



Small Talk

the official newsletter of the
Oregon Small Schools Association

Fall 2008

The Road Less Traveled



By: Al Meunier
OSSA Executive
Director

On Oct. 2, I arrived at Warrenton High School to visit a project created and developed by Steve Porter, a science teacher at Warrenton High School. I was in for

a surprise. Over the course of my career I have seen a large number of class projects, but this particular project was unlike any other I have ever visited.

First of all, seldom do you see a class project that involves hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in a building and very sophisticated equipment. Even more astounding was the fact that the driving force for the project was Henry Balensifer, a student at Warrenton High School. Henry is now a college student.

Years ago, Warrenton High School had a small fish project in which many of the older fishermen participated when they were students. Henry connected with them and the seafood processing industry and the project was off and running. Local businesses and individuals donated money and labor. Government agencies provided the expertise to develop the actual project in cooperation with projects that the agencies already had in operation. National Guard engineers constructed the building.

Henry had some dedicated support from Steve

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Teacher of the Year finalists selected

Winner to be announced at Small Schools Breakfast
at OSBA Convention Nov. 15

By: Casey White
Editor, Small Talk

The Oregon Small Schools Association Board of Directors has narrowed down the nominations for the 2008-09 OSSA Teacher of the Year to two finalists: Peg Moore, a K-2 teacher at Maple Grove Elementary in the Molalla School District; and Mitch Coleman, an agriculture teacher at Dayton High School in the Dayton School District.

The winner will be announced during the Small Schools Breakfast on Saturday, Nov. 15, at the Oregon School Boards Association's Annual Convention at the Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront Hotel.

Mitch Coleman

Coleman is an agriculture education teacher at Dayton High School, where he has taught for all 18 of his years in education. Coleman says that he had wanted to become a teacher "for as long as I can remember." His inspiration to become a teacher stems from watching his grandmother teach the first grade in Idaho.

"I saw students learn new things when they didn't even know they were learning," Coleman says. "I loved seeing her teach and wanted to be a teacher like her when I grew up."

After working on a ranch for six years, Coleman went back to school to become an agriculture teacher in an effort to bring his desire of teaching and his experiences of ranching together.

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Mitch Coleman



Peg Moore

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Porter, a science teacher who involves the students in real world science projects. Mr. Porter has done this his entire career, but never anything quite like the fish recovery project. The project involves students like Henry in the tagging of 12,000 salmon for release into the Skipanon River, which flows through the high school property. In the building are a number of tanks that hold the fish until they are ready for release. While in the tanks, the fish are vulnerable to a variety of diseases and must be carefully monitored. The monitoring is done through a series of high-tech devices that constantly gather information about the water.

When the fish have reached the proper level of maturity, a tag is inserted to provide data. The tag is a chip that allows the fish to be tracked when it returns from the ocean. This year the project was able to purchase the tags through national fisheries for \$2.50 per tag. The regular cost is \$3.90 per tag. When the project actually can verify that it has fish returning, it will be eligible for another series of grants to enhance the program. All of the students become extremely dedicated to the project and care very much about the fish for which they are responsible.

A side benefit of the project has been the restoration of the river habitat. The river which was populated by lesser species of fish now has flounder and the occasional trout. With the restoration of the river, the salmon can now be released right by the project.

In late October the students in Mr. Porter's class will welcome 12,000 new charges to nurture and eventually send to the ocean. It is amazing what a dedicated teacher and group of dedicated students can accomplish. When a community recognizes the power of a small group of committed young people, they willingly provide support. The entire community of Warrenton can be proud of the program they have created. It is another example of what can happen in Oregon's small schools.



*A Warrenton student tags a fish.
(Contributed photo)*



*Warrenton High teacher Steve Porter in the fish building at Warrenton.
(Photo by Al Meunier)*

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Coleman considers his greatest contribution to teaching is his enthusiasm for helping students to discover that education is good for everyone, and that if they believe in their own abilities, they can become a success.

"I believe every student can learn and that it is my job to find the way to make sure that they can learn sometimes when they don't even want to," Coleman says. "My teaching philosophy has always been modeled around the quote, 'Tell me and I will forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I will understand.'"

Coleman's principal at Dayton High School, Roger Lorenzen, says that Coleman and his wife, Ann, have "positively impacted countless young people in the Dayton community and beyond."

"You could find no better representative for this honor," Lorenzen said. "Mitch is articulate, bright, and engaging. He would be a wonderful spokesperson for small schools because he is passionate about affording students the opportunities that come with the small school environment. He is the one who changes obstacles into opportunities – all for the betterment of students."

