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Preparing a future generation to lead and to teach

OEA-RETIRED MEMBERS SHARE LIFETIME OF EDUCATION EXPERIENCE THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM

One in five teachers leaves the profession during the first three years of teaching.

It's a discouraging statistic for those who have dedicated their careers to teaching children and one that Ohio's veteran educators are working to change. The goal for a group of dedicated retirees is to help talented teachers stay where they should be—in the classroom, helping students to learn and to thrive.

Their task is not an easy one—especially at a time when public education faces hostile attacks on numerous fronts—but it is an increasingly important one.

Education students are preparing not only for what they will find in a classroom, but what they stand to encounter in seeking a job, building a career, pursuing professional development, and even planning for health care and retirement needs. They are concerned about the availability of teaching jobs and prospects for a long-term career in a rapidly changing field in the midst of a volatile political and economic climate.

Such concerns are not new to OEA-Retired (OEA-R) members, many of whom can recall a time before collective bargaining was law and teaching and learning conditions were vastly different than today.

Members of OEA-R are politically—and professionally—active. They work to elect pro-public education candidates, support active members in bargaining, advocate for the security of pensions and health care and continue their own education through training. They share a sense of the importance of continuing to work for the common good, making a difference, and advancing the profession for both active members and those who will be educators in generations to come.

Several years ago, NEA launched discussions on intergenerational mentoring at a regional NEA-Retired (NEA-R) conference. In 2007, under the leadership of OEA-R member **Nancy Wonson**, the OEA-Retired Advisory Council applied for and received a two-year grant from NEA and NEA-R to establish a mentoring project pairing retired educators with students working toward a degree in education.

“Our goal is to match retired OEA-R members with education majors at OEA-affiliated campuses for the purpose of providing guidance, advice and friendship to future teachers,” says Wonson. “Through the Intergenerational Mentoring Program, mentors help students to develop teaching skills and gain confidence in their teaching ability so that they remain in the teaching profession.”

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In many ways, the program has opened up my eyes to today's teacher preparation process. It is much more thorough, complex and refined that what it was back in the early 70s. These young teachers will be much more prepared, supported and qualified to do the job of educating our youth.

MARY STEINER
OEA-R MEMBER AND MENTOR



OEA-R Advisory Council members **Arnetta Depp** (WEOA), **Marti Huss** (SWOEA), **Elaine Spondike** (ESP representative) and **Wonson** (NEOEA) formed an Intergenerational Mentoring team and began the work of creating a program that would establish a mentoring relationship to smooth the transition for new and student teachers and assist them as they completed education studies and entered their first teaching jobs. Among the goals of the program: to provide a mentor as a sounding board, to utilize retired teachers to develop and train future teachers, and to provide non-evaluative support.

For Wonson, one of the things that has benefited Ohio is the state's required mentoring for new teachers. "Our retired teachers are already prepared to mentor," she says, "so this is a natural extension of that training and skill."

In October 2008, the Intergenerational Mentoring team welcomed its first group of 30 retired teachers to a workshop at Kent State University. During the program's resulting pilot period, the Intergenerational Mentor-

ing Team matched interested Kent State student members with OEA-R members with experience in the areas of the students' teaching concentration.

In 2008, Wonson served as facilitator for the first program at Kent State. There were initially six mentees and six mentors. The following year, the program grew to include 14 mentees and 12 mentors. Sixteen mentees and 15 mentors attended the first Kent State Meet and Greet event for 2010-2011.

Under the leadership of OEA-R member Huss, a second program was formed at Miami University in the fall of 2009 with 18 mentees and 16 mentors. One year later, 22 mentees and 16 mentors committed to the program.

Launched in 2010, Ohio University (OU) is the third college campus to be affiliated with the Intergenerational Mentoring Program. An Ohio Student Education Association (OSEA) member initiated the conversation to launch a program on campus after learning about the Intergenerational Mentoring Program at the annual OSEA conference. In November 2010, OEA-R members **Marilyn Allen** and Huss held a training session for prospective mentors. That evening, the program overview was shared with the mem-

bers of OUSEA. The program's first Meet and Greet was held this January. Allen, an alumna of Ohio University, serves as the OU program facilitator.

This February, as the second year of their two-year grant from NEA-R came to a close, OEA-R members submitted a new grant proposal to seek funding from NEA-R. Huss explains that this grant, in addition to funding from other sources is needed in order to grow the Intergenerational Mentoring Program on the three existing campuses and to expand the program to additional campuses.

Mentor and mentee pairs on each of the three campuses share a variety of experiences, including group meetings, Meet and Greets, potluck suppers, participation in the NEA Student Program Outreach to Teach and more.

Mentors and mentees in the Kent State program recently participated in the Kent Student Education Association bi-annual Read Across America event attended by 116 children from the Kent City Schools. The visiting students participated in reading stations and listened to readings of Dr. Seuss book). The student organization also held Senate Bill 5 Information



night. OEA Board of Directors members Becky Miller and Andre Taylor spoke about Senate Bill 5, what it means to student members as future educators and what they can do to help defeat the bill. The Kent Student Education Association plans to help OEA's efforts with the Senate Bill 5 referendum, and this meeting was its first course of action in doing so.

One mentor took her two students to visit Lebanon High School to introduce them to teachers prior to field experience. For student Robert Stevens, the opportunity to interact with his mentor, a former French teacher, and to have an experienced teacher as a sounding board for ideas on what works and doesn't work has made the transition into teaching much smoother.

"Just through our introduction to the class in French, we realized how much we needed to slow down our rate of speaking. By the time we introduced ourselves to the third class, we had reached a level that was comprehensible to the students. We had the chance to help a teacher with a class activity and to help students," he said.

One of the program's goals is to launch independent relationships between the pairs that will continue to grow as the students become teachers.

As the program grows, OEA-R is seeking retired colleagues who, Huss says, "have an open heart to the call of mentoring."

"This is not a one-year match," Wonson stresses. "The pairs of mentors and mentees that are created stay together through the student's graduation and into the first year of teaching. We want and need to get into the professional life of the students we mentor, and we want to help them with their careers," she adds.

Recently, OEA-R member Allen discussed the importance of mentoring, and the goals of the program on "Teacher Talk," a radio program produced by Columbus Public Schools that airs on WCBE FM (90.5 FM). The program will be archived and available in May at <http://ceaohio.org/>.

There are people who truly are willing to help new and inexperienced teachers and pre-service teachers, and I have become more aware and comfortable seeking help that I may need. The most successful aspect of the program has been not only the friendship that has developed, but also the fact that I feel so much more confident and comfortable going into student teaching, interviewing and, eventually, running my own classroom.

ERIN ZEILER
MIAMI UNIVERSITY STUDENT

2012

Be a mentor

Interested in mentoring an education student? OEA-R is seeking recently retired teachers in the geographic areas surrounding Kent State University, Miami University and Ohio University.

For detailed information or to receive an application, contact Sherri Lawrence or Bill Otten at 1 800 686 4632 or write to Intergenerational Mentoring Program, OEA-R, 5026 Pine Creek Drive, Westerville OH 43081.