

REMEMBERING 'BIG THINKER' ALVINWEINBERG - 'One of most significant scientists in this country and in the world'

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OAK RIDGE, Tenn. - Ronnie Bogard told the Oak Ridge Rotary Club about the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge's plans for the late Alvin Weinberg's personal papers, and why a Children's Museum has the files in the first place.

"We want our kids to know who Alvin Weinberg was and how important he thought education was and how he wanted kids to be able to think critically and to think big and to think beyond the narrow area of science," Bogard, the daughter of the late Children's Museum Director Selma Shapiro said. She said her mother had promised Weinberg to keep these papers, which she said cover many different subjects.

Many in the crowd at the DoubleTree by Hilton Oak Ridge hotel had known Weinberg, a former director of Oak Ridge National Laboratory from 1955 through 1973. Before that, he worked on the Manhattan Project and then as director of research.

Bogard said under his leadership the biology research at the lab expanded.

Bogard described Weinberg as one of the "big thinkers" who moved "in the direction of using isotopes for medical treatment and diagnosis" with his work on radioisotopes.

She said his papers have "world wide significance today and for the future.

"He was one of the most significant scientists in this country and even, as I would say, in the world," Bogard said, adding later that in Europe and China, scientists are working on molten reactor designs based on Weinberg's ideas. She described Weinberg as smart, humble and "good at mentoring other people." As Bogard explained, the Weinberg Archive Project, which she leads, includes preserving the Children's Museum's collection of 200 boxes of Weinberg's personal papers donated in 1986, presentations and correspondence. It also includes assessing, digitizing and sharing the collection, and featuring it in a future Children's Museum exhibit.

Bogard described this exhibit as interactive.

"We hope to make it for all ages, where young kids and older kids and adults can find aspects of that exhibit that will be meaningful to them," she said.

In response to a question, Bogard said this future, exhibit phase is not as clear yet as earlier phases that involved

organizing and digitizing the documents.

She said there was discussion about the Weinberg exhibits being interactive and teaching children "basic principals of physics" and the interest his ideas still hold today.

She said a kiosk will be available at the museum before the exhibit is finished.

It will include a desk that has a computer with the digital records. A notebook will explain the various topics involved.

She said she hoped school children would be able to use the information for school projects. She said a separate area would allow scientists and "serious researchers" to do research with digital files.

Shapiro and Weinberg Bogard started her talk by talking about her mother, Selma Shapiro, the longtime children's museum director and why the Children's Museum - which celebrated its 45th birthday last year - had the papers in the first place.

"There's also the personal story that goes with it for me," she said. A number of people in the room raised their hands when she asked if they knew Shapiro.

"Obviously, this Rotary club was really important for her," Bogard said. She said her mother took the position at the museum "once we all left for college." She was almost 50 at that time.

"What was amazing was the transformation that we saw our mother go through once she took that job. She was finally getting to do something for herself, and she became incredibly passionate about it," Bogard said.

She said her mother oversaw the museum moving to the former Highland View Elementary School and understood the value of a "historical" building.

"The main thing about my mom was that she believed in education. That was a value that she instilled in all of us in our family. She believed the children could learn through play. That they needed a place to learn outside of the pressures of the classroom, and she wanted that experience to not be just for children, but to be intergenerational.

And that was the whole driving concept for her at the Children's Museum," Bogard said.

She also spoke on her mother's interest in sharing Oak Ridge history, which she made a priority at the museum.

"She felt that those of us growing up did not have any idea about the history of our community," Bogard said, adding this had been true during her childhood. "What we didn't really know is what was here before and why were we here because I think people wanted to move on at that point and not really talk about the history so much." She talked about her mother's work on the Appalachian exhibit, which tells about the area before Oak

Ridge, and the Difficult Decisions exhibit on the Manhattan Project's history.

She said Weinberg was "very interested and very supportive" of the Children's Museum.

"For him, education was everything," Bogard said.

She said as Weinberg and Shapiro forged a friendship, Weinberg knew that the Children's Museum was where he wanted his papers.

"He asked her to promise him that she would keep those papers," Bogard said. As usual, she said, her mother was true to her word.

"She took that commitment seriously and even though there were times when other people were wanting to get that collection and take it elsewhere, she always said, 'I'm not breaking my promise,'" Bogard said. She also said that Weinberg's firing by the U.S. Department of Energy was another factor in him not wanting DOE to have the papers.

"He wanted to be sure that they were somewhere he could feel confident that they could be maintained," Bogard said.

She said she remembered being asked by the museum's current Executive Director Beth Shea to work on the project.

"I felt the presence of my mother in the room at that very moment saying, 'Of course, you can do this,'" Bogard said.

How to help

Bogard said donations may be made to the website <http://childrensmuseumofokridge.org/weinberg/> or as checks made out to the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge with "Weinberg project" in the memo line. The checks can be mailed to the museum at 461 West Outer Drive, Oak Ridge TN 37830. Donations may also be made over the phone at (865) 482-1074 via credit card.

She said about \$24,000 of the desired amount had already been raised, which helps to pay for materials and the salary for archivist Kittie Crittenden.

She said, however, she has to raise another \$20,000 next year for the project, and is seeking grants for the exhibit.

She also recommended people who "were mentored or influenced" by Weinberg contribute personal stories for a video series, which can be watched on the Children's Museum's YouTube channel or at <http://childrensmuseumofokridge.org/weinberg-personal-videos/>.

"It's a really fun project.

It's been really important to me," Bogard said.

If you would like to add your video memories, contact Ronnie Bogard, who is leading the Weinberg Papers Archive Project, at (865) 482-7991, or weinbergpapers@gmail.com.

See the project's website, <http://childrensmuseumof oakridge.org/weinberg/>, to learn more about the preservation of Weinberg's papers and for links to his oral history and articles of interest.

Call Ben Pounds at (865) 220-5502 and follow him on Twitter@Bpoundsjournal.

Caption: **Weinberg**

Ben Pounds/The Oak Ridger

Pictured from left are Oak Ridge's city historian D. Ray Smith, guest speaker Ronnie Bogard and Rotarian Connor Matthews.

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