

Pentagon veteran hawks education at OU center

By TOM LONERGAN

What's a long-time Army veteran doing running a university continuing education program?

The mix of Army and academia is rare. But to Lowell Eklund, dean of Oakland University's Division of Continuing Education for 21 years, it has become second nature.

"We're selling education," he says of his job.

A RESIDENT of Bloomfield Township, Eklund, 62, says he was part of a "post war (World War II) flurry to get officers educated in academic institutions."



DEAN LOWELL EKLUND
Selling continuing education

That took him to Syracuse University where he earned master's and doctor's degrees in political science. The Upper Peninsula native also holds a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University.

A retired Army Reserve colonel, Eklund spent six years at the Pentagon where he helped brief then Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower on such items as "electronic impact on missile guidance."

Eklund landed in the education field

quite by accident. On his way to a prospective job at Chrysler Corp. in 1954, Eklund stopped by East Lansing to see a university administrator who was an old friend. He left East Lansing as head of Michigan State University's cooperative extension program in the Detroit area.

And when MSU-Oakland was formed in 1958, Eklund found himself in an old auto empire mansion — Meadow Brook Hall — which he has fashioned as a center of a five-level continuing education program.

Also part of the continuing education division are the Continuum Center for Adult Counseling and Leadership Training, conference department, non-credit course department and labor education program.

OAKLAND'S CONTINUING education courses are oriented toward business and professional careers because, says Eklund, "in the non-credit area, that's the principal market."

And as Eklund explained in a recent interview in his Meadow Brook Hall office, a continuing education course has to have a market — i.e., a sufficient number of paying students. The \$2 million continuing education division operates with \$155,000 of state general tax fund money, Eklund estimated.

The state covers Eklund's \$43,750 annual salary and those of his support and clerical staffs. "We get the heat, light and janitor work done for us, and we use the facilities," Eklund said. But operating revenue from tuition and conference fees must cover teacher salaries, supplies and other expenses.

The way Eklund sees it, that puts him in the education selling business — "out on the cutting edge of the need."

"WE MUST SELL," he said. "We're hucksters of the product. I contend that's the only way we survive. We're in the brochure business."

But operating revenue from tuition and conference fees must cover teacher salaries, supplies and other expenses.

The winter non-degree course brochure lists 14 legal assistant courses,

eight management offerings, four courses in business and investment, a new math competency diploma program, small business workshop courses and "avocational interests," ranging from basic photography to "Diamonds & Gemstones: In Depth."

The department keeps a close watch on state licensing requirements and offers examination refresher courses for certified public accountants and medical professionals.

Under Eklund's tutelage, the continuing education program at Oakland has had a long-standing pact with the General Motors Corp. to provide management training courses.

"WE HAVE sort of a small college within a university here for General Motors," Eklund said. The continuing education division

provides management development programs for GM that lead to a non-credit diploma.

Continuing ed offers a labor education program to train union administrators, managers and stewards. Eklund estimates enrollment in non-credit courses is 3,000 to 4,000, down some 2,000 from OU's peak in past years.

Eklund adds that up to 12,000 attend conferences at Oakland annually, 500 participate in continuum center programs, 400 are trained in the labor education program and 80,000 a year visit Meadow Brook Hall.

EKLUND SAYS nearly half of his time is spent keeping the 50-year old hall financially afloat. It costs \$900,000 a year to keep Meadow Brook Hall open for tours and conferences. The

money is raised through four revenues, contributions and foundation grants.

The university has received a one-time state grant of \$160,000 for security and preservation at Meadow Brook.

Eklund also recruits area volunteers for such chores as spring housecleaning. "We've had society women from Bloomfield Hills coming in and polishing our silverware," said Eklund. "They still do."

Built in 1929 for \$3.5 million, the Dodge Brothers mansion was donated to the university in 1957 by Matilda Wilson, widow of auto company owner John Dodge. Her estate restricts the house to be used for educational purposes only.

LAST YEAR Eklund was appointed

by President Jimmy Carter to a three-year term on the National Advisory Council on extension and continuing education.

The 21-member group advises the White House and Congress on continuing education funding. A number of Oakland's programs, particularly the Continuum Center, are dependent on federal grants, says Eklund.

Eklund said he gives his department, heads a good deal of autonomy with their programs, which he adds is a by-product of his military background.

"You learn administration and management in the military in a very systematic and disciplined way," he said. "Don't make it like I'm bragging about it. It's second nature."

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Clarification

If Oakland County decides to buy the Pine Knob recreation complex, its method of financing could be at interest rates of 8 or 9 percent.

An article in the March 3 Observer & Eccentric editions quoted a county study as saying general obligation bonds the county would issue to buy Pine Knob could be paid off at a 6 percent interest rate.

However, a footnote in the study said higher interest rates were possible when the notes were actually issued.

The county needs voter approval before it could issue general obligation bonds.

"A 1 percent change would translate into a \$160,000 change in fixed costs," the study said.

County budget director James Brennan said the interest rate on general obligation bonds was at 6 percent when the county feasibility study was being prepared in January. Since then, he said, interest rates, which fluctuate, have increased.

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