



# » THE LANTERN «

ORLEANS COUNTY ADULT LEARNING SERVICES—*LIGHTING THE WAY TO LEARNING*

Volume 5 Issue 2

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*It is with much sadness that OCALS announces the passing of former Vice-President, Eleanor "Connie" Mikels, on July 30, 2011. Connie was an integral part of OCALS from it's inception, and will be greatly missed.*



**Although Connie can never be replaced, OCALS is happy to announce that Mary Lee Knights has agreed to take on this important position of Vice President of our organization. We are confident that OCALS will benefit greatly from her knowledge and experience. We would like to thank Mary Lee for her graciousness in accepting this challenging position, and her commitment to addressing the literacy needs in Orleans County.**



**M**ary Lee Knights has been a resident of Orleans County for the past 40 years. She was born in the Adirondacks, but interviewed for a counseling position in Medina on her way home from Ohio University where she received her Masters in Education/ Guidance & Counseling. She

was offered the position in Medina, accepted, and has been here every since.

Mary Lee lives on the Knights Family Farm with her husband Kenneth, and is the mother of three grown children. One of her greatest joys is the opportunity to grow and sell pumpkins of all sizes during the month of October. She says the smiles she and her husband receive, from all age groups, is well worth the work.

Her years here in Orleans County, when not being wife and mother, have centered mostly around education. She was a Guidance Counselor at Medina High as well as a Child Guidance Specialist for Gates Chili Schools. After her first child was born she left the public school system and began Kniland Nursery School. Once all her children were past nursery school age, and well established in the Medina School System, she accepted a BOCES position as GED Instructor. She taught all five basic subjects, on all levels, to students

working towards a GED. At the same time she took on the job of Director of Religious Education for St. Mary's Catholic Church in Medina. She held both of these positions for ten years. She continued in her BOCES career, taking on the position of Learning Disabilities Specialist.

She kept this position until recently deciding to semi-retire, giving herself more opportunities to visit her grandchildren who all live out of state. After semi-retiring she took on the position of State Chief Examiner, and now coordinates her times away around Orleans/Niagara GED Testing, for which she has to be present.

Along with all these related educational endeavors she has been an active member of her community; taking on many office/director positions in various organizations such as Ridgeway Planning Board, Medina YMCA, N.Y.S. Jaycees, Beta Sigma Phi Sorority, Orleans Co. Jr. Miss, Bishop's Committee Chairman, just to name a few. These organizational responsibilities, along with her participation in many musical groups in both Medina and Albion, have kept her busy and happy here in Orleans County.

Her most recent challenge is her acceptance to take on the duties of OCALS' Vice President, where she looks forward to continuing the use of her educational and literary background to help the organization grow in strength and purpose.

## Memorial Tribute

### Eleanor A. "Connie" Mikels

On July 30, 2011, Connie Mikels, one of the founders of the newly developed Orleans County Adult Learning Services (OCALS), and very dear friend to this writer and board president, gave up her courageous battle for life. Today, I still find it difficult to believe that she's gone. Connie had such a zest for life and seemed indestructible and ageless. It was only two years ago that we celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup>

birthday at the OCALS' Annual Dinner Meeting.



She seemed very full of life, physical

ailments were pushed aside—Connie always preferred being busy. "I don't want to get rusty," she claimed.

Connie was the type of person you could trust 100%. If she said she'd do something—she'd do it. Whenever you needed anything, she was always there for you—no matter the inconvenience to herself. She appeared to be a gentle soul, but she often showed great emotional strength and courage. People of power didn't intimidate Connie, if a wrong existed, she strongly spoke her mind—often successful in achieving her objectives.

Connie loved her family, friends, church and community, and often could be found working or fighting for the well being of those she held dear. She fought valiantly to not let her illnesses interfere with helping others and the causes she loved. As many learned at her funeral, Connie planned to host a Program Committee Meeting on July 19<sup>th</sup>. Instead, her health unexpectedly declined late in the day and she was taken by ambulance to the hospital. When the committee members arrived at her home they found a note tacked on

the door instructing everyone to use her home to go ahead with the meeting as planned. Even when critically ill at the hospital, Connie tried to be of help to OCALS. She had encouraged Don and I to visit her when we called ahead to see if she felt like having visitors. "Wake me if I'm asleep," Connie said. She was very frail and wanted to converse, but could only manage a few words at a time. She had her granddaughter's upcoming wedding on her mind, and also remembered a person she wanted contacted for OCALS' board of directors.

Connie was well known in the community. She was a Registered Nurse and worked for Kendall Central School, Arnold Gregory Hospital, and was the Orleans County Public Health Nurse. She was on the Board of Directors for the American Red Cross and was active with their mobile blood drives. She was a member of the Friends of the Swan Library, and if I heard the information correctly, Connie was an early founder, just as she was with OCALS.

The organizations that Connie assisted are too numerous to mention in this article. Suffice it to know that she was unbiased and lacking in prejudice with whom she helped. She gave abundantly and openly of her time, and anonymously from her pocket book. She was acknowledged on a NYS level for her volunteerism. Connie lived in the area since 1958 and also volunteered her time diligently to her church, Holy Family Parish, serving as lector; St. Joseph's Ladies of Charities; the Catholic Daughters of America; and St. Joseph's Bereavement Committee. She taught Religious Education at Kendall and Holley, and for many years taught defensive driving.

