

Jim Harless – Proud of his service to Oak Ridge
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on February 28, 2012)

Maybe the first notice Oak Ridgers had of a man named James D. (Jim) Harless was when his father, James W. Harless, a Y-12 Chemical Services employee, was featured in an article in the *Y-12 Bulletin* for March 29, 1967. The article announced the attendance of the Harless family at their son's graduation exercises on Saturday, March 18, 1967, at the University of Tennessee.

It seems young Harless had received his BS degree in education, with a major in biology. Jim sent this information to me via a copy of the *Y-12 Bulletin*. I must remind readers that they can find these historic publications on the Y-12 public web site. Just go to the following link:
http://www.y12.doe.gov/about/history/historical_media.php .

There you will find the *Y-12 Bulletin* from 1947 to 1972. More are being added until we have access to these historic bulletins all the way up to the current B&W Y-12 Times publications. These old bulletins are so popular that I have been accused of causing one lady to "lose her laptop" because her dad, who was in a nursing home, would not return her computer because he enjoyed reading these old bulletins.

James D. Harless has worked for the State of Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Department of Energy Oversight Program of the TDEC Environmental Monitoring Program for the last 10 years. He retired in June 2011 as Manager of the department. He and his wife Melanie are enjoying some long awaited travel and relaxation. But they admit to being glad to return to Oak Ridge after each trip.

The monitoring and oversight for which Jim was responsible is performed in compliance with the Tennessee Oversight Agreement with DOE, signed in 1991. The program he managed is one of the three programs that perform services of environmental monitoring and oversight of DOE Oak Ridge Reservation work both on and off site.

Jim worked with his department staff to implement the superfund laws and the Federal Facility Agreement for the Oak Ridge Reservation. His was one of five program sections of TDEC DOE Oversight, based in Oak Ridge. He has seen a lot of things happen and worked hard to help assure the environmental issues were addressed properly.

Prior to his work with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation for the support of agreements for TDEC with regard to the Oak Ridge Reservation and other environmental oversight work in East Tennessee, Jim worked with the University of Tennessee Municipal Technical Advisory Service.

There he worked in support of the Tennessee state Superfund laws, and for Construction Grants and Loans, for technical assistance to local governments with regard to potable water, wastewater treatment, and for superfund technical assistance from 1987 to 1991.

From 1973 to 1987, Jim worked for the Oak Ridge City Government. His primary role was that of Environmental Health Supervisor of an independent City Public Health Department, the only one in Tennessee. I am pleased to have written earlier in *Historically Speaking* about Jim and his work for the City.

Prior to his service to our city he worked for the State of Georgia. His service there was as a Senior Sanitarian in Walker County Public Health, from 1967 to 1973. He has a BS in Natural Science from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and an MS in Health and Safety, also from UT.

Having lived in Oak Ridge since 1973, Jim and Melanie are very proud to be Oak Ridgers. Jim is very proud of the creative manner in which he has been able to address environmental service delivery throughout his career serving the city he has grown to admire.

He takes particular pride in having "invented and created" both independent monitoring and oversight of both DOE and DOE contractor operations. This had not been done before within Tennessee and much of it never done any place else in the nation.

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His monitoring program staff found levels of DOE contaminants both on and off-site from Oak Ridge DOE but often the levels of offsite contamination were not a substantial defined hazard. He takes pride in not ever allowing such a hazard to develop.

Jim cited his most frustrating challenge during his career serving Oak Ridge as seeing both DOE and contractor staff, as well as his TDEC oversight managers and staff try to accomplish clean up of environmental issues with, all too often, a budget that was not adequate to meet the milestones agreed upon. That frustrating situation was hard on both the regulator and those attempting to meet the regulations.

Jim says he has worked with a great number of fine hard working people in TDEC and UT. The professional efforts and hard work of those peers and field staff was unsurpassed. He also considers himself most fortunate to have never missed a day of work during his entire working career.

I asked him to comment on the recent Mercury situation. He responded with, "I saw local and Nashville water pollution staff working this issue. They want the creek [East Fork Poplar Creek] as clean as possible, and HG [mercury] is not good to the environment. I think their effort is on solid ground, and given all the long term spills by Y-12, I would like to see it do all that is possible and in the least bit within the technology and ability to deal with HG clean up. "

Jim continued, "My Dad was proud of Y-12, you will recall he was in Chemical Operations. He felt the bomb saved his life. Otherwise he would have likely died in the Pacific in World War II, if the bomb had not ended the war."

"I would be proud of Y-12 if it would strive to do all that is possible to clean Oak Ridge environment, given the war mission was accomplished successfully. Why not win the war against serious pollution. Can the minds, the will, and the resources available to Y-12 push for respect and hold high consideration for local environmental quality.

"I hope DOE and Y-12 will consider their efforts successful when they strive for and accomplish high quality clean up. And, not apply attorneys and effort and energy and resources toward trying to minimize or get away from Oak Ridge and East TN.

There you see the regulator lingering into retirement. Jim has not lost sight of the importance of clean up and environmental stewardship. He remains true to his education, experience and dedication. The environmental cleanup is an important element in the overall DOE mission here in Oak Ridge.

Jim's hobbies from here forward include riding his newly purchased motorcycle and riding a bicycle more at Cades Cove. Jim has always enjoyed nature photography and with the current digital technology, he is enjoying it even more.

Jim & Melanie are enjoying the retirement by hiking in the Smoky Mountains, taking in more plays and movies as well as spending time with the grandchildren. Both of them enjoy writing, she about their travels and he in support of his nature photography.

Jim concludes with, "We are hopeful that our own personal health status will allow us some added time to enjoy these activities as long as possible."

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James D. Harless

Jim Harless as he appeared in 1967 when graduating from UT



Jim Harless not long before retirement