

# OFE NEWS BRIEFS

### All-State, Medal for Excellence Nominations Open in September

Nomination forms for 2008 Academic All-State and Medal for Excellence Awards will be available on the foundation Web site at [www.ofe.org](http://www.ofe.org) beginning Sept. 24. Winners will be honored at the foundation's Academic Awards Banquet on May 17 in Tulsa.

Principals and superintendents have until Dec. 1 to submit nominations for Academic All-State, which honors 100 outstanding public high school seniors with a \$2,000 scholarship and medallion.

Medal for Excellence Awards, which include a \$10,000 cash prize, are presented to an exceptional elementary, secondary and college teacher; an outstanding elementary/secondary administrator and an alternative education program. Medal for Excellence Award nominations may be submitted by anyone and must be postmarked by Nov. 26. For selection criteria, visit the foundation's Web site at [www.ofe.org](http://www.ofe.org).

### Colonial Williamsburg Electronic Field Trips Available

Applications are available for fifth- and eighth-grade teachers interested in receiving free Colonial Williamsburg Electronic Field Trips subscriptions from the Oklahoma Foundation for

Excellence. Applications, which will be accepted through Sept. 10, are available on the foundation's Web site at [www.ofe.org](http://www.ofe.org).

The Emmy Award-winning Electronic Field Trips, produced by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, bring early-American history to life through a series of live television broadcasts and interactive online activities. Students also have the opportunity to call toll-free and speak to historians and character interpreters during the live television programs. The broadcasts are presented monthly from October through April on OETA.

### Making History

Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute Manager Molly Kerr (right) presents Edmond teacher Carol Anderson with an Edward C. Joullian Oklahoma Scholar lapel pin upon her graduation from the teacher institute in June. From now on, Oklahoma participants will be named Joullian Scholars in honor of the late trustee and benefactor who founded the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence scholarship program that sends teachers to the renowned institute. Twenty-five Oklahoma teachers received scholarships this summer to attend the institute, where they met character interpreters of 18th-century people and were immersed in early-American history through hands-on activities and reenactments of historic events.



## You Can Make a Difference!

NEW: Donate online at [www.ofe.org](http://www.ofe.org)

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## Mentoring Advisory Committee Named

Thank you to the following individuals who have volunteered to serve on our new David and Molly Boren Mentoring Initiative Advisory Committee. The committee will meet twice a year to advise the foundation on its efforts to support the growth and development of quality school-based mentoring programs in Oklahoma.

Teresa B. Adwan  
OFE Trustee, Tulsa

Mary Alice Ahlgren  
Campfire USA, Tulsa

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Volunteers for Youth PAL's  
Program, Claremore

Maggie Taylor  
Academic All-State Alumni  
Mentor, Weatherford

Gail Wynn  
McKinley Elementary Partnership,  
First Presbyterian Church, Enid

## All-State Alumni Mentors Sought

Academic All-State alumni are being sought to serve as mentors at elementary schools in Norman, Oklahoma City, Stillwater, Tulsa and Weatherford.

Volunteers must commit to spend one hour a week mentoring a student in need. Training and support will be provided for all volunteers. For more information, contact Jennifer Geren at 405/410-1523 or e-mail [jgeren@ofe.org](mailto:jgeren@ofe.org).

## Oct. 23 Fall Forum Getting "Back to Basics"

Local education foundation volunteers will have an opportunity to explore the nuts and bolts of building an effective foundation during the 19th annual Fall Forum for Local Education Foundations, slated from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 23, on the University of Oklahoma Norman campus.

Sponsored by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, the Fall Forum is the centerpiece of the foundation's LEF Outreach Program and provides a one-of-a-kind networking and training opportunity for LEF volunteers, school administrators and educators from throughout Oklahoma. Registration fees are \$50 per person if received by Oct. 8. Late registration is \$60 per person.

"Back to Basics" is the theme of this year's forum, which will offer a variety of sessions designed to help volunteers from new and established LEFs learn best practices and improve the day-to-day operations of their organizations.

