

## **Dr. Cynthia Reighard Introduces 2003 Bartlett Award Winner Valorie Wolcott Mendelson**

It is a joy and honor to be asked to present the Clyde V. Bartlett Award this year to Valorie Wolcott Mendelson.

Today OSPA is celebrating its 60th anniversary. Throughout the history of our profession, people have stepped forward to fill key needs that have resulted in the advancement of school psychology. I'd like to walk with some of those people for a moment in order to place in perspective Valorie's vital contribution to the statewide collaborative system that supports school psychology today.

P.O. Wagner, the first practicing school psychology in this state, was employed directly by the State of Ohio. His job was to test children where ever they were located. Through time, it was apparent that additional school psychologists were needed and again it was the intention of the State to continue employing them to serve on a statewide basis. Wagner aggressively argued that state funds should be sent directly to school districts for them to employ school psychologists who could support children, families and teachers on a local basis after the testing was completed.

Wagner was followed by Ray Horn who worked closely with the universities who trained school psychologists. At that time, interns were required to complete a 300-hour internship. It was generally agreed that this was not sufficient time to adequately prepare an intern for a lifetime of practice and that a full year was preferable. There was considerable disagreement about whether interns should be paid for this experience. It was Dr. Horn's belief that if the most qualified people were to be attracted into the profession and be required to participate in a year-long internship, interns must be paid. Thankfully, he won the debate.

Both Ray Horn and Pete Gross maintained formal working relationships with the training universities which would become the Inter University Council (IUC) for School Psychology. While the universities provided excellent pre-service education, no additional professional development was available to practitioners. So Pete Gross was asked to call together several well-known school psychologists across the state to come to Ray Horn's house to discuss the needs of practicing school psychologists. It was around Ray Horn's kitchen table that Bertha Lucky from Cleveland and several other leaders formed the predecessor of OSPA, the School Psychologists of Ohio Association.

A collaborative chain was now being formed by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), IUC, and OSPA. Another link would be added by Pete Gross when he invited supervisors of schools psychologists to come together at least quarterly to receive updates on due process issues and ODE initiatives. This group formalized itself to become The Supervisors of School Psychologists Association and is has continued to serve as a

leadership network for discussing best practice and legal issues related to key state and federal requirements.

Still a link was missing. While universities were collaborating with each other through IUC, the other part of the equation, field facilitators, were not. Field facilitators are a critical component to building a strong workforce of new school psychologists. Not only do they model and mentor best practice, they, in many cases, knock off rough edges and polish the skills, knowledge, attitudes of blossoming professionals. Too often, field facilitators found themselves in a bind when their interns were given new information which they were not. Recognizing a need to bring field facilitators together and to have their voice heard, Valorie seized the moment and brought field facilitators together to form the Association of Field Facilitators of Intern Competencies (AFFIC) which she led in 1992 and continues to do so today. This group has worked with IUC to develop the Field Placement Manual which clearly spells out expectations for universities, field facilitators and interns.

Few interns will ever know the behind the scenes work that Valorie has conducted on their behalf and that of their immediate supervisors. Through AFFIC, Valorie continues to work with university trainers and field placement supervisors to cultivate new goals for interns and field facilitators. The impact of her work can be seen by the presence of both IUC members and field facilitators at the statewide intern conference each year.

Perhaps Valorie's passion for involving both IUC and field facilitators in strengthening the internship program comes from her relentless dedication to providing an outstanding internship experience for her own interns. Valorie has served as a field facilitator for more than 15 years. Her interns say that she has an incredible way of taking an intern and molding her/him into a fine tuned professional whom she is proud to call a colleague. She uses the most interesting style of polishing - always making you think "outside the box" - which keeps her interns coming back to her years later just to consult or check in about best practices. This nurturing has resulted in her former interns being described as among the best trained school psychologists in the region.

I've talked a lot about Valorie's commitment to developing new professionals, however her pursuit of excellence extends beyond interns. Within the larger arena of advancing our profession, she has, with single heartedness worked tirelessly in developing vitality and integrity in the profession of school psychology throughout the state.

She has assumed leadership positions in OSPA for many years, beginning as a regional representative from CASP. She has strengthened OSPA by her inclusive leadership style as president. During her presidency, she began a successful campaign which continues today to increase membership and to increase service to members. With unflagging energy, she mounted a successful campaign to safeguard financial support for the internship year. She sustained active participation in professional development through revitalizing OSPA's committees and personally reached out to regional organizations to strengthen both the regional and state professional organizations. Valorie has used her time and talents wisely and generously in pursuit of excellence in responding to the needs

of school psychology in this state and through school psychologists to the need's of Ohio's children.

