

ELK GROVE CITIZEN
HISTORY HAPPENED HERE
MORE ON ELK GROVE UNIFIED

by Elizabeth Pinkerton
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Elk Grove Unified School District received my History Gold Star award for 2008 as covered in last week's article. I gave more thought to historical answers for why the district continues to have such success in providing services for students. I also asked some local residents, old-timers as well as newcomers, for their opinions, and today I will tell you about some of the gold stars within the district.

1. Arlene Hein is the superintendent's executive assistant, a position she has held since the district unified in 1959. She attended Franklin Elementary School and graduated from Elk Grove Union High School when they were independent school districts. Because of family issues, Arlene was not able to attend college but she became the secretary for the high school principal, Glen Beeman. When unification began, she was secretary for George Kibby, the new superintendent. She has been there ever since, almost 50 years, and for that entire time, she has also been the secretary for the Board of Education. Is she dedicated? Yes. She could have retired long ago, but she continues to play a key role in Elk Grove Unified. Does she know everything there is to know about EGUSD? Yes, she probably does for in addition to general administration, she has been involved with almost all district operations from personnel to fiscal to construction in one way or another. Consider also that she has only missed two meetings of the Board of Education in all those years, and the Board meets twice a month. The smooth transition from one superintendent to another over the past half century can be credited to Arlene Hein.

2. Elk Grove Graduates have gone on to become outstanding leaders in a variety of fields including the military, athletics, education, and business. I wrote about one last summer—Donald Ralph who is now a Brigadier General in the U. S. Air Force. There are many more. Some are local celebrities, and some are important in California and the nation. Here are just a few of them: Susan Westerberg Prager, president of Occidental College until a few weeks ago; Bill Cartwright, star basketball player, now assistant coach of the New Jersey Nets; Jo Gusman, nationally known presenter and trainer of teachers in language and literacy; Paul Signorotti, president of a major hop producing company, Frank Maita, local businessman and on the Elk Grove planning commission; David Herburger, publisher and general manager of the *Elk Grove Citizen*. Also, in addition to Arlene Hein, hundreds of folks who graduated from Elk Grove schools work for the school district as teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, administrators, and personnel from all departments. Here are just a few: vice principals Dave Ishikawa and Shelley Hughes, DeDe Berry, school secretary; Jeff Markov, director, fiscal services; and Kathy Zehnder, secretary in the superintendent's office.

3. Parents of Elk Grove students also deserve a gold star because many of them chose to live in south Sacramento County just so that their children could attend Elk Grove schools. They shopped around, and when they made their decision to buy a house, it was because of the schools. The majority of Elk Grove teachers and other employees are also parents, and they usually send their children to district schools.

4. Elk Grove has had many **FIRSTS**. I mentioned something special about the high school last week. Elk Grove Union High School, started in 1893, was the first in California

when citizens voted to tax themselves for a high school for their youth. Another FIRST is our library. We had the first rural library in California, and it was started by the first female principal of the high school, Harriet Eddy. It would be 70 years before there was another woman high school principal. Ms. Eddy started the library in order to have the school accredited, and from that modest beginning, our schools are all accredited, and we have libraries in all schools.

5. Elk Grove has many outstanding programs, many of which stand head and shoulders above others in the state and nation, and they serve as models for other schools and districts. Here are a few: Never Streaming, a way to do early intervention for children with disabilities; preschool programs, particularly for four year olds, coordinated to make the best use of state and federal funds; programs for English Learners that focus on English literacy as well as support in the student's primary language; drama, art, and music programs winning awards year after year; agriculture programs and FFA that continue to create top notch leaders for California; and, of course, athletic programs that develop physical fitness, nurture sportsmanship, and keep kids focused on academics.

6. Elk Grove's Employee Organizations have a history of teamwork within the district, and, unlike many school districts where there is constant turmoil with employees, Elk Grove has found ways for folks to work together for the benefit of all. A wonderful example of this cooperation is the employee contributions through the various unions that provide hundreds of dollars in scholarships for students.

7. Board of Education members work as part of the EGUSD team, and this harmony allows the district to focus its energy on how to best serve students. The original members of the first board of education were Dr. Wyland Cripe, Robert Walker, James Guttridge, E. Henry Kloss, Robert Mackey, Jake Schneider, and Alfred Schopf. Family members of many of these are still active in the Elk Grove communities. Five schools are named for school board members: John Reith, Barbara Comstock Morse, Arthur Butler, Katherine Albiani, and Ed Harris Jr.

8. Teachers in Elk Grove schools are among the best in the state and nation, and the district has had its share of Teachers of the Year and other recognitions. Consider that all these schools are named for teachers: Maeola Beitzel, Mary Tsukamoto, Helen Carr Castello, Irene West, Ellen Feickert, Edna Batey, Florence Markofer, Isabelle Jackson, and Anna Kirchgater. And Toby Johnson, Robert Fite, Harriet Eddy, Samuel Jackman and T. R. Smedberg were teachers before they became administrators.

9. The recognition that has been provided over the years to Elk Grove district employees is amazing. Consider the following:

Elk Grove Citizen of the Year, the annual award recognition was begun in 1957. The first recipient was Raymond Case, who at that time was the principal/superintendent of the Elk Grove Elementary School and District. Others that followed over the years were Jessie Baker, a parent who was instrumental in starting the special school for children with disabilities that is named in her honor; Theodore Smedberg, principal of Elk Grove High School who went on to become superintendent of Sacramento County schools; Hilma Colton, teacher at Elk Grove HS; Robert Fite, principal of Joseph Kerr Jr. HS and Pleasant Grove Elementary; Anabel Gage, cafeteria manager/photographer/historian; Glen Beeman, principal, district administrator and teacher; Glen Houde, superintendent; Gary Lawson, principal of Jessie Baker; Olga Batey, teacher; Cathy O'Neil, teacher; and Arnie Adreani, principal of Joseph Kerr. Included in this

list of honorees are also several active contributors to the community who were graduates of our schools such as Marsha Holmes, Mike Zehnder, and Gerald Derr.

The Elk Grove Citizen Eagle Awards have been presented to a variety of local folks with connections to Elk Grove schools including Constantine Baranoff, Arnie Adreani, Robert Trigg, and Dave Gordon. Others such as Reno Dawson, Sandy Waite, Michael Hanson, Maureen Jordan, Michael Calicura, and Bob Fossgreen were also recognized in various categories of community service, but they were all district employees either at the time or prior to their recognition. School board members Jeanette Amavisca and Pam Ireys were honored as were coaches Ed Lombardi, Mike Clemons, and Dave Hoskins. And a number of the awardees were also graduates of our schools.

So..... gold stars to all!

1. History Happened Here, Book 1-River, Oaks, Gold.

2. History Happened Here, Book 2-Fields, Farms, Schools

3. Images of America-ELK GROVE

The books are normally \$20 (tax included). BUT FOR A SHORT TIME, YOU CAN PURCHASE ALL THREE FOR \$50, AND SHIPPING COSTS WILL BE INCLUDED IN THAT PRICE. Make your check payable to **Laguna Publishers**, and send your order to P.O. Box 692, Elk Grove CA 95759. Tell me who you want the books signed to. Call me at 916-685-0606 or 916-205-1267 if you have any questions – or email me at elizabethpink@gmail.com.

All proceeds from the books are for student scholarships through the Elk Grove Community Foundation.