

History of OMEC (Oregon Math Education Council)

The birth of OMEC began when the “Board of Directors” of an early NSF grant wanted to have people in the community represent a broad area which would connect to the Oregon Math Community. The individuals on that council were “free agents,” however, they also brought their own perspective to this board from the groups they represented.. The members were from OCTM, TOTOM, Community and four year colleges, classroom teachers, Superintendents, businesses, principals and the PTO (parent-teacher organization).

It all began when NSF was giving grants for professional development for teachers throughout the 50’s and 60’s. Sue McGraw went to Illinois and Ted Nelson went to New Hampshire as a part of these monies. Gene Meier, a professor of number theory and the University of Oregon, Dave Raskin, a curriculum person from Beaverton Schools, and Don Rasmussen, ODE math specialist, got together as the “Board of Directors” to write this NSF Grant in the 60’s. The state of Delaware had received the Science award and Oregon had received the math award. It was a five year grant for \$5,000,000. That was a big deal, but we had received the award with no plan for how the money would be spent. Marj Enneking went to “some kind of math meeting” at Lane Community College. All those who were there wanted their “piece of the pie.” But they had to come up with a plan as to how this professional development would be implemented.

So the Board went on the road, literally. Gene, Dave and Don drove around the state talking with superintendents and principals. They soon realized that their real audience was the teachers. Teachers were the ones who could tell them what they wanted to learn more about. They would say, “Bend really wants some stuff on Geometry.” So it became a grass roots effort. So the guys went

back to the colleges and told them what the teachers needed. Courses were developed to meet teachers' needs.

When it came time to send their evaluations of this grant to the NSF, the Board didn't know how to report what had happened. Other states had been doing a "top down" model, but Oregon, being Oregon, felt that what they had to report could not be replicated. How do you tell other states to just get in their cars and drive around, talking to teachers?

So that's when OMEC, TOTOM and the Math Learning Center got started. Gene Maier had taken a five year leave of absence to do this project and the University of Oregon would not give him any more time. So he gave up his tenure and began the Math Learning Center. The Lane County Math project and the Math for the Uninvolved also began at this time. Marj Enneking and Gary Musser started OMEC because they did not want to lose the momentum of what had begun with the NSF grant. The Oregon math community had a sense of mission, an esprit d' core.

Marj said they had a lot to do, but they felt they could do it. Don Fineran was the "glue that held us all together." Everyone (from ODE , COSA, college professors, administrators and teachers) who had been involved in all the projects felt a commitment to the math community. It was a convergence of people who looked at the common good. Don worked for the State, but he had a genius for getting things done in spite of that! He figured out a way to make things work. Without someone to provide that impetus, it's going to be hard to get things done.

Marj said that the mission of OCTM was different than that of OMEC. OMEC was fast-moving and needed something important to act on, such as political issues. Examples are high school math requirements or teacher certification. They connect to the broad Math Ed community. She described TOTOM as a "self-help"

group with no officers and no treasury. They had an annual retreat organized by Don, the “telephoner.” He reminded members that it was their institution and they needed to help organize their retreat. Often teachers were invited to talk about what they were doing in the classroom. They even gave input to this group as to what they should be doing to prepare teachers.

We are writing this history to give others who read it a sense of how the Oregon Math community evolved. We want to renew our sense of mission and the commitment that we are all a part of the Oregon math community.