Coleman has won numerous awards and accolades for his progress with students and successes in the classroom. He's been the Yamhill County Soil and Water Conservation Teacher of the Year twice (2005 and 1995); the Oregon Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association (OVATA) Teacher of the Year twice (2002 and 1998); OVATA Young Agriculture Teacher of the Year (1995); received the OVATA Agriculture Program of the Year three times (2004, 2000 and 1997); and the Oregon Soil and Water Conservation Agriculture Teacher of the Year (1995).

Peg Moore

Moore is a K-2 teacher at Maple Grove Elementary in the Molalla School District, where she's been since 1991. Prior to that, Moore taught 3rd grade at Redland Elementary in Oregon City.

Like Coleman, Moore can't ever remember a time when she didn't want to be a teacher. She got her first thirst for working with kids while in high school, when she worked for the park department developing and implementing activities for kids, where she said she "enjoyed their enthusiasm and zest for life."

Just as Moore expects a lot from her students, she also expects outstanding teaching from herself. She prides herself in taking advantage of "teachable moments," and being mindful of all the learning styles in her classroom. For example, while studying Michelangelo, students are asked to tape a piece of paper to the bottom of their desks, and then they position themselves on their backs on the floor and produce their masterpieces.

Moore says that the reward she receives from teaching is seeing the progress students make. She says she enjoys seeing kids excited about learning and loves the relationships that are developed with her students.

"They come to me as a blank slate and leave as readers and writers," Moore says.

Though Moore says she was always a good student herself, math is a subject she struggled in while growing up. "From K-high school, I had negative experiences that disintegrated my mathematical self-concept," Moore says. "It seemed the push was for speed and accuracy, not understanding of concepts."

Moore wanted to make sure her students didn't have the same experiences with math. In 2004, Moore committed to a four-year National Science Foundation grant, which resulted in the Oregon Mathematics Leadership Institute (OMLI). OMLI's mission was to see if greater student achievement would result from increased student discourse. Part of the project was to promote leadership and network ideas they learned back to staff in their own districts. Moore used late-start Fridays to present professional development to teachers and instructional assistants in two schools.

When Moore joined the OMLI grant, she was required to take 18 hours of college-level content classes. While intimidating, Moore remembers her "breakthrough day."

"I had spent three hours justifying one homework problem, but when I finished, I had an overwhelming sense of pride knowing my struggle paid off because I truly understood a new math concept," Moore said. She now brings this sense of accomplishment to her students.

Moore's head teacher at Maple Grove, Mike Clarke, says Moore has a challenging position in teaching K-2 students.

"This can be very challenging, but Peg handles it with ease and professionalism," Clarke says. "We have some of the highest test scores in the state that reflect back to Peg and her wonderful teaching style. Students are pushed and cared for in her classrooms."

Small districts find challenges, advantages during bond process

By: Casey White
Editor, Small Talk

Living in a small town with a small school district definitely has its advantages. There tends to be a strong sense of community, everyone knows your name, and the schools tend to be the heart of the community.

But election time can make having a small school district more challenging if the district has a bond on the ballot.

Putting a school bond or levy on an election ballot is all about the numbers. Sometimes those numbers work to your advantage – like for the St. Paul, Glide, Cove and Adrian school districts, which all were able to pass bonds or levies in the last General Election in November 2006.

But all too often, those numbers can also work against a district. Just look at the Wallowa School District, which missed out on passing a local option levy in May 2007 by just two votes. In the May 2008 election, just 162 votes came between the district and a passing levy. Sherman County schools missed out on a local option levy of just \$0.21/\$1,000 assessed property value in May 2008 by just 18 votes.

Small school districts face financial challenges every year due to their sizes and small pool of taxpayers. This often leads districts to attempt to pass a school bond or levy to develop the funding necessary for updating structures or constructing new buildings, maintenance and safety upgrades. Though small districts often ask taxpayers to pass much smaller bonds than larger school districts, they often face even more challenges come election time.

Out of the 30 Oregon school districts vying for a passing bond in the Nov. 4, 2008, general election, 14 are small school districts, 11 of which are OSSA members.

Nyssa Superintendent Don Grotting, whose district will ask voters to pass a \$12.7 million bond, said one of the greatest challenges for a small district come bond-time is the smaller tax base that comes from living in a small town. This means there's more of a financial impact on the town's taxpayers because there are fewer of them to foot the bill. In contrast, a larger school district has an increased tax base to pull from, thus spreading out the cost amongst more taxpayers.

