

The guiding spirit of FASE, Dr. Blanche Sommers, is greeted at the annual banquet honoring the emeritus faculty and staff by the host, OU President William S. Banowsky.



The University Creates Its Own Over-the-Hill Gang

By LOUISE BEARD MOORE

Campus old-timers claim that if you stay in Norman long enough, almost everyone you have ever known at the University of Oklahoma will return to revisit scenes of collegiate daring-do, bemoan the disappearance of old landmarks and marvel at the new buildings. But most of all they yearn to encounter their favorite profs, and even an administrator or two. They can't imagine OU without George Sutton, Clayton Feaver, Maurice Merrill, Boyd Gunning, Gene Kuntz, Bill Livezey or Dora McFarland — only a few of the 500 retired faculty, staff and surviving spouses (out of a total of 601) still living in Norman and the immediate area.

Traditionally retired University folks teach a course, write a book, travel, become active in church and civic affairs. Some go into another line of work. But many retirees have felt cut off from the University where they spent so many years. With passing time bringing their former departments under new management, they often felt that the current faculty didn't even know they existed.

But a new cohesion of interest and activity among faculty and staff retirees is evident today, and it all goes back to the summer of 1978 and an idea expressed by then President Paul F. Sharp to about-to-be-retired Dr. Blanche Sommers, veteran professor and former dean of pharmacy. Sharp suggested that Dr. Sommers find some way to bring retirees back into the campus fold.

Blanche Sommers is a notable dynamo lady with a flair for getting things done. She liked Sharp's idea. Sharp sent her to David A. Burr, OU vice president for University Affairs, whose office has continued to be the retired faculty program's official home.

A steering committee of retired personnel was set up, calling itself FASE (acronym for Faculty and Staff Emeritus.) The plan thoughtfully included FASEA, an auxiliary group comprised of widows of faculty and staff. (Thus far there are no widowers in the group.)

FASE went public in October of 1978 with a welcoming reception for OU's new president, Dr. William S.

Banowsky, held in University House, formerly the home of OU presidents. Responding to the warmth of the occasion, Banowsky gave limelight status to the group by announcing that he intended to have the retired faculty and staff as his guests for dinner each year.

That did it. By spring 1979 the pattern was set. With that year's newly retiring faculty members as special guests, the emeritus faculty and staff were invited first to a President's Concert in Holmberg Hall, then to a reception in University House and dinner in the Union Ballroom. It was well attended. Blanche Sommers recalls that one faculty member came in a wheelchair and several used canes. The third annual dinner was held this April and again filled the ballroom.

But there is more to FASE than a once-a-year banquet. The organization is concerned with helping faculty and staff retirees on many fronts. Two recent seminars are cases in point.

At the first, David Ross Boyd professor of law, Dr. R. Dale Vliet, counseled his older colleagues on estate

planning, a topic which drew so many that follow-up sessions had to be scheduled.

In March Pharmacy Dean Rodney Ice brought three of his faculty members to Norman from the Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City for a drug information workshop, "You and the Drugs You Take." Prescription and over-the-counter drugs were discussed, their intended and side effects, the problems in taking different drugs in combination, with the experts available for questions from the audience.

Another seminar is planned for August 10 on the subject of insurance, particularly university group insurance. Committees of the FASE organization also are studying retirement benefits, cost-of-living and supplemental retirement payments.

FASE had a great deal of input in the establishment of the new Gerontology Center at the OU Health Sciences Center, directed by Dr. Joseph H. Holtzman, which serves as an educational agency for various HSC curricula, and for health care providers

and consumer groups throughout Oklahoma, and as a center for research in the field of aging. In March the Gerontology Center co-sponsored with FASE a free public lecture by nationally noted human relations consultant Dr. Zahea Nappa, "Beginning Again: Myths and Stereotypes of Aging in a Youth-Oriented Society."

Dr. Sommers explains that FASE had a hand in making available discount cards for retirees from some 30 local merchants (also available to other Norman senior citizens). The group also is studying seriously the possibility of a faculty-staff retirement village in Norman.

Although Dr. Sommers "spark-plugs" the FASE organization, she points out that the 19-member steering committee, which meets periodically for lunch, has no designated officers. Serving on the committee are Harold Keith, longtime OU sports information director and author; Dr. Horace Bliss and Dr. Bernard Heston, chemistry; Dr. George Goodman, botany; Dr. J. Teague Self, zoology; Dr. Eugene Springer and Eunice Lewis, mathematics; Mildred Andrews Boggess and Dr. Robert Ross, music; Dr. Virginia Morris, physical education; former Vice President Thurman J. White, continuing education; Savoie Lottinville, OU Press director-emeritus; Dr. John Morris, geography; Dr. Funston Gaither, education; Robert V. Peterson, journalism, and Mrs. Opal Harnal Huneke, who is the FASEA representative.

David Burr and Assistant Vice President for University Affairs Chris Brown are ex-officio representatives to the FASE committee, and Mrs. Jerry Snow is the University Af-

Active faculty members have been very supportive in help with FASE seminars on estate planning, drug information and insurance. At left, Law Professor R. Dale Vliet talks with Mrs. Elmer Lucas, widow of the veteran member of the University geology faculty.



fairs staff person working with FASE and FASEA.

Besides Mrs. Huneke, the FASEA includes on its steering committee Mrs. Carl Ritzman, Mrs. Leslie H. Rice, Mrs. A. M. de la Torre, Mrs. John Bruce, Mrs. W. A. Willibrand, Mrs. Ralph Bienfang and Mrs. Maude Salyer.