I became acquainted with Connie in 1990 when she decided to become a tutor for Literacy Volunteers of America-Orleans County, Inc. At the time I was the executive director and quickly connected with Connie because of her caring quality and willingness to tutor anyone in need of assistance. It didn't matter if they were disabled or higher functioning—she totally immersed herself in trying to help

anyone with limited literacy skills. One day she came into the office and told me she loaned her glasses to one of her students because she discovered the student couldn't read due to poor vision. Connie continually sought to improve her teaching skills, attended numerous tutor in-services and even became a workshop assistant, helping tutor trainers. Of course she also helped behind the scenes, serving on many committees, including fundraisers. There are many fond personal memories I have of her that will always be cherished. I loved her wonderful sensitivity—she could sense when someone was feeling hurt or in pain. She exhibited kindness and thoughtfulness in the most unexpected ways. It could be a simple phone call when she knew you were feeling down or discouraged—or she would send a card to brighten your day. I admired her for her integrity and loyalty....and many other qualities, too numerous to mention. Let's just say she and Mother Theresa were probably related.

I left the organization in 1998 to pursue a career in chemical dependency counseling and lost touch with Connie, but then we re-connected when a survey revealed that Orleans County's illiteracy rate was escalating and services were insufficient. Connie and I served on a literacy advisory committee that was responsible for developing Orleans County Adult Learning Services (OCALS). When the going got tough—Connie stayed by my side—believing in the literacy cause and the new organization. Even as her health declined during the last year and it became a struggle to attend meetings...she offered to host them at her home. She remained Vice President of OCALS until May 2011, when she knew she couldn't handle the demands of the role any longer.

Connie and I had an ongoing debate as to who cared more—Social Workers (I have a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work) or Nurses. If it's between her and me—Connie deserves the award hands down. God's Blessings to you, Connie—your devotion to literacy and your friendship will never be forgotten.



ROSE RUCK

Under leadership of Mary Lee Knights, OCALS' monthly Program Meetings are stimulating development of new programs and services. In August we had guest speaker Patricia Edwards, from the Genesee Valley Board of Cooperative Education Services of BOCES Genesee Migrant Center. Patricia gave us numerous suggestions and good ideas, and led an interesting discussion of future plans for OCALS. This discussion led to the decision to partner with Agri-Business Child Development Center in Holley, NY, to develop a pilot program geared towards tutoring pre-K children and their parents. Mary Lee met with Annie DeJes'us, FSC, at Agri-Business Child Development Center, and it was determined that weekend ESL tutors were needed for adult learners, and weekday tutors for one-on-one sessions with the pre-K children who attend ABCD. We will continue to work with these families as the children enter the Holley or Albion school districts. OCALS is excited to be partnering with Agri-Business Child Development Center, and believes that we can make a difference in the lives of these families. There will be more information in future issues of our newsletter as we implement this important program.

Many thanks to the Arc of Orleans for letting OCALS use their facilities for September's Program Meeting. It was decided to hold an Autumn Goodie Sale at Knight's Pumpkin farm on October weekends. Thanks to the Knights for the use of this location—a total of \$350 was raised, and special thanks to those who worked at the event, and those who donated the awesome goodies for us to sell!! It was also decided that OCALS will be sponsoring a membership drive. Program Committee members will be hosting small informal gatherings to introduce our organization to friends and family. The first meeting was held Nov. 10 at the home of Della Morales. For more information on these meetings please call 585-967-0965.



**ATTENTION: Anyone wishing to contact OCALS by e-mail may use the following new email address: [ocals2006@gmail.com](mailto:ocals2006@gmail.com)**



### OCALS FIFTH ANNUAL DINNER MEETING

OCALS fifth annual dinner meeting was held Sept. 13, 2011 at the United Methodist Church in Medina, NY. The blessing was given by new Board Member, Pastor David Beach. As usual, the pot-luck dinner was delicious and everyone enjoyed visiting with each other. Entertainment was provided by William Grimble, a member of the Albion High School Chorus who sang "I Believe in You", and by magician Mitch Holbrook. A short business meeting was held after dinner, and the following awards were presented:

#### FRAMED CERTIFICATES

**Dennis Seekins** - Tutor of the Year

**Lee Fletcher**—Adult Learner of the Year

**Virginia Kropf**—outstanding publicity for our program in "The Daily News"

**Pathstone**—for supporting our cause and making referrals and space at their facility for tutoring (*Award accepted by Melissa Schultz*)

**United Way of Orleans County** - given in appreciation for continual financial support (*Award accepted by Lisa Ireland*)

#### WOODEN PLACQUES WITH OCALS LOGO

**Curtis Foundation** - given in appreciation for continued financial support (*Award accepted for Curtis Foundation by Virginia Kropf*)

**St Mary RC Church, Holley, NY** given in appreciation of space donated for OCALS' office and library. (*Award accepted by Gail Christ*)



Gail Christ & Rose Ruck

### SPECIAL AWARDS

**Jean Gates** received a "Special Friend" award for her donation to help fund OCALS headquarters in the new Swan Library being built in Albion, NY.

**Don Colquhoun** received a gift certificate to Lift Bridge Book Store as a retirement present, and thanks for his support of our organization throughout the years.

**Mary Lee Knights** received OCALS' Volunteer of the Year Award.

**Rose Ruck** received flowers as a special THANK YOU for her hard work, dedication and service to our organization.

Special thanks also to **Mary Lee Knights** and **Renee Garnier** for all the time and effort spent organizing this dinner meeting. OCALS would also like to thank Medina United Methodist Church, **Rev. James Maxwell**, and all the workers from the church who helped to make our dinner a success.

**Special Remembrance:** **Connie Mikels** was remembered for her dedication to OCALS. Connie's daughter and son-in-law, **Joan & Jim Aducci**, and her son **Mike** attended the dinner and were presented with gifts in honor of their mother.



Joan Aducci



Many thanks to Amy Ellsmore for the beautiful artwork on the "Tribute to Connie" displayed at OCALS 5th Annual Dinner Meeting.






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