"We will provide a wider variety of topics that LEF volunteers have been seeking, such as information on IRS requirements, how to choose a donor database and tips on marketing your foundation," said Fall Forum Chair Caroline Gist. "We will also offer a session for those interested in learning how to start a public school foundation in their community."

Glen Johnson, chancellor for the State Regents for Higher Education, will be the keynote speaker for the Fall Forum luncheon. During the luncheon, the foundation will recognize the recipients of the Outstanding Program Awards for Local Education Foundations.

The programs include the Century Club Campaign sponsored by the Bixby Educational Endowment Foundation; the Principal for a Day Program sponsored by the Edmond Public Schools Foundation and the Academic Quest/Leadership Training Program sponsored by the Poteau Schools Education Foundation.

New to this year's forum will be an opening general session highlighting several programs that can enhance the quality of education in any school district. Representatives from the Oklahoma After-School Network, the Payne Educational Center, the Oklahoma Office of Accountability and DonorsChoose will give a sneak preview of their programs and will offer longer breakout sessions later in the day for those who want more information.

Forum organizers have invited Dallas-based nonprofit consultant and development officer Kathy Friend to present sessions on LEF board recruitment and board policies and procedures. As part of the David and Molly Boren Mentoring Initiative, this year's Fall Forum will also offer a panel of mentoring experts focusing on best practices in administering youth mentoring programs.

For more information, visit the foundation's Web site at [www.ofe.org](http://www.ofe.org) or call Dr. Karen Rose, director of LEF Outreach, at (918) 743-5533.



Keynote Speaker:  
Glen D. Johnson Jr.,  
chancellor of the Oklahoma State Regents  
for Higher Education  
and former speaker of  
the Oklahoma House of  
Representatives

## Boeing Supports Math, Science Teacher Scholarships

Seventeen Oklahoma City metro-area teachers had the opportunity to attend national and regional conferences in math and science this spring and summer, thanks to the Boeing Company's support for Teacher Scholarships for Professional Development administered by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence.

"If we want to remain competitive as a state and a nation, we must improve education in math and science, starting from the elementary level up," said Emily Stratton, OFE executive director. "We are grateful to the Boeing Company for investing in math and science education by providing quality training and networking opportunities for Oklahoma teachers."

Since Boeing began supporting the program two years ago, it has provided more than \$47,000

toward the scholarship program, which pays registration, travel and lodging costs for teachers to attend regional and national conferences.

Putnam City West High School teacher Jennie Croslin attended the International ChemEd Conference this summer to help develop long-term inquiry-based research projects for her chemistry students.

"Active student research is the key to engagement in the classroom – the answer to "why are we learning this." Croslin and other scholarship recipients will multiply the benefits of the training by sharing what they learn with colleagues throughout their districts.

Applications for 2008 Teacher Scholarships for Professional Development will be posted online at [www.ofe.org](http://www.ofe.org) in September.

## Wright Encourages Creative Thinking, Problem Solving As Coordinator of State's Student Invention Exposition

One of Betty Wright's greatest joys in life is seeing a student make a discovery.

"I just love watching the kids' thinking processes and seeing the light come on in their eyes when they solve a problem," said Wright, a 1994 Medal for Excellence winner in Elementary Education.

Although Wright retired from the classroom in 1997, she is still encouraging "a-ha" moments for thousands of Oklahoma students as coordinator of the Oklahoma Student Invention Exposition. An Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence trustee, Wright co-founded the nonprofit invention exposition in 1989 with Oklahoma inventor Julian Taylor. Their goal was to engage students in real-world, problem-solving and critical-thinking



Wright

activities and to encourage students to integrate their classroom learning into great inventions. The statewide invention competition is free and open to all Oklahoma public, private and home-schooled students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Approximately 3,000 students are selected by their local schools to compete at the statewide invention exposition, held in February at Rose State College in Midwest City.

