

Classification Talks Report Two Interesting Backgrounds

Gene Walker and Helen Wheeler gave classification talks last week, as they talked about banking and chamber of commerce activities.

HELEN WHEELER included some activities at OSU. She said she was interested in advertising and public relations. She recalled being director of the "Orange Peel," which had gone on for seven years at O State. It was the first year for the show to make a profit. She also told about the American Advertising Federation ad team, sponsored by Chrysler and Bank of America. Both gave her "invaluable experience" in how to start and finish a project, she said.

She also told about her experience in ADV Films, a target marketing activity.

Helen is married to a McAlester High School coach, Vic Wheeler. She had lived in Houston, but he was from Stroud, a town of 2,500, she related. So she moved where he accepted a job offer. That was at Pawnee, his first job in Oklahoma. She found a job working for the chamber of commerce at nearby Stillwater.

So when her husband accepted a job in McAlester, she talked to Mary Hefebain at the chamber office here. She worked for Mary, where she said she worked hard to define what we were doing and offering chamber members.

When Mary retired, she became executive director of the chamber.

She said the Chamber Legislative Committee is busy, and that in the chamber membership drive, 62 percent joined in the first two days.

The chamber has a website and "a lot of visitors." The chamber also works closely with the Economic Development Service, she stated.

The Wheelers have bought their first home here, and she said they would like to live here for a while. She called herself "very fortunate."

H. GENE WALKER Gene said he and his wife Carol, have just celebrated their 44th wedding anniversary. They have two sons. The oldest, Butch, is married with five children, two of whom were adopted from Korea. He is in Little Rock, and is vice president for Support Services with Family Life, part of Campus Crusade for Christ.

Their other son is Scott Walker, associate pastor of The Kings House in McAlester. He is married and their two children were adopted, from Mexico.

Gene and his wife moved to McAlester from Lawton, in 1974. He was city manager. They later decided to stay in McAlester. "I am proud of my

family, and love McAlester," he said.

Gene spent 14 years in manufacturing, sales and marketing for Meeco Marinas and was CEO.

He was employed by The Bank NA and then Arvest Bank. He has been in banking for 12 years and has been president of the Arvest banks in McAlester and Eufaula for three years.

Gene said Arvest Bank purchased Superior Bank in 2003 and he has branch managers at both locations. In that way, "I am able to focus my attention primarily to Community Relations and Commercial Lending," he said. "My private business experience has been very valuable to me and to my customers, in understanding the needs of business."

Gene said the "latest numbers" he has seen show the Arvest Bank Group at \$9 billion and 200 locations in four states. Arvest also owns its own mortgage company and credit card company, and Superior Finance Co. Yet Arvest "prides itself on being a community bank," he stated, "based on the way it is organized.

However, Arvest "gives a lot of autonomy to local banks, so that we are able to respond to local needs and issues," he said.

In McAlester, Arvest organized a board, consisting of Sam Magdalena, Sue Bollinger, Randy Saunier, of McAlester, Orlean Smith of Canadian, and Brian Speligene from Eufaula.

Arvest is owned by the Walton Family, but not WalMart, Walker explained. "Arvest is privately held." Yet Jim Walton, son of Sam Walton, is chairman of the board of Arvest Bank Group. He has been to McAlester "to visit us" at least annually.

Arvest has a "large loan portfolio. I have been impressed with the way Arvest looks at loan proposals," said Gene.

"We like to make good loans, but so does every other banker I know."

He said Arvest is "not reluctant to take on big projects and we're not fast to bail out on customers who experience the bad times."

Gene said Arvest "has been a very good experience for me. They believe in running a bank the way it needs to be run, and treat their people and customers as a priority."

Arvest has TV commercials on which a customer says, "My name is Karen and I am a very happy 'Arvest customer..."

"Well," he said, "My name is Gene and I am a very happy Arvest Banker."

Local Habitat For Humanity Has Lot of Interest, Speaker Says

Lots of people are interested in a Habitat for Humanity project for this area, Linda Clark told us Jan. 2.

Ms. Clark said she has applied for a local board to be set up and is trying to "establish an affiliate."

Affiliates are independent, locally run, nonprofit organizations. Each affiliate coordinates all aspects of the Habitat home building in its local area, she revealed—fund raising, building sites selections, partner family selection and support, house construction and mortgage servicing.

But churches, Lowe's and a window supplier are interested in helping

with the project, she reported.

There are over 5,000,000 American families which pay more than half of their income for housing, the speaker pointed out. They endure "overcrowded conditions and live in houses with severe physical deficiencies," she said. "While the number of families in poverty is growing, the number of affordable rental units is shrinking."

She said that the "high cost of housing leaves low-income families little money for other basic necessities like food, clothing or health care.

See Habitat on Page 2

Habitat for Humanity is “a working partnership” to break the cycle of poverty, she stated. “Thousands of low-income families have found new hope in the form of affordable housing.”

Through the program, people who qualify can buy a non-profit, no interest home using volunteer labor. The owner uses “sweat equity hours” to help build their own home, Ms. Clark related. Donations of money and materials also help.