Many members of the retirees organization have become involved in the oral archives project in the OU Center for Studies in Higher Education. Dr. Herbert R. Hengst, the center's director (who is far from retired, by the way), has been assembling oral history tapes for the Western History Collections of memoirs of old-time faculty members. One tape which will be missing from Hengst's fascinating collection is the interview he had just scheduled with Snorter Luster when that witty, longtime ath-

letic staff member died earlier this year.

Support of Norman United Way drive has been another FASE project. The retirees have been in the forefront of University participation in the United Way with a much higher percentage of contributors than the active faculty and staff.


It's high time that this article dealt in more detail with Dr. Horace Bliss, referred to locally as "Prof. Retirement." Bliss taught chemistry at OU from 1946 to 1973 and has devoted most of his own retirement years to helping his colleagues enjoy theirs. An unofficial gerontology expert, Bliss is a leader of the Cleveland County AIM (Action for Independent Maturity) and AARP (American Association of Retired Persons). He is always on call for transportation for elderly people or to help with income

tax problems. His expertise benefits not only the faculty retirees organization but also the whole Norman community.

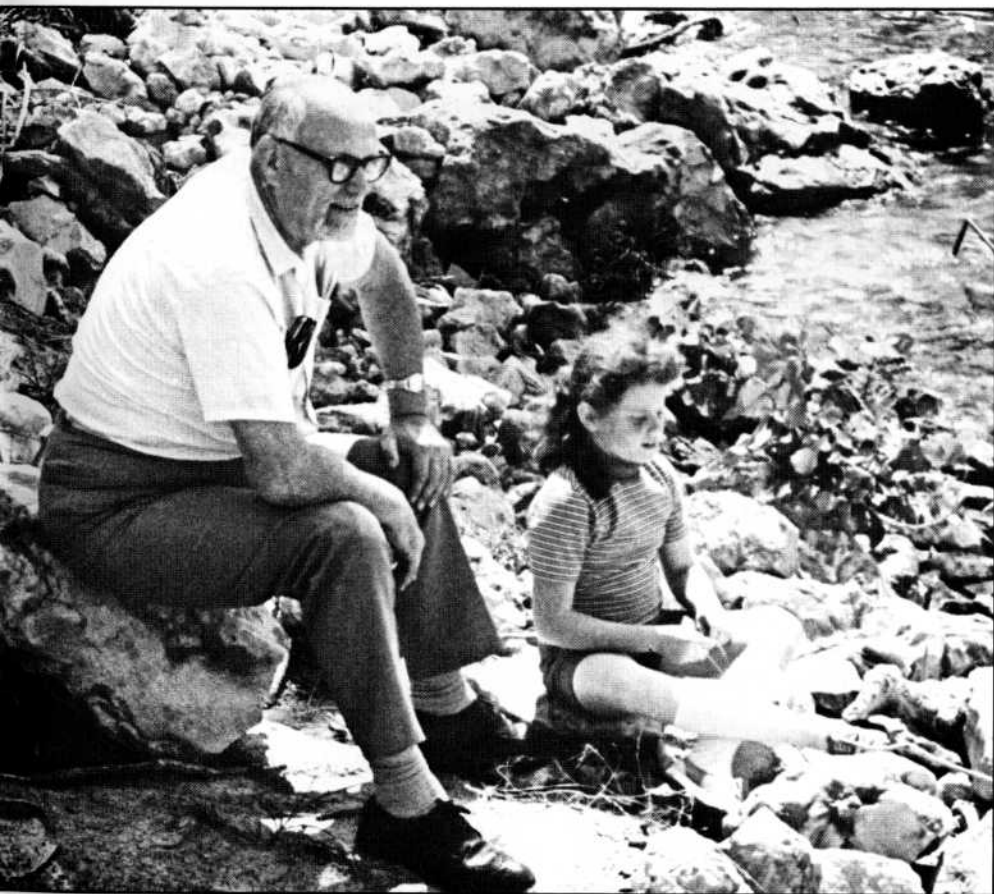
Bliss will remind anyone who will listen that senior citizens have traditionally maintained the highest percentage for voting of any age category — which, he is quick to point out, enhances their influence in politics. He promotes simplification of estate probate procedures and is well versed on issues affecting nursing homes and institutionalization of the elderly.

The retired chemist was instrumental in pushing for the OU Gerontology Center, encouraging the incorporation of more geriatric material into the training of health care professionals. He is particularly interested in more interaction between young people and the elderly in community level activities and civic organizations.

Dr. Dennis Crites, retired this spring after 32 years on the business marketing faculty, is the guiding light of a tax-aid counseling program for the elderly throughout Norman. A number of faculty and staff retirees avail themselves of this free service.

Mandatory retirement at OU is 70 for faculty and staff and age 65 for administrators. Faculty and staff also may opt for retirement at 65 and even earlier with long years of service. They retain group medical insurance, on-campus parking cards, library privileges and athletic ticket priorities. But perhaps most important in the past few years is that they also are accorded the attention of the University they served — in good days and bad — during the most important years of their lives. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *If a poll were taken of former professors whom visiting alumni would most like to see on their trips to the campus, Louise Beard Moore would have to rank in the top 10. For 19 years, from 1952 to her early retirement in 1971, Mrs. Moore was the journalism faculty's adviser to the Oklahoma Daily. The Daily newsroom had been the scene of Louise Beard's early OU triumphs as a member of the Class of 1927. A popular Daily columnist, she also appeared in OU stage productions.*



Dr. Horace Bliss plunged into his retirement years as vigorously as he had lived his teaching career in the department of chemistry. OU's "Prof. Retirement" works for Norman's senior citizens on all fronts, with particular attention to interaction between youth and age in community activities and civic organizations.