Judges for the competition include patent attorneys and service men and women from Tinker Air Force Base. Up to \$15,000 in cash awards and



A young inventor displays his even-slice pizza slicer.

trophies are awarded by age division to the winning students and their teachers.

"We've had some amazing young inventors over the years," Wright said. "Some have gone on to compete at national levels and received patents."

Some of the memorable inventions for Wright have included snow chains for bicycles, a "stick-em" fly swatter with peel-off sticky paper and a touch-coding system to help blind people match their clothing.

"Every year just seems to get better," she said. "It's fun to see how happy and proud these kids are to display something that they have invented to solve an every-day problem."

Teachers who would like to learn more about the invention exposition can request a guidelines booklet by calling Wright at (405) 670-3131 or emailing [Rwright482@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Rwright482@sbcglobal.net). Teachers are encouraged to begin preparing their students for the invention competition in the fall.

## Norman Teachers Receive National Plank Award

Three Norman teachers who received an Oklahoma Fund for Teachers grant to travel to Zimbabwe last summer have been awarded the Raymond Plank Award for Teaching Excellence from the national Fund for Teachers in recognition of their summer project.

Emily Stratton (right), executive director of the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, presented the Plank Award plaques to Monroe Elementary teachers (from left) Cindy Scarberry, Lani Garner and Stefani Stuemky during Monroe's Art Festival. The national award is presented annually to a teacher or



team of teachers whose summer project best exemplifies the Fund for Teachers' mission. Plank, a Houston businessman, established the Fund for Teachers to enrich the professional growth of teachers as they identify and pursue opportunities around the globe that will have the greatest impact on their practice, the academic lives of their students and on their school communities. The Foundation for Excellence and the Tulsa Community Foundation assist in administering the Oklahoma program.

Visit [www.ofe.org](http://www.ofe.org) for details on upcoming Fund for Teachers information sessions and the 2008 applications, available in October.

## KUDOS!

Dave Simons (AAS '91) of Longmont, Colo., is an executive program manager for IBM's Printing Systems Division. He looks forward to helping lay the foundation for the newly formed Infoprint Solutions Co., which is a joint venture between Ricoh and IBM.

Oklahoma City trustee **Aubrey K. McClendon**, chairman and CEO of Chesapeake Energy Corp., and **Tulsan David Kyle**, chairman of the board of ONEOK and a major supporter of the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, have been selected for induction into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in November.

Oklahoma City trustee **Bob Burke**, who has written more than 70 books on Oklahoma history, will soon publish *Broken Bow: The First Century* to help celebrate the centennial of his hometown. Proceeds from the book will support the Broken Bow Public School Foundation.

Enid trustee **Virginia Groendyke** has been honored as Woman of the Year by the Enid YWCA in recognition of her service to the YWCA and the Enid community.

Oklahoma City trustee **Ann Simmons Alspaugh** has been named the recipient of the Paul Strasbaugh Lifetime Achievement Award from the Oklahoma City University Meinders School of Business. She will be inducted into the Oklahoma Commerce & Industry Hall of Honor during the awards ceremony.

Tulsa trustee **Edward F. Keller**, who recently retired as chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase Oklahoma, has been elected to serve on the board of directors of XETA Technologies, a national voice communications and data networks company.

## Academic All-Stater Jenna Butner Shares Advice from Boren, Simmons

*(Editor's note: 2007 Academic All-Stater Jenna Butner of Seminole is our featured student columnist for this issue of HighMarks. Here, she shares insights she gained from the All-Staters' "Bull Session" with OFE Chairman David L. Boren and keynote speaker Ruth Simmons. Butner plans to study nursing at Oklahoma Baptist University.)*

"Adam... Livvy... Hannah..." As I walked into the Academic All-State orientation, names flew through the air as students excitedly introduced themselves. One hundred people simultaneously meeting each other was chaotic. This chaos continued as we crowded onto a staircase to take a giant group photo, each of us silently wondering if the cameraman was going to fall through the top of the plastic trashcan upon which he balanced. Afterwards, however, the mood transformed as we walked into the famous and eagerly anticipated Bull Session with OU President David Boren and Brown University President Ruth Simmons.