The speaker said she is from the Eufaula area and works for Lowe’s, but not when she is working on Habitat for Humanity.

There are 2,500 families living below 50 percent of the minimum income of this area, she said.

It is “so great for kids” to grow up in this area, with its morals and values, she said.

“I think this is a great program for McAlester, she added.

Get Kids Involved in Sports *But Don’t Specialize Too Early, Says Speaker*

There are more sports for boys and girls than ever before, but young people should not “specialize” in any sport until they see which ones have scholarships available, said a former principal and coach at last week’s meeting.

Ed Kennedy, a native of Wilburton who said he coached and was a school principal at Tahlequah and was employed by universities in Idaho, brought the program. Kennedy presently is a federal grant coordinator for Eufaula Public Schools. However, he said he is “looking” at the possibility of establishing a fitness center in Eufaula.

Kennedy said he is a single parent, and has two daughters who are active in sports. His older daughter is involved in an “Olympic development program” in Idaho. His other daughter is in San Antonio, Texas and is a runner. However, the younger daughter is a “sprinter,” and there are no college scholarships available for short distance female runners, he said.

He said he got Glen Stone, McAlester native and track coach at Eastern Oklahoma State College, to work with her about learning how to run the hurdles.

There are scholarships for women students who run the hurdles, he explained.

A few years ago there were no women’s sports except basketball, he noted. He recommended “getting kids involved in athletics,” although not necessarily a competitive sport. They are less likely to turn to alcohol or drugs, he said.

At 9 or 10 years of age, kids are more interested in “what they’re going to eat after the game.” The speaker said he is “big on letting kids be kids.”

They can pick a sports specialty later. The best “skill kids grow up playing soccer,” he noted. Later they can decide which sport they like best and the sport which can best help them get an education.

“Maybe it’s mom and dad who get kids involved in all these things.”

Kennedy said he likes “Micro-Soccer,” because there are four or five on a team. “Everybody gets playing time,” and several games can be played at the same time.

Parental support is good here, for youth activities, he said. He also commended activities of the Boys and Girls Club of McAlester.

Kennedy was introduced by Lynn Edwards, last week’s program chairman.

United Way ‘Puts Back’ \$1.4 Million

McAlester United Way Official Yvette Martin told us Jan. 9 of some of the new United Way programs that “put back” \$1.4 million in the amount of services.

The Duffle Bag Program, Yvette said, provided 200 duffle bags last year, to youths recommended by DHS or the Youth Shelter.

Most of the items owned by these young people were carried in Wal-Mart sacks or trash bags, she said.

The United Way Board decided to continue the Duffle Bag Program each year, she reported.

From 9,000 to 10,000 personal care kits were given to young people.

This program provided lotion, deodorant, tooth brushes, sun screen, etc.

County jail inmates helped pack the kits. Coaches and teachers tell the students about personal hygiene.

There are enough of the kits to carry out the Personal Care Kit Program

for three or four more years, Yvette stated.

The Dental Hygiene Education Program in February, gives toothbrushes to all first and second graders in the county.

May 11 and 12 are part of the Day of Caring Program. Adults can help by reading to kids. There are lots of things we can do, that make a big difference, she noted.

“Extreme Makeover, Community Edition is another program.

The United Way works with the annual Food Drive by Postal Workers.

“Stuff the Bus” is a program for county schools, held in early August. It provides school items for students in the county.

There are Day of Caring sponsors who give T-shirts with their names on the back.

The general public can participate one way or another, in most of these programs, by contacting the McAlester United Way office.

Attendance, Visitors, and Handshakers

The club has had four meetings in the last five weeks, due to the weather. Teenagers have learned to get along without TV, and men have learned how to get along without NFL football games. (But the ice and snow have kept the beer cold, Randy says.)

On Jan. 2, there were 43 attending the meeting. Harlin Pinkerton of Sand Springs was a visiting Rotarian, and Leslie James was a guest of Shirley Fleming.

First reading was held for Chris Smith.

On Jan. 9, there were 46 in attendance. Merrie Brenner was a guest of Phil. Student guests were Amelia Judge and Matthew Spinks. Second reading was held for Chris Smith.

On Jan. 23 there were 42 Rotarians present and no guests.

Last week, 41 attended and we had two guests. Visitors were Tom Cobb, Assistant District Governor, and Arlene Sullivan of Realty World, a guest of Sandy Brock-Bahe.

HANSHAKERS-The handshaker Jan. 23 was Jim Thompson, who handed the dollar to Clem Santine. On Jan. 9, Orlean Smith gave the dollar to Gary Boyd for being such a good piano player.

On Jan. 2, Shirley Fleming thought she was giving a dollar to the Salvation Army, but Don Harris may have stuck it in his pocket. On Jan. 16, those who came to the meeting said it was too cold to shake hands.

And last week Bob Bahe gave the dollar to the Boys and Girls Club, but Lynn Edwards, also may have stuck it in his pocket.