

# INTELLECTUAL OASIS FOR THE

*For those adults who need more than television, bridge, golf and small talk, there's a stimulating world of*

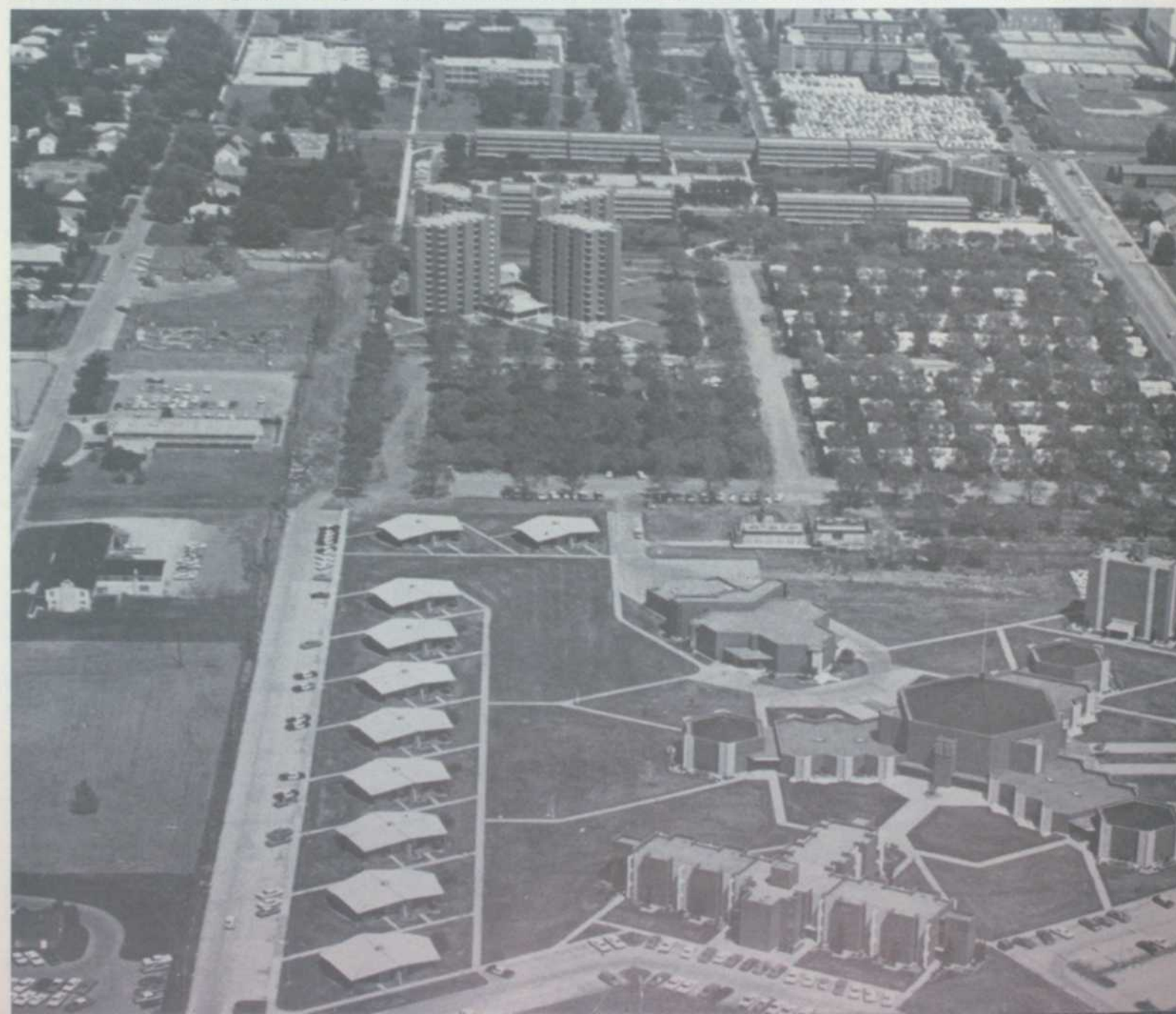
**W**HEN THIS SUBJECT of the increased leisure time of our age comes up, thoughtful people more and more ask, "Leisure for what?" Is all this extra free time to be pooped away on TV watching or spectator sports? Fortunately, many will exercise their body muscles in participant sports and outdoor activities. But are the mind and soul never to be stretched? Is learning, other than on the job, to end with graduation from high school or college?