Small districts often are already at a financial disadvantage compared to some of their larger neighbors. In the Santiam Canyon School District, for example, the former timber town is not flourishing, and the free and reduced lunch rate is at around 65 percent, said Superintendent Brad Yates. "So there's not a lot of extra dollars around," Yates said.

A struggling economy also stands against school districts, large ones included. While many citizens may support a school bond, it isn't financially feasible for them at this time. "Everyone votes with their pocketbook, as they should," Yates said.

Grotting said it can also be difficult to gather people within the community to promote the bond during election season. In addition, there are fewer service clubs, organizations and events through which to promote the bond as compared to larger areas.

Yates said this also means it can be a challenge to get a large number of people to value education enough to pay more for it, especially if a taxpayer has no connection to the schools.

One of the other difficulties, Grotting said, is that smaller communities are often limited to the amount a bond can ask for, whether the bond comes from a school district, fire district, water district or hospital.

OSSA Member Districts with Bonds on the Nov. 4, 2008 Ballot

School District	ADM	Amount
Dufer SD	285	\$3.75 million
Elkton SD	170	\$1.20 million
Helix SD	144	\$1.40 million
Marcola SD	222	\$6.40 million
Nyssa SD	1148	\$12.7 million
Oakland SD	526	\$885,000
Pilot Rock SD	361	\$3.42 million
Santiam Canyon SD	605	\$14.5 million
Umatilla SD	1221	\$6.50 million
Willamina SD	909	\$8.50 million
Yamhill-Carlton SD	1171	\$21.0 million

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"This can hamper a district's ability regarding bonding or the amount desired," Grotting said.

But this is not to say having a small school district doesn't have its advantages when trying to pass a bond.

Shannon Priem, Communications Director for the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA), said having a smaller community population enables districts to more easily acquire a feel for what citizens are willing to vote for.

"Also, people in a small town have a sense of how important their school is to the whole community," Priem said. "It's a place everyone gathers. In some cases, that big white school building is the crown jewel of the town."

Grotting agrees.

"I believe in some communities, the school is the heartbeat of the community, and more of the citizens may be more likely to have contact with the school or be associated with someone in the school," Grotting said.

Small communities also tend to rally around their athletic teams, so oftentimes, bonds with upgrades to athletic facilities or fields will pass with much community support.

"Everyone likes upgraded facilities and they have a good understanding of building care needs," Yates said.

For detailed information about school bond election results, go to the OSBA web site at www.osba.org.

Prairie City teacher named History Teacher of the Year

This article originally appeared in the June 4, 2008, edition of the Blue Mountain Eagle newspaper and has been reprinted with permission.

Prairie City School history teacher Andy Demko has received the Oregon State History Teacher of the Year award for 2007-2008. The award was presented at the Daughters of the American Revolution Oregon State Conference, held May 17 in Wilsonville.

In February, the local Lone Pine Tree Chapter of the DAR in Baker City and La Grande presented Demko with the local History Teacher of the Year award and nominated him as a candidate for the state honor. Demko is now included with those in the running at the national level.

Demko said he is humbled to receive the award and thanks Roberta Morin and the DAR for supporting his career.

On his merits as a history teacher, Demko said, "My goal is to make history and social studies interesting by giving 110 percent of myself to my teaching. I believe that by understanding the past, our students will be better prepared for their futures."

According to DAR historian Roberta Morin, who has been a guest speaker in Demko's classroom, this is the Lone Pine Tree Chapter's first winner of this high degree. She also said honoring Demko with the award speaks highly of his ability, enthusiasm and talent as a teacher.

Demko's accomplishments have included: co-founder of Camp Logan Days, history club advisor, advisor to several classes at Prairie City School, board member of the Oregon Council for the Social Studies, member of the National History Club Advisory Board, and 2006 Oregon Outstanding Social Studies Educator of the Year.



Andy Demko joins Beverly Przybyski (left), outgoing DAR State Regent, and Linda Gist Calvin, the new National President General of the DAR.

Oregon Small Schools Study underway

By: Robert Valiant

Umatilla-Morrow ESD

In 2007, the Oregon Small Schools Association, in conjunction with the State Legislative Revenue Office, began to look at questions of funding adequacy and program flexibility for small and rural school districts in Oregon.

