

Oak Ridge Institute for Continued Learning
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 22, 2011)

"The ORICL and Roane State partnership is an outstanding vehicle for providing life-long learning opportunities for the Oak Ridge citizens. We have been honored to have ORICL and the ORICL members on our campus. They add so much richness to the educational experiences offered on the Oak Ridge Branch Campus. ORICL is an organization that needs to be modeled in all of Tennessee's 95 counties." – Gary Goff, President, Roane State Community College

My friend, Gary Goff, kindly agreed to provide the above quote regarding the relationship between Oak Ridge Institute for Continued Learning and Roane State Community College. I believe he has captured the essence of ORICL and proudly promotes such educational organizations be created across Tennessee. I agree. To learn more about ORICL, go to: <http://www.discoveret.org/oricl/>

My personal experience with ORICL has been to provide Oak Ridge History programs over the years. I have thoroughly enjoyed each opportunity to teach in the excellent program. Remember now that I am "teaching" history to folks who actually lived much of what I am trying to bring to life. I have found them kind when I miss a detail and helpful to fill in the gaps from my inexperience. Together we have learned more about our history and together we have had really great fun.

In addition to Gary, I am indebted to several others who have provided research materials and photographs illustrating the history of ORICL. First and foremost has been Murray Rosenthal. Owen Driskill, Joe McGrory, Laura Bowles, Don Miller and encouragement from several others.

The Oak Ridge Institute for Continued Learning or "ORICL" as it is fondly known, is one of the many things that exist in Oak Ridge that are all too often taken for granted by us citizens who just come to expect such excellence as routine. In Oak Ridge the normally high level of quality in all we have is expected and all too often we fail to realize how very special such organization and opportunities are.

We fail to recognize the value they bring to each of our lives. We fail to notice that other communities or cities surrounding us don't have anything even close to ORICL. It is noteworthy to again look at the last sentence of Dr. Goff's quote above. ORICL should indeed be a model for other counties, as he states, but I say it should be a model for other states and even other nations.

ORICL is a jewel in our crown that glows well beyond the "glow in the dark" that Oak Ridge is often said to exhibit, and though said half-jokingly, this comment all too often reflects the sentiment of misunderstanding of all things Oak Ridge. It is easier to just joke about us than to actually try and understand such things as ORICL. Let me take you back in time and help us all better appreciate this phenomenon that has come to be ORICL and that professional educator, Dr. Goff, cites as a model for others.

The history of ORICL started with Murray Rosenthal some 16 years ago, in 1995, at a birthday dinner in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In his own words, Murray takes us back to that beginning and brings us up to the 10th anniversary of that special organization he helped create in a speech he presented at that milestone in the history of the phenomenon that has come to be known by the simple acronym, ORICL.

THE FORMATION OF ORICL by: Murray Rosenthal

"For me, ORICL started at a birthday dinner in Chapel Hill, North Carolina that Mimi and I attended in 1995. People at the dinner kept talking about what they were doing at something called "DILR," which I learned was the Duke Institute for Learning in Retirement. DILR is sponsored by Duke University in Durham, and on a subsequent visit to Chapel Hill, our friends took us to see the DILR facility and told us more about it.

"The more I learned about DILR, the more attractive it looked, and I concluded that a program like it would be perfect for Oak Ridge. So when we returned home, I called Roane State President Sherry Hoppe and suggested that Roane State create something like DILR. Sherry said she would look into it, and later I got a call from Dean Loretta Friend, who proposed a meeting.

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"I invited Marion Alexander, Dick Smyser, Dot Hightower, and Howie Adler to go to the meeting with me. Loretta brought faculty member Janet Evans, which was the first of many important things she did for us. Janet had had experience with continuing education and knew the territory, and she was about to retire.

"I said to Loretta that if Roane State would create a DILR-like program, we would help. She responded that if we would we create a program, Roane State would help. After talking it over, we accepted Loretta's proposal.

"The five of us plus Janet met several times and outlined what had to be done. Then we invited six others to join us, generally selecting people for specific responsibilities. Among them was Harwell Smith, whom we knew had the experience and ability to serve as treasurer. That was a fortunate choice because Harwell quickly set up the financial procedures and programs that we had to have.

