

Scholar to speak at OU

A leading scholar on the Russian economy will speak at Oakland University April 16 on "What's Right and What's Wrong in the Russian Transition," in a free public lecture series to promote understanding of international issues.

Anders Aslund will deliver his speech at the School of Business Administration's 1998 Alice Conner Gorlin Memorial Lecture at 7:30 p.m., 201 Dodge Hall.

Gorlin was an esteemed professor of economics at Oakland from 1972 until her death in 1987. In her tenure at OU, Gorlin gained international recognition as a scholar of the Soviet economy, publishing in

many major professional journals. Her dedication to the broader role of human beings as citizens of the world led Gorlin's friends to sponsor this series.

Since 1994, Aslund has been a senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C. He served as an economic advisor to the Ukrainian government. He graduated from the Stockholm School of Economics and the University of Stockholm.

Aslund joined the Swedish Diplomatic Service and served in Kuwait, Geneva, Poland, Moscow and Stockholm. In 1982, he received his doctorate

from Oxford University.

As a research scholar at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, he wrote a major book, "Gorbachev's Struggle for Economic Reform" (1989). He also wrote "Post-Communist Economic Revolution: How Big A Band?" (1992), and edited six books on Soviet and Russian economic issues.

For further information, contact OU's Augustin Posu, chair, Department of Economics, School of Business Administration, at (248) 370-3523.

Accident inspires song

Deborah Homeister had never written a note of music in her life — at least not until last June when the Troy resident created a ballad that she hopes will touch the hearts of everyone who hears it.

Entitled "To Whom it May Concern," the song was written shortly after the car crash that killed Troy teens Andrew Stunt, Ashley Easterbrook, and Michael Jamieson. The car in which they were riding was struck broadside at Long Lake and Crooks by a car that police said ran a red light. Its driver, who had been drinking, was also killed.

It was this tragic accident that made Homeister realize she had to do something to teach the public the dangers of drunk driving.



Song performers: Performing Deborah Homeister's song "To Whom it May Concern" were, clockwise from top left, Jeffrey White, cello; Deborah Homeister, songwriter; Mark Hamlin, vocals, piano and arranger; Nicole Spahn, vocals, and Adrienne Jacobs, violin.

"I know the families (of the teens who were killed) and I had an intense desire to do something to prevent something like this from happening again," Homeister said. "We don't always hear what people say to us but we tend to analyze the songs we listen to."

So Homeister embarked on the task of writing an inspirational song, which for a musical novice turned out to be an easy job. In just 20 short minutes, Homeister had penned the words to "To Whom it May Concern," a plea to potential drunk drivers written from the perspective of a family and friends of their victims.

After months of trying to find someone to put the words to musical notation, sing the song, record it, mix it and produce a corresponding music video, the CD and video is now awaiting an April release date. Homeister credits the individuals who donated their time and efforts and, most of all, God for getting the project off the ground.

"I would have to say this entire project has been a bit of a miracle because I had absolutely no experience in writing music before," Homeister said. "I have every reason to believe that this is God's project. People would die for an opportunity like this. The doors just kept opening for me."

When the song was written, Homeister's first hurdle was putting the words to music. Mark

Hamlin, who leads the praise and worship team at the Troy Baptist Church, volunteered his services. Alan McNair, orchestra director at Troy High School, offered to direct his students Adrienne Jacobs, 16, on the violin, and Jeffrey White, 17, on the cello. Hamlin, along with Homeister's daughter, Nicole Spahn, 18, provided the vocals.

Homeister still needed to find someone who would, free of charge, record the song and mix and master the CD. Dave Kupczak, owner of Extreme Digital Audio, recorded the song at the Troy Baptist Church and Jeff LeDuke, of Stoney Creek Studios in Rochester, mixed the CD.

But Homeister still wanted to present another side to the song — a side that people could actually see. So she got in touch with DaShazor Productions and compiled a story board. Homeister describes the video as the story of a man and his choices, a responsible bartender and the effects drunk driving can have on a family.