Dr. Simmons is the youngest of 12 children, the first female president of Brown, and the first African American to be appointed as president of an Ivy League university. What a woman! President Boren began the session by graciously introducing Dr. Simmons and humbly admitting that she had been named "America's Best College President" by *Time* magazine. This bull session was unlike any discussion group or lecture I'd ever attended. President Boren and President Simmons made the session immensely beneficial by discussing topics in which we are all interested.

"How important is it to study abroad?" President Boren asked.

Dr. Simmons explained that our problem is that we see the world as a homogeneous community. She urged us to get out, study everything, learn all that we possibly can from people and opportunities, and taste everything. Dr. Simmons elaborated that she saw studying or touring abroad as a way to appreciate the value of difference. She also stressed the importance of studying other languages because it opens doors across the globe.

President Boren also posed this question, "If you could go back in time, what would you do differently?"

Dr. Simmons gave one of the best answers I've ever heard. She explained that she would never want to change anything about her past because then her life would be different. She would not be the person she is today without the challenges and obstacles she faced in her life.

We also discussed college academics. President Boren inspired us to explore ideas and snoop around instead of concentrating on a specific major too quickly. He believes that knowledge should be gathered from many areas. Dr. Simmons said we should get out of our comfort zone and go to a place where we feel challenged.

At the end of the session, President Boren and Dr. Simmons presented the All-Staters with specific words of advice. Boren urged us to do what we love, while Dr. Simmons said that we have a right to be happy, so we should follow our heart wherever it leads us.

The Bull Session was a once in a lifetime experience – a personal chat with two of the greatest college presidents in history, yet it focused completely on the one hundred students seated in front of them. So now, I urge you, take their advice – get out, taste everything and follow your heart.



*Seminole Academic All-Stater Jenna Butner is greeted by OFE Chairman David Boren and Brown University President Ruth Simmons prior to the Academic All-State Bull Session.*



▲ *Keynote speaker Ruth Simmons and OFE Chairman David Boren (second and third from left) congratulate the 2007 Medal for Excellence winners (from left) Kathleen Blake, Edmond Memorial High School; James Breckenridge, Southwestern Oklahoma State University; Eileta Creekpaum, Robert E. Lee Elementary School, Tulsa; and Bobby Russell, superintendent of Pauls Valley Public Schools. Pictured in the inset is Boren with Debra Thomas, principal of Oklahoma City's Emerson High School, winner of the alternative education award.*



◀ *Banquet Chair Les Risser (left) greets (from left) Debbie Roberts and her husband, Oklahoma City artist Ron Roberts, who designed the "Roots and Wings" award presented to Medal for Excellence winners and this year's commemorative banquet poster. Joining them are Foundation President Ken Ferguson and his wife, Mary Ann, of Altus.*



▲ *Banquet Producer Ron Demers (center) gives directions to honorees in preparation for the televised portion of the awards ceremony.*

## Centennial Year Banquet Set to the Theme "Roots and Wings"

► *Academic All-State Alumni Coordinator Morgan Harris (AAS '98) congratulates Ponca City All-Stater Zhu "Judy" Wang, a graduate of the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics. Wang's scholarship was sponsored by contributions from Academic All-State Alumni.*



▲ *Academic All-Stater Betsy Riley of Poteau thanks her scholarship sponsors Pam and Steve Holton, community leaders from her hometown. The Holtons were generous sponsors of this year's banquet, providing complimentary banquet admission for two members of each All-State family. Steve Holton is a trustee and executive committee member of the foundation.*



▲ *John Clinton, dean of the College of Arts, Media and Design at the University of Central Oklahoma, serves as guest conductor for the Oklahoma Arts Institute Orchestra, which performs annually at the Academic Awards Banquet.*

