



# THE ORACLE

November 2023

A Biannual Newsletter of the  
Oak Ridge Institute for Continued Learning

## ORICL TEACHERS OF THE YEAR CHOSEN



**Karen Davis**  
Teacher  
of the Year

How did I start teaching at ORICL?

I was born in Oak Ridge, and in 1975 I joined the US Army. Among the battery of aptitude tests I took during the enlistment process was the DLAT, Defense Language Aptitude Test. It measured your ability to learn vocabulary and memorize and apply grammar rules. At the time, that version had a maximum score of 63. I did

so well my recruiter was almost giddy, and he offered me the job of 98G, Cryptologic Linguist, with a spot in the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California – learning Russian, one of the two most difficult courses to qualify into (along with Mandarin Chinese).

Russian was a language I knew almost nothing about, just a handful of words (da, nyet, tovarish, troika, vodka ... it was the Cold War, after all). My recruiter said it was very hard, but my score on the DLAT was very good. I shouldn't have much trouble. Later I learned his bonus came from getting me there, not from me passing!

But he was right. I didn't. Oh, I'm not saying it was easy; Russian isn't easy for an English speaker. (Easier than Mandarin, though!) But I did well, and after 47 weeks of intensive training I qualified for an immediate entry into the next level and another 37 weeks. I loved it; ten hours a day, class and homework, just studying a language? Heaven.

I spent another eight years in the army, working as a translator and various assorted peripheral jobs, including some teaching assignments at DLI and the cryptologic school in San Angelo, Texas. I was



**Mark Banker**  
Teacher  
of the Year

If, as it has been said, "creative human endeavors are often autobiographical," Mark Banker's courses at ORICL can be attributed to a life's journey that has been as unlikely as it has been rewarding. He was raised on a farm near Kingston where his ORNL administrator father and school teacher mother instilled in their six sons commitments to learning rooted in curiosity, kindness rooted in faith, and respect for manual labor rooted in first-hand experience.

Between 1969 and 1987, he completed degrees in history from Warren Wilson College (NC) and the Universities of Virginia and New Mexico. Living and informally learning in those diverse settings complemented his scholarly pursuits and shaped his distinct world view

After his father's unexpected passing in 1986, Banker made the homecoming to East Tennessee that he never anticipated. With a newly-minted Ph.D., he returned to the family farm and for the next twenty-nine years was the primary teacher of Advanced Placement United States History at Knoxville's Webb School.

Engagement in the nascent field of Appalachian studies added new insights into the distinctive take on the American experience that he shared with many of Knoxville's and East Tennessee's most gifted and advantaged youths. Two NEH-funded sabbaticals allowed him to probe several of his scholarly interests more deeply and compose a number of publications, including *Appalachians All: East Tennesseans and the Elusive of History of an American Region* (University of Tennessee Press 2010).

After retiring from Webb in 2016, Mark offered courses for adults sponsored by the Webb School Alumni Association,

Continued on page 3 - "Davis"

Continued on page 3 - "Banker"

## ORICL VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR CHOSEN

**Nancy Basford**, long time attendee of many classes, joined ORICL at the beginning of 2000 --- after retiring from active duty as a paramedic at Roane County Ambulance (EMS).

Her volunteering in ORICL began when she signed up as a student and also the class assistant in Bill Moore's Latin class in 2007, and she has signed up as both student and class assistants in Bill's Latin classes ever since.

She has a biology background from college days (BA from the University of Kansas and MS from UT) and Latin was her favorite class in high school in Sydney, Australia. Also in ORICL, she has managed the army of volunteers for mailing catalogs and class schedules since 2015 and has really enjoyed proofreading the ORICL catalog/calendar every semester since 2012.

She is very honored to be selected as an ORICL Volunteer of the Year. She states that ORICL is such a wonderful asset for Oak Ridge and surrounding communities with outstanding instructors teaching such a huge variety of fascinating subjects. We are so lucky!

Submitted by Nancy Basford



Volunteers of the Year

**Jim Basford** had listened for several years to glowing reports of ORICL classes from his wife so, upon retirement in 2005, he joined.

His first classes were two book groups, keeping him very busy reading great books and taking part in the great discussions of them. He served as coordinator of the Nonfiction Book Group for a number of years. With so many great ORICL classes, it has been difficult to enroll in no more than 15 per semester. For about two of these classes per semester he has been class assistant.

For many years he has helped with the mailing of catalogs and class schedules. He became familiar with the AV equipment in the three ORICL classrooms and wrote illustrated AV instruction manuals for each room.