Last weekend, the video was recorded. Caribu Coffee in Troy, Troy Athens High School, Community EMS ambulance service, the Wagon Wheel restaurant in Troy and the State Police Department pitched in.

"I can't even begin to find enough words to properly thank everyone who has been involved

in every step of this project including the family and friends of the victims, who acted in the video," Homeister said. "It truly shows the heartbeat of the community. I think people are tired of hearing of these preventable deaths. They really do care."

While the song was recently presented to Sony records, Homeister isn't sure if it will be accepted by the major record label. But she still hopes the song will hit the radio airwaves and MTV and VH1, two music video stations.

Homeister has also recently written letters to Oprah Winfrey and WUFL, the family life radio station.

"This video can be a useful teaching aid in schools, churches and civic groups," Homeister said. "It has such a very, very powerful message."

"I can not emphasize enough that I deeply feel for the families of all drinking and driving victims. I wanted to do something to make a difference and I think I've accomplished that goal. I really believe that one person does make a difference."

The CD and video will be available locally sometime in April. Homeister said Harmony House has already ordered 1,000 copies. Proceeds from the video will benefit Broken Dreams, a non-profit organization that works to teach the negative effects of drunk driving.

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The voice of public education Raising student achievement—a test for us all

Like many public school teachers, Brian Oakes is troubled by the results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) released last month.

The test of the math and science achievement of high school students in 21 countries showed that even our best and brightest seniors lagged behind their counterparts in the rest of the industrialized world.

But Oakes, a first-year art teacher at Lakeview High School in St. Clair Shores, is even more disturbed that so many politicians, profiteers and pundits are lashing out at teachers instead of latching on to solutions.

Before landing a teaching job here, Oakes taught English in Korea. There, he said, no one blamed teachers or the public education system for student failure.

"Education is the highest priority and teachers are treated with the utmost respect in Korea," he said. "If students fail, everyone knows they must work harder."

Curing problems such as this takes a network of dedicated and determined public school employees, parents, politicians and business and community leaders working together.



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Our students are just as capable as students anywhere in the world.

But since we do not have a mandatory curriculum that guarantees that all students have opportunities to learn high level math and science, only some of our students in some of our public schools get that chance.

Far too many of our middle schools and high schools don't require students to take advanced math and science courses—or even have the resources to offer those courses. So, while students in other countries are learning algebra and geometry in middle school, many of our students are still doing basic arithmetic.

There is no excuse for low academic standards. We must raise the bar for all students—and all public school employees.

But as we elevate our expectations, we must also supply the training, tools and resources necessary to reach them. One of the most important tools for raising student achievement is a qualified teacher in every classroom. In addition, we must toughen teacher training and certification standards, and insist that teachers be assigned to teach only subjects that they are certified in.

Pay attention

Perhaps one of the most profound differences Brian Oakes saw between American and Korean education was the level of parental commitment and partnership with teachers.

Korean parents support teachers by caring about, monitoring and encouraging their child's success.

"They know education is necessary for success," Oakes said. "They wouldn't think of doing anything to undermine their child's chances."

Nor should any one of us. If we expect our students to be on top of the world, we must all stop the blame games. Anything less puts us all in jeopardy.

The blame game

It's easy to blame educators—or poverty, or parents, or politicians—for failing children.

And it's easy to suggest that such things as private school vouchers, tuition tax credits or some other gimmick will improve student achievement.

It's much more difficult to identify the real problems but it's about time that we do. Public school employees are just as frustrated with the blame games and the rhetoric as the general public. But they know that to significantly improve student achievement, we must address some pressing problems:

- lack of adequate health care for children;
- low expectations;
- no mandatory core academic curriculum;
- the absence of a qualified teacher in some classrooms;
- too little positive parental involvement.

Partnerships yield solutions

Some problems are simply beyond the scope of the schools. Take the health care crisis among children in the United States, for example.

Nearly 11 million of our children are not covered by health insurance. Uninsured children tend not to get preventative medical care. They get sick more and miss school an average of 25 percent more than children whose families are insured, or they go to school ill and unprepared to learn.

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