

First National Bank of Oneida and Education

By DR. NANCY WILLIAMSON FNB Guest Columnist

First National Bank has been a part of my life as long as I can remember. The present location at Alberta and Depot was the location of the home of my paternal aunt, Mrs. Minnie Beets Morrow. I spent many summer days in her backyard and mowing that yard was my first job. I went with my father, Zeigler Beets, to the bank building on the corner of Main and Depot as a child and was impressed with the entrance and steps. They seemed so large to a small child. The teller windows were too tall for a small child to see over but the tellers would always make a point to greet both of us with a smile. First National Bank was the lending institution for my father to purchase a home on First Avenue in Oneida. This house was built in 1917 and is still standing in the original location.

As an educator, First National Bank has had a tremendous impact on how teachers consider funding for projects they wish to conduct in their classes each year. My first reaction to the mini-grant process when it was introduced several years ago was that it was such a novel way for a business to give back to the community. Most of the teachers were new to the grant writing process but the guidelines were clear and easy to follow. As a result of this first effort, the First National Bank Mini-Grants for Education have grown into a much-anticipated program each year. It has been rewarding to watch our teachers mature as grant writers. They plan a mini-grant into their curriculum each year and many teachers add to existing mini-grant material year after year. Teachers often comment that there is a particular program they would like in their classroom and that it would make a good subject for a First National Bank Mini-Grant.

The Mini-Grant Program has evolved through the years to meet the needs and requests of the education community. Teachers are now encouraged to pool their resources and write cooperative grants. This effort has produced new and interesting methods of delivering instruction to the students. It has resulted in application processes that help students see the need to learn certain facts and how this information will be of use to them in the future. Teachers in all areas are given equal value. Grants have been awarded to enhance the arts and encourage participation in related activities as well as core academic subjects. All these activities are necessary for a well-rounded student to become a participant in the community as an adult. When principals began to ask if they could apply for mini-grants, school administrators were included into the process to receive funding for school-based attendance programs.

The whole Mini-Grant Program is an example of how business can become involved in the education process in a community. It is an excellent way to give back to the community through



Figure 1 - Nancy Williamson - Member Oneida Special School Board

enriched educational experiences for all students. Our children are our most valuable resource in a community and this program has enriched the lives of so many students in the area since its inception.

Through the years, the employees of First National Bank have been involved with school activities. Mr. W.H. Swain has allowed The University of Tennessee Teaching Oneida/Scott Rural Education Intern Program the use of his guest house for class meetings and activities. This enabled the students to receive all instruction related to the program in the local area and they did not have to return to campus for classes. He also serves on the Oneida Schools Advisory Council and allows these meetings to be held at his guest house. Mr. Scott Thompson has been a member of the Oneida Schools Board of Education for many years, following a family tradition established by his father, Dr. Milford Thompson, and grandfather, Dr. M.E. Thompson. Mr. Mike Swain has taken an active role in helping with the Oneida soccer team and is now successfully coaching this sport. His teams are known throughout the area for their discipline and sportsmanship. Mrs. Joretta Griffith has the pleasure of visiting all classrooms where Mini-Grants are being implemented. She always encourages teachers to think about what they will apply for the next year. All employees of First National Bank are willing to participate in the development of children in the area. They are willing to visit classrooms and share banking information when asked to do so.

There are so many ways First National Bank has assisted in education through the years it would be impossible to recall and list them all. The bank and its employees are a valuable resource in our community and the education community will continue to tap this resource as much as possible in the future.