"I should mention that we were also fortunate that the Financial Vice President of Roane State was Bill Fuqua. I had expected Roane State to impose a lot of limits and restrictions on us. But Bill granted us a great deal of freedom. Happily, I don't think we have ever violated his trust.

"Loretta suggested that we hold a public meeting to assess interest before proceeding, and we agreed to that. We wrote an invitation letter and assembled a mailing list of over 1,000 using Elderhostel and Friends of ORNL distribution lists, plus the names of others we thought of.

"The committee then met to stuff envelopes, and we wrote individual notes on the letters to those we knew. The public meeting was held in September, 1997, at the old Roane State building on the Turnpike. Many of you were there.

"We had thought that an attendance of 30 to 50 would be adequate to demonstrate interest. But to our delight, an overflow crowd of 243 came, and we had to have several parallel sessions to handle them all. On a questionnaire that we passed out, 92% of those present said that probably they would join.

"With that endorsement, Janet and I met with Sherry and Loretta a few days later and signed an agreement that committed us to proceed. In the agreement, we said that we would organize and manage the program and Roane State would provide classrooms, an office, and access to secretarial and administrative help. Sherry advanced us \$800 to get started.

"Now that we were in business, Elizabeth Richardson, who was on the Committee, got help from attorney David Flitcroft and drew up a set of bylaws. Under them, the Organizing Committee became the Board of Directors, and we adopted the ORICL name.

"I became President and Janet became Vice-President. Janet had observed at an early meeting that Dot Hightower was the only one who had brought a notebook, so Dot became the Secretary. And, of course, Harwell became Treasurer.

"Marion Alexander volunteered to chair the critically important Curriculum Committee, and with Janet and Ray Adams as members, recruited the first faculty and readied 19 courses for presentation, all in 7 weeks!

"Janet quickly created the catalog and had it printed. With her experience at Roane State, she knew we would need an automated system for registration and recruited her husband Paul to write a computer program that made it possible for us to get everyone registered and assigned to classes.

"The first semester began in February of 1998. Some 262 people signed up, paying \$35 for that term. After that we established annual memberships. Most of the courses were given in the Roane State building on Emory Valley Road. Many had overflow registration.

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"Paul's program included a lottery that determined who would get in a course if it was oversubscribed, and, indeed, many were.

"The Board included several former teachers who thought that class size should be restricted to promote discussion, but with the large enrollment, we had to abandon that idea and fill the classrooms with all they would hold.

"At a meeting of the Board, I had asked every member to bring in ideas for courses. One of the ideas was a course on the Dead Sea scrolls, and Dot said she had heard that a retired professor named Bob Jones who lived in Loudon County was an expert on them.

"Marion called Bob, and he said he would be glad to teach if first he could give a course on Job. He lectured about Job the first semester, and then he gave a course on the scrolls, and following that he taught an ORICL course every semester for ten years until retiring this fall! Many teachers have taught multiple courses, but I doubt that Bob's record will ever be broken.

"Also among the first courses was one on history by Gene Pickel, a famous Oak Ridge High School teacher whose classes had included the children of most of us. I registered for it, but it was oversubscribed and the computer program kicked me out. I was sorry to miss the cut, but my rejection turned out to be useful. People who didn't get in a course could be told that even the ORICL president didn't get the one he most wanted.

"But I did get into one of Gene's courses later and discovered that sometimes he got confused about which generation he was teaching. During a lecture on the Great Depression, he said to the class, 'Why don't you go home and ask your parents what life was like during the depression.' It took him a moment to recognize why the room had broken up in laughter.

Next we will continue Murray's history and also learn from Jay Searcy what he thinks about ORICL.

Please note that early registration for ORICL 2011 classes ends August 24, 2011. Sign up NOW, go to: <http://www.discoveret.org/oricl/>. Of course you may register at anytime, but the earlier you register the more likely you are to get the classes you want.

The 2011 season's kickoff event was held Saturday, August 13, 2011, and featured humorist Sam Venable. The Pollard Auditorium was filled! We learned to speak Sam Venable's version of the English language as spoken by East Tennesseans. I have to admit I understood every word...

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2011 Kick Off Event held at the Pollard Auditorium was attended by many who are looking forward to another very good year of ORICL classes



Sam Venable, Knoxville News Sentinel Columnist was the speaker for the ORICL Kick-off event