



DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES Roz Fuller (far right) visited with students in the cafeteria at the SEED School.

Oberlin graduate helps students in Washington school

By MARY LOU OLSON

Nestled between two parks, operated by the District of Columbia, lies an educational oasis — the SEED (Schools for Educational Evolution and Development) Public Charter School.

An Oberlin native and former English and music teacher at Herndon, Roz (Avery) Fuller, is Director of Student Services.

She oversees all mental health, medical, academic support, leadership and community partnership programs which support students' success.

She is the daughter of Alyce Avery of Oberlin and the late Rod Avery and a 1967 graduate of Decatur Community High School. She graduated from Fort Hays State University in 1971, then taught briefly in Ellinwood before moving to Japan.

After three years, she returned to the United States, then in 1985, she and her family moved to the island of Okinawa, where she worked for 14 years for the Department of Defense Education Activity as a teacher, then as a counselor at Kadena High School at Kadena Air Base.

Both of her children, Autumn and Morgan, graduated from high school at Okinawa. Her daughter and family live in Northern Virginia, and her son runs a business on Okinawa.

She said the SEED school, the brainchild of two young businessmen, Eric Adler and Rajiv Vinakota, is the only school of its kind in the U.S. It is a college-preparatory boarding school for mostly black urban youths, and is both school and home to 315 middle and high school students from Sunday night through Friday afternoon.

Ms. Fuller said she was hired by SEED under a federal grant for safe schools and healthy students. It was her job to ensure that they met the needs of the whole child.

She said she was responsible for creating a crisis response plan and manual, substance abuse education, after-school activities, a sex education program, relationships within the community and forming a child study team to assess at-risk students for failure.

After the grant ended in Septem-

ber 2002, she was hired directly as associate director of boarding programs. For the past school year, she was responsible for all afternoon, evening and weekend programs.

The school, now in its sixth year, graduated its first class of seniors in June. For the five years since the school opened, it was housed in the attic of the National Children's Museum, at Trinity College, and in a downtown office building.

"It has since moved to its permanent location, a beautiful campus, in southeast D.C.," said Ms. Fuller.

The campus boasts two dorms, an academic building and a student center. The brand new student center includes a dining room, gymnasium, student recreation room, office space and a student lounge.

"Because it is a public school, it receives the same amount of money per pupil as do all other public schools in the District of Columbia," she said, "and because it is a boarding school, it receives an additional sum per student. However, those amounts don't come close to being enough to fund the school and all of its programs."

"The SEED Foundation works hard to raise the rest of the money from donations and from private benefactors," said Ms. Fuller. "Having a foundation which raises the money needed to support the school is tremendous, because it frees the school staff to do what we love to do — educate and take care of our students."

All of the students come from the District of Columbia, and they enter the school in the seventh grade.

"Traditionally, there are three applicants for every opening," she said, "so we have a yearly lottery to determine which of the candidates are offered admission."

New students attend a week-long orientation camp at the school to introduce them to the boarding school environment and to allow the staff to get to know them. This helps them meet individual needs better once the school year begins.

A typical week starts on Sunday evening, when students check in between 7 and 9 p.m. The check-in process includes putting clothes and supplies away and uniform checks to ensure that students have enough uniforms for the week.



SEVERAL STUDENTS got together to enjoy some down time at the SEED School in Washington.

"Monday through Friday, students begin their days as early as 5:30 a.m. in preparation for breakfast," Ms Fuller said. "They are in class from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day, with the last class of the day being Life Skills, a class taught by their boarding instructors."

"Monday and Wednesday afternoons will find the students, who aren't attending athletic practices, in activities, which may include martial arts, Junior Achievement, a fashion show, world cultures and drama. Students eat a family-style dinner each night."

"After dinner, all students have study hall, followed by quiet house, when students prepare for the next day. Tuesday and Thursday afternoons are designated for community time, when students participate in seminars, house meetings, and special programs designed for their group. Students check out of school on Friday afternoons between 4 and 6 p.m."

Most weekends find a group of students staying on campus until

Saturday afternoon to participate in extended programming. Each closed-campus weekend comprises four components: cultural enrichment, community service, life skills, and study hall.

"Because it is located in the nation's capital, SEED is able to take students to numerous concerts, plays, ballets, and festivals, as well as professional sports competitions and the many museums in the District of Columbia," Ms. Fuller said.

"Each house of students selects a community service project for the entire year, some of which include Loaves and Fishes and D.C. Central Kitchen, which feed homeless residents of the District; the Benning Old Folks Home, which is the nation's oldest residence for aging African-American residents; From the Ground Up, a farm which cultivates food for homeless people; and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, which works to preserve the Chesapeake Bay watershed area."

"Students at SEED are offered many unique opportunities. One of

our most impressive is the Greek Scholars Program, which allows students to study the history, culture, art, and government of Greece for one semester before traveling to Greece for a three-week study trip."

Other opportunities include participation in Experiment in International Living, which lets students study abroad for a summer; City at Peace, a performance company which allows high school students to write, direct, and perform their own life stories;

People Animals Love, which offers summer internships for students at their camp for physically challenged students; City School, a Boston-based summer internship program which provides high school students the opportunity to work with city government programs for disadvantaged people; and D.C. Summer Work-Study Programs.

The school also conducts a three-week summer school program which offers both remedial and advanced programs.

An athletic program has been

added during the past year, including flag football, baseball, volleyball, cross-country, basketball, wrestling and track.

A unique advantage for student athletes is that they play against schools with diverse student populations. Ninety-eight percent of SEED students are African-American, and the schools they compete against have students from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

"It is my hope," said Ms. Fuller, "that soon we can build exchange programs with these schools that go beyond athletics."

I want our students to have the broadest exposure they can have while at SEED. Being able to attend classes at these private and international schools will open our student's eyes to other mindsets and other viewpoints.

"When our students arrived to play basketball at one of the schools recently, they were shocked to hear the same music they listen to, and they asked why these (white) students would listen to their (black) music."

For this reason, I want our students to have opportunities to interact with students from as many other schools as possible."

The Oprah Winfrey Show and Nightline have featured stories on the SEED School and its founders received the "Use Your Life Award" from Oprah's Angel Network, in addition to a donation of 300 computers, dormitory furniture and bed linens.

Ms. Fuller said she feels that SEED is a unique place where urban youths are able to find both academic and personal support, where they are challenged to achieve academic success, where they are provided with opportunities to grow and to expand their horizons.

Its 40 teachers, 24 boarding instructors, and 20 administrators and staff work hard to provide the structure and the support students need to achieve academic and personal success.

"And it appears to be working," she said. "The first SEED senior to be admitted into college was granted early admission to Princeton University, which was cause for great celebration on the SEED campus."