In preparation for this presentation I read through massive amounts of documentation from parents, teachers, school psychologists, and regional and state leaders. What becomes immediately evident is that not only do the writers speak about Valorie's leadership, they also consistently talk about the impact of her personal interaction with them. Valorie has a way of listening and supporting that makes each person feel valued and important.

Themes became evident throughout the comments. Valorie is a caring human being who holds honest regard for others. She is an unflappable optimist, a nurturing mentor for interns, a "ever ready" school psychologist whose energy and commitment keeps going and going. She is an inspired leader among her colleagues.

In knowing Valorie, I too understand that she believes that each moment holds the opportunity for adding value to someone's life. She always seems to leave the door open for whoever walks around the corner. It's almost like she keeps the light on. As a result Valorie's life is full of gifts to others. Gifts that come through teachable moments - moments of gentleness and understanding, moments of unrestrained support, moments of challenging folks to seek new opportunities by thinking outside of the box and - moments when she takes care to seek the "best practice" in decisions for children's education and the advancement of school psychology.

*Teachable moments for parents and teachers.* A defensive mother of a second grade boy, who tended to be a handful, came to school one day and became verbally aggressive with the teacher. Being under verbal attack, the teacher sought support from the principal whose presence only exacerbated the confrontation because the mother had difficulty dealing with authority figures. Seeking no easy resolution to the situation, Valorie was called into the room. The arguments continued until everyone simultaneously stopped and looked at Valorie as if to say - "So what are you going to do about it!" Calmly, softly, Valorie validated the ideas and feeling held by each person and then reflected on previously unseen commonalities. Each person left school that day feeling satisfied with agreed upon strategies for working with the child.

*Teachable moments for parents and teachers; teachable moments for children.* Once a person enters Valorie's sphere of concern, they are never again beyond her arm's reach for care and support. That can be pretty challenging since Valorie's passion is to work with pre-schoolers who have many years of education in front of them. Take the time when one of Valorie's pre-school children - now a first-grader - happened to meet Valorie in the hallway at school. Valorie immediately recognized the youngster by name, as well as, the unhappy expression on her face. It seems that the class bully had been teasing the girl- calling her ugly. Transforming this unexpected encounter into a teachable moment resulted in on-the-spot role-playing. "You be the boy and I'll be you and we'll figure out how to handle this situation," she said. "Okay," said the little girl, "You're ugly." "Well, I'm better than you are in school," said Valorie who clicked her heels and demonstrated walking away from the confrontation. The girl was absolutely

gleeful because now she had a strategy for countering the number one jerk in the first grade.

Several times in my remarks, I have stated that Valorie encourages people to think outside the box. Let's think about that for a moment. Thinking outside the box can be dangerous.....think about it. We live in boxes called homes.....they protect us. We work in boxes called offices (or cubicles, or custodian closets or wherever our buildings can find space for us school psychologists). These places protect us.....sometimes better than others and typically less well than our homes. Nonetheless, they serve to protect. Thinking, let alone stepping, outside the box requires courage....courage to leave the personal comfort of the known for the frightening nature of the unknown - leave the comfort of one's social support network of professional colleagues, some of whom choose the comfort and security of "the box" over the perceived and, in some instances, very real dangers of stepping outside.

Thinking outside the box requires strong conviction....in Valorie's case, her primary conviction was that we could find a way to better serve children. Her efforts over the years spanned the system: child, family, building, school system, her profession's state and regional organizations, and beyond.

We know that even as state leaders, our ultimate duty is to the children we are serving. Valorie's conviction to better serve children is reflected by the written testimony of one of her parents.

"Since my son's diagnosis of ADHD and subsequent behavioral issues, I have dealt with countless educators, administrators, and counselors. Mrs. Wolcott Mendelson has stood head and shoulders above each and every other person who has had any input into my son's situation. Even though my son has not attended (her school) for four years, Mrs. Wolcott Mendelson has continued to be a main member of his IEP team at my request. She, unlike most others, has always been expeditious in returning my phone calls and e-mails, and has made herself available at all times, whether during regular school hours, after school... My personal feeling is that there can be no candidate more deserving of this award. (James Scruton, parent)

When we were trained as interns, we were taught about the importance of advocating for children no matter what the circumstance. As years pass, it is easy for the initial passion to become dull. But not for Valorie. She has continued to be motivated by her values and beliefs. Over many years she has transformed her values and beliefs into action, leadership and advocacy. It has been many years, many experiences and much heart felt admiration that makes me so very pleased to be the one to present the Clyde V. Bartlett award to Valorie Wolcott Mendelson !