Many Oklahomans may not realize it, but one of the most interesting efforts of all to find answers is taking place in our state. That is the Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education (OCCE) at the University of Oklahoma. (The OCCE sometimes is known as the Kellogg Center, since it was partly financed by funds from the Kellogg Foundation of Michigan.) The Center runs a variety of short courses, such as management training seminars and industrial refresher ses-

sions for its bread and butter. But the heart of its search for meaningful answers to the question of 20th century man's increased leisure is its liberal arts seminar program.

These seminars are held periodically at the center, usually commencing on a Friday evening and lasting through Saturday afternoon. They are open to any citizen upon payment of the conference fee. Since part of the concept of the seminars is to provide a complete break for the participants

*Located on the southern edge of the campus, the Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education is as impressive from the air as it is by land.*



# TING MINDS

ed for them at the University's OCCE

By CLARKE M. THOMAS

from their normal routine, hotel-like housing at the center is available for the overnight stay. (This also provides an opportunity for informal "bull sessions" by participants during the conference.)

Each seminar weekend is built around a theme. Distinguished professors or knowledgeable "laymen" present papers on the theme, each followed by a general discussion by those attending the seminar. Saturday afternoon at the end of the seminar session

there is a summation by the panelists, followed by a final general discussion. In the past three years such topics as drugs and society, existentialism and conflicts of our time have been the themes. Others have dealt with such diverse subjects as *Woman: The New Problems*, *Focus on a Philosophy*, *History—A Guide to the Future?*, *Religion Tomorrow: A Challenge for Today*, and *Man and Myth*.

**For information about future programs, write Department H, Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education, 1700 Asp Street, Norman, Oklahoma**

The idea is to offer expert opinion and new knowledge on the subject, but also to allow persons gathered from many Oklahoma walks of life to discuss it and to bring to bear on the theme their own particular experiences and reactions. Thus, it is intended to be a healthy blend of the academic and philosophical with the non-academic and practical. In a real sense the seminars provide an intellectual retreat, an "oasis," so to speak, for many Oklahomans. Here they can get new and stimulating ideas not only from the academic world but from like-minded fellow citizens. As one western Oklahoma woman said over coffee at a recent seminar, "There are so few, so very few people in my town who are remotely interested in this sort of intellectual stimulation, in talking about ideas. Fine people, mind you. But I get so hungry intellectually, and just reading by yourself isn't the answer forever. You need to talk it over with other like-minded people."

In some of the larger communities Great Books groups provide an answer. But even with these there is an ingredient of the university environment missing—that of the benefits of trained professors, specialists in the fields under discussion. This is an element which makes the OCCE "experiment" unique. It makes possible the interplay of specialization and the general, something so badly needed in our increasingly compartmentalized age. It makes it possible for the participant from anywhere in Oklahoma to break away from his bread-and-butter specialization to rub minds not only with the scholar but with other laymen coming from diverse backgrounds. Parenthetically, not all professors or experts have been successful

in this OCCE experiment. Those unsure of themselves, or so used to the accepting ways of the note-taking college student that they are upset by probing, knowledgeable questions from adults—eventually these are weeded out. It is said that at OU it has become a mark of distinction for a professor to be asked to appear on these panels. Certainly it helps the public realize the high caliber of the best of our faculty (and wonder if their talents wouldn't be wasted if used only for college students).

The only flaw in this remarkable picture is that it has not had the drawing power that its creators had hoped. Perhaps it's not yet well enough known around Oklahoma, and especially among those who might yearn for such an experience. Or it may be the cost. In this day of expensive weekends \$15 for such a seminar (plus lodging and meals) is not out of line with other forms of entertainment. Still, it may inhibit some. Eventually, perhaps, our society which places so great a premium on education will realize the importance of adult education—or "continuing education" as the OCCE would prefer to call it. Then perhaps there might be some funding of the program (just as we support with taxes the college training of our youngsters) so that the tuition might be brought down within the realm of more pocketbooks.

But in the meantime the OCCE liberal arts seminars, which must be self-supporting, may be doomed unless there is more attendance from around Oklahoma. This would be too bad because here we have a good lead to possible answers for the leisure time questions of our age. Here we have a framework for a mentally stimulating and idea-filled weekend for the interested person, as important to the mind as an outdoor weekend is to the body. (Just ask anyone who has attended one of the seminars.) Here too, we have a chance—to use the words of the western Oklahoma woman quoted earlier—"to build a statewide community of 'scholars,' yes, right here in Oklahoma." *END*

*CLARKE M. THOMAS is editor of the editorial page of the Oklahoma City Times. This article appeared in the Times and is reprinted with permission from the Oklahoma Publishing Co.*

