



Many Voices Working for the Community

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Oak Ridge Oral History Steering Committee Formed

A steering committee has been formed to oversee the establishment and operation of a comprehensive Oak Ridge oral history program. The objective of the program is to provide public access to existing oral histories and to continue gathering additional histories of people who worked and lived in Oak Ridge before, during, and after the Manhattan Project, plus the Cold War Years to the present.

Steve Stow, member of the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB) and former director of the American Museum of Science and Energy, proposed the idea of jumpstarting the oral history program to the Executive Committee of ORSSAB in 2007. The committee asked Stow to form an ad hoc group of interested persons to study the feasibility of establishing a comprehensive oral history program for Oak Ridge. ORSSAB is a citizens' panel chartered by the federal government to offer advice and recommendations on the Department of Energy's (DOE) cleanup operations on the Oak Ridge Reservation.

"More than 300 oral histories have been conducted over the years with individuals who worked at the three main plants during and after the Manhattan Project," said Stow. "But they were conducted by various organizations and are stored in various locations. They are not easily accessible to researchers and interested individuals. I believe all of these interviews should be consolidated in one all-inclusive program managed by one entity to make these resources more accessible. We also need a mechanism to continue gathering stories."

The ad hoc committee decided to hold a workshop that consisted of representatives of several organizations and individuals interested in the history of Oak Ridge. One of the ideas to come out of the workshop, held in October 2007, was to form a steering committee to oversee the establishment and administration of an oral history program.

The steering committee consists of some of the participants of the workshop and includes representatives from the DOE Oak Ridge Office, ORSSAB, the Oak Ridge Public Library, the American Museum of Science and Energy, the City of Oak Ridge, the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge, the National Nuclear Security Administration/Y-12, the DOE Office of Science and Technical Information, the Tennessee State Library and Archives, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the University of Tennessee Center for Study of War and Society, and two members of the public.

The steering committee had its first meeting in January and decided that the Oak Ridge Public Library will act as the manager of the program. The committee will work with the library to determine how existing oral histories will be catalogued, the final format of interviews, and subjects to be interviewed in the future. A budget is being developed to start and maintain the

program. ORSSAB has pledged \$7,000 in seed money and has recommended that DOE-Oak Ridge endorse the program and support it monetarily.

“We are very excited about the potential of making these materials available for the public and researchers, as well as gathering new stories,” said Kathy McNeilly, director of the Oak Ridge Public Library.

“There are many considerations that we have to work out,” said Stow, who is the ORSSAB representative on the steering committee. “We have to figure how and where to store and make available current information. We’re not asking that organizations give up what they have, but we would like to at least get copies of everything that has been done so we can put it all in one place. Some of that material, however, has not been reviewed and cleared for public use. That needs to be done as well. We also have to develop a list of potential interviewees to add to the collection.

“The ultimate goal is to make all oral histories available in digital format on the Internet, allowing researchers to search for specific themes, subjects, individuals, and so on,” said Stow.

The steering committee will have a table in the library lobby during the Secret City Festival in June, said McNeilly. “We plan to have forms available so we can gather information from people who worked here and may be visiting the area for a few days. We want to get biographical and contact information so we can follow up with them later.”

The steering committee has met three times since its initial organizational meeting in January. It will continue to meet about every month until the program is up and running.

For more information about the Oak Ridge oral history program contact Kathy McNeilly at the Oak Ridge Public Library, 865-425-3455.

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