

History of the Greater Dane County Talented & Gifted Network **As remembered by Ruth Robinson, February 2007**

Thanks to Dr. Clasen at the Making a Difference Breakfast on February 27, I learned along with everyone else, that the roots of this Network go back to the early 1980's when Mary Klein from Lodi and Welda (then Swed) Simousek from DeForest met for lunch periodically to share ideas about how to best provide services for gifted kids in their districts.

In 1981, Bob and Donna Rae Clasen started the College for Kids Program on the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Shortly after that, with Bob as the major contact at the University for College for Kids and through his association with Mary and Welda, the network expanded as part of the University Extension Outreach. The original name was U-TAG, representing University Outreach for Talented and Gifted.

Mary Klein presided over the group for all the years that the group was organized and supported by the University Extension Outreach Office and Bob Clasen's supervision. At that time, the meetings were rotated around to different school settings in the area. We met in activity rooms, classrooms, auditoriums, libraries, any spare space available, often enjoying the school lunch of the day!

By 1987 when State Standard (t) became part of the statute, Dr. Ellie Shatz moved from District TAG Coordinator in the Monona Grove School District to the first Consultant for Gifted Education at the Department of Public Instruction. Welda Simousek replaced Ellie and stayed in the position until it was eliminated in the early 1990's. Currently, Chrys Mursky serves in the Gifted Consultant's Office as the position was restored in the 2005-2007 biennium. Chrys also attended the U-TAG meetings for many years when she was a district Gifted Coordinator. As Bob noted at the breakfast, the state leadership in gifted education has all come from this group!

As the number of districts with Gifted Coordinators increased with the requirements of Standard 't', the circle at U-TAG meetings got larger too. Bob would say, "Dane County is a state of mind, not a geographic boundary." This is so true since the membership extended from Lodi, Portage, and DeForest, to Evansville, Monroe, and many other communities in and around Dane County.

Shortly after Dr. Clasen retired in 1996, UW-Extension could no longer support the group with clerical or financial assistance. However, the extension office through Julie Seaborg, Karen Fisk, Elaine Seitz, Nancy Blake and others continued as a source of information about professional development opportunities. The loss of clerical assistance was huge in the development and production of the Yahara River Writer's Anthology.

For a few years we continued to meet in a different district each time - the Cambridge Village Center, a meeting room at the Cherokee Country Club, the District Offices of the Middleton Community District, and probably a few other sites I am forgetting. Judy Peppard (formerly with the Madison Diocese, now at DPI) first arranged for the group to meet at the Bishop O'Connell Center. It has been wonderful knowing where the meetings are going to be, how long it takes to get there, where to park, and how to find the room! When the location changed from month to month it was always an adventure!

Separating from the UW-Extension was a scary transition for us as a group. How do we decide a fee structure that would sustain all of the activities established for our students? Who would keep records, minutes, and agendas for the organization without the clerical support of the

UW-Extension office? Well, look around you - - - many of the people sitting with you stepped up to the tasks required to keep the train moving!

Migs Percy was TAG Coordinator in Middleton and was instrumental in setting up a checking and savings account for the organization. She served as treasurer until she retired. Suzanne Matiash from Mount Horeb took over the treasurer's position for several years until she retired also. It is very helpful to have continuity in that position and was especially important as we found out if we could stand on our own two feet, without the support and organization of the University.

Chrys Mursky, Wendy Wegenke (New Glarus and then Sun Prairie), Margie Brunette (Monroe), Carol Wright (Monona Grove) and Martha Barlow (Waunakee) were instrumental in writing and rewriting the bylaws that provided structure for the organization. These meetings were very lively and it is to the credit of every member during those years that the organization survived and is flourishing now. It speaks highly of all the members who, then and now, stepped up to assume responsibilities for various activities that benefit our students.

The 5th and 6th Grade Math Meet was pioneered by Margie Brunette, Monroe, and Wendy Wegenke, then from the Sun Prairie School District.

Robin Carelli, from the Poynette and then Waunakee School District, originated the Fine Arts Weekend at Spring Green many years ago. Robin also arranged for many of the professional development programs that the Network sponsored. Susan Winebrenner and others were sponsored by the Network which assisted many teachers in our districts.

The Yahara River Writer's anthology and Workshop was taken over by me with the help of many members. The Middleton School District handled the printing of the Yahara River Anthology for the years we took over the duties. In fact, it was through our assuming the responsibility for this event and publication that every member district had to take on duties or nothing would happen for the kids!

There are more pieces to this story and I thank you for starting the process of tracking the long history of this group which has had such a far-reaching affect on the gifted and talented students in our care.

Presidents

198?-??	Mary Klein, Lodi School District
???-??	?
1997-98	Linda (Scott) Uttech, Oregon School District
1998-99	
1999-00	Margie Brunette, Monroe School District
2000-01	Ruth Robinson, then from the Evansville Community Schools
2001-02	Jamie Gillespie-Walser, then from the Wisconsin Heights School District
2002-03	Patti Testolin (Coan), then from Monona Grove School District
2003-04	Patti Testolin (Coan), then from Monona Grove School District
2004-05	Yvonne Kohn, Waterloo School District
2005-06	Gretchen Ginter, Jefferson School District, then Lodi
2006-07	Martha Barlow, Waunakee School District
2007-08	Sharon Daly, Cambridge School District