Anecdotal evidence existed at that time, which suggested that small and rural districts were having a disproportionately harder time complying with state and federal mandates and at the same time were struggling to provide a comprehensive curriculum to their students. There was a strong belief that students at small schools should not be denied an excellent education just because they lived in rural communities. Evidence was needed to establish these facts and two surveys were crafted.

For the purposes of the study, districts were divided into the following size categories:

Extra Small: Less than 151 students

Very Small: 151 to 500 students

Small: 501 to 1,000 students

Medium: 1,001 to 3,000 students

Districts larger than 3,000 students were not included in the study.

The first survey looked at high school schedules to find out how frequently higher level mathematics, science, and foreign language courses were offered. These courses were selected because they related to entry requirements for universities and a lack of those courses might indicate handicaps for entry to rural students.

The results of his survey are outlined below:

	Extra Small (0-150)	Very Small (151-500)	Small (501-1,000)	Medium (1,001-3,000)
Foreign Language I	90%	100%	100%	100%
Chemistry	80%	83%	94%	100%
Pre-Calculus	80%	78%	100%	89%
Foreign Language 2	50%	91%	94%	100%
Physics	50%	74%	67%	84%
Calculus	30%	43%	72%	89%
sample size	10	23	18	19

The second survey is currently in progress and results should be available in late October.

Contribute to *Small Talk*!

Have something you'd like to see in *Small Talk*? Send your story ideas, articles and photos to OSSA Executive Secretary Tami Peterson.

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Pendleton, OR 97801

or e-mail: ossa@umesd.k12.or.us



Oregon Small Schools Association

Al Meunier, Executive Director

SCHOOL DISTRICT MEMBERSHIP 2008-2009

COUNTY: _____

The membership fee for membership in the Oregon Small Schools Association is based on the ADM (Average Daily Membership-Resident—Number of students enrolled) in each school district. The ADM numbers are the actual number of students reported to ODE for funding through the School Fund Formula as of September, 2008. Below is the fee structure for membership in OSSA for the 2008-2009 school year (July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009).

K-12 DISTRICTS -- \$200 minimum with less than 200 ADMr, plus \$1/ADMr over 200 students with a cap of \$1,500

K-8 Districts -- \$100 minimum with less than 100 ADMr. K-8 Districts greater than 100 ADMr would be \$200 minimum plus \$1/ADMr over 100 students with a cap of \$1,500

ESD -- \$250 plus \$1/ADMr for each high school in their constituent districts with less than 500 ADMr with a cap of \$1,500

Our records indicate that your district's ADM is _____. Therefore your membership fee to support your district's involvement in the Oregon Small Schools Association is _____.

If you are interested in joining OSSA, please return this statement and your membership check to:

Oregon Small Schools Association
2001 S.W. Nye Ave.
Pendleton, OR 9701

Please provide us with the following information for your school district:

Superintendent's Name: _____

E-Mail: _____

Elementary Principal's Name: _____

E-Mail: _____

Middle School Principal's Name: _____

E-Mail: _____

High School Principal's Name: _____

E-Mail: _____

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For a current list of district
vacancies log on to
www.oregonssa.org/vacancies

OSSA Member-District Vacancies

Douglas ESD
Roseburg, Oregon

Position:

- Speech and Language Pathologist - *Early Intervention Program and/or K-12 Program (Open until filled)*

Contact:

Lyn Leno
Personnel Officer
(541) 440-4753 / 1-877-373-5627
lyn.leno@douglasesd.k12.or.us
TDD# (503) 440-4791
or
Matt Brausam
Special Programs Coordinator
(541) 440-4791
matt.brausam@douglasesd.k12.or.us

Send Application Materials to:

Lyn Leno
Douglas ESD
1871 NE Stephens St.
Roseburg, OR 97470-1493

Linn Benton Lincoln ESD
Albany, Oregon

Position:

- Speech-Language Pathologist (open until filled)

To Apply send:

Letter of Introduction and Interest
ESD Licensed Application
Resume
Letters of Recommendation
Copies of License and Transcripts

Applications are available at:

Linn Benton Education Service District,
905 4th Ave SE, Albany, OR 97321 or
phone (541)812-2631

Send application materials to:

Linn Benton ESD
905 4th Avenue SE
Albany, OR 97321
(541) 812-2600
Fax: (541) 926-6047
www.lblesd.k12.or.us

Small Schools Summit

February 15, 2009 @ 2 p.m.
Salem Conference Center
Salem, OR

In conjunction with the
COSA/OSBA Legislative Conference

More information will be available and
updated online at www.oregonssa.org.