He was responsible for installing and cataloging the John Million Library in F-112. Due to his helping with a number of activities, he was asked to serve on the ORICL Board. His suggestion to rearrange F-112 to its current orientation led to better instructor interactions and great improvements in AV operations. He is currently working on approaches to finding new ORICL members.

Submitted by Jim Basford

December 5	Winter/Spring Online Registration Opens
Dec. 13 - Jan. 1	Holidays – ORICL office and classrooms closed
January 2	RSCC/ORICL office opens
January 15	Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday – RSCC/ORICL closed
January 24	Student schedules mailed for Winter/Spring term
February 5	Winter/Spring classes begin
March 4-8	RSCC Spring Break
March 29	Good Friday Holiday – RSCC/ORICL closed; no classes
April 26	Winter/Spring classes end

## Continued from page 1 - "Davis"

stationed in Germany twice – Berlin and Wurzburg. But as I got promoted the career path veered from language to more supervisory tasks, and I wasn't happy. Turns out two years of school isn't representative of the military – who knew?

But it was still the Cold War, and as my second term came to an end I discovered that the National Security Agency was interested in offering me a job. So I left the army and became a Defense Department civilian, and stayed there for thirty-two years. Along the way I became an adjunct instructor, meaning that every so often I took a couple of days off from my usual duties to teach a translation course. And then I got a call from the National Cryptologic School, offering me a full-time instructor position. Which, of course, I jumped at.

I spent the last fifteen years of my career at the NCS, teaching translation, intermediate Russian grammar and reading courses, and developing a Ukrainian acquisition course in the early '90s after the USSR fell apart. Ukrainian translation courses followed, as did twice teaching Presidential Translators. Along the way, of course, I was taking training myself, and by the time I retired I was at Full Professional Proficiency in both Russian and Ukrainian (ILR level 4).

I'm lucky. I love East Slavic languages, particularly Ukrainian. I love their complexity, the way they sound, their morphology, and even their alphabets. To have been able to spend forty-two years working with them was a delight.

I also love teaching, and I think I'm pretty good at it. Winning the Defense Department's Teacher of the Year once and coming second twice let me know others agreed. Introducing others to my beloved East Slavic languages and figuring out how to explain complex structures to them is fun!

When I finally retired in 2016 and moved back to my hometown, I found that I was missing teaching. My parents had always taken ORICL courses and spoke highly of the institute, so I looked into maybe being able to keep on teaching there. To my delight, they were happy to let me teach a Beginning Russian course. (At the time, I figured more people would want Russian than much-less-popular Ukrainian.)

I started with one course, then two, then three – and with the Winter/Spring Term of 2024 I'll be offering five Russian courses and two Ukrainian ones. I'd

meant to just 'keep my hand in', but I'm teaching four days a week now and loving it. My classes are small but dedicated, and some of my students are still with me from that very first Beginning Russian in 2017. I don't plan on stopping any time soon.

Submitted by Karen Davis

## Continued from page 1 - "Banker"

the Roane County Heritage Commission, and ORICL. His column, "Glimpses from a Teacher-Historian," appears weekly in the *Roane County News*. Like his ORICL courses, those musings reflect his diverse experiences and his belief that humble discernment of history's "rhymes" can help us navigate the challenges of our own historical era.

Submitted by Mark Banker

**State (UT) Botanical Gardens Tour  
Winter/Spring 2024  
Thursday, April 11, 9:15 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
See the catalog for more information.**

**Winter/Spring Registration opens on **Tuesday,**  
**December 5.**  
If you are turning in a paper  
registration form, please do so  
as soon as possible.  
If you paid membership fees in the Fall term,  
you do not owe anything for Winter/Spring.**

### Treasurer Explains QCD's

One way to donate to ORICL is with QCD's, qualified charitable distributions. Because ORICL is a qualified charitable organization designated by a 501[c]3, we can receive qualified charitable distributions, QCD's. A QCD is an otherwise taxable distribution from an IRA that is paid directly from the IRA to the qualified charity. The QCD cannot be claimed as a charitable tax deduction but by utilizing the QCD, the donor can lower their taxable income which may provide greater income tax savings in comparison to making a cash gift and claiming a tax deduction. For more information, please contact your financial adviser.

Submitted by Lois McKeever, Treasurer

## Member Donations Provide ORICL with Additional Operating Funds

Thanks to these members who contributed to ORICL above the required membership fee. Donations were recorded so far this calendar year.

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### ORICL Office

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 Closed Fridays

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### Website:

[www.roanestate.edu/oricl](http://www.roanestate.edu/oricl)

Facebook: @ORICLRSCC  
 ORICL is a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit  
 organization in partnership with  
 Roane State Community College.

In all three categories, there were anonymous donations.