



ONEIDA MOUNTAINEER

www.oneidaschool.org

A bi-monthly newsletter of Oneida Baptist Institute

July/August 2024

Celebrating 125 years of Education for Time and Eternity

Three OBI athletes advance to state competitions in spring sports

OBI's spring sports season culminated with athletes in both tennis and track and field becoming regional qualifiers and advancing to state-level competition. It was a special year as the teams enjoyed the new track and field and lighting on the tennis courts, all features of the Walker Athletic Complex.

Jason Erhunmwunse (photo right), an OBI junior from Nigeria, became the regional runner up in the high jump with a jump of 5-feet, 8 inches. At state, he tied for 15th place. "It was my first time to do it! I was so proud!" he smiled. He also placed 6th in the region in long jump.



Though Jason has played soccer, basketball and tennis at OBI, this was his first season to try track and field. After watching a training video about high jump, Jason reacted, "It looked interesting and fun!" It wasn't until his regional success that he realized he was pretty good at the event. "I was surprised that I made it to state!" Jason said.

Another first-timer to track and field was seventh grader and local student **Mimi Olayinka** (photo left). She represented OBI at both the middle school and high school track meets in the Girls' 400 meter dash after a fourth-place regional finish. In the high school meet, she was the only 7th grader



and crossed the line in 16th place of 23 runners.

Three-year OBI tennis veteran and rising senior **Samuel Cho** (photo right) from South Korea qualified for the state tennis match as a 13th Region Boy's Singles semifinalist. This was his first year to make it to state. Though he did not advance out of the first round, he was proud of the progress he has made in tennis. "Last year, I made it to [regional] quarter finals. This year, I made it to semi finals and state. Next year, I want to be a region finalist!" he said. □



Homecoming 2024 Saturday October 19th

Join us to celebrate:

- The Class of 1974
- OBI's 125th Anniversary
- Athletic Hall of Fame Inductee

More Highlights:

11:00 AM— Hymn Sing at Oneida Baptist Church
11:30 AM-1:00 PM—Lunch at Underwood Hall Cafeteria
1:00 PM—Alumni Recognition
2:00 PM—Special J.A. Burns 125 Year Celebration Lecture given by President Larry A. Gritton, Jr.

Alumni, former students or staff, whatever your connection is to OBI, you are welcome at Homecoming!

Questions? Email:
alumni@oneidaschool.org



***Reminisce, Reconnect,
Reflect***

Summer Fun



Summer Ball—OBI played games home and away 2-3 times a week with practices during late May and June.



Tennis Camps in June—We offered four days of beginning tennis for grades 4-7 and a two-day skills camp for grades 7-12.

Volleyball Open Gyms—

The Lady Mountaineers began prepping for their fall season on Tuesdays and Thursdays in late June.



Basketball Camp in July—Local children in grades 2-8 had a free fun day on campus learning about basketball and Jesus.

Expanding the Vision—The Sparks Legacy

Having weathered many storms and witnessed many miracles in its first 40 years, Oneida Baptist Institute entered a season of growth and expansion under the leadership of OBI's seventh president Rev. D. Chester Sparks and his wife, Zella Mai, from 1948-1962.

Born 10 miles from Oneida on Sexton's Creek, Sparks was nine years old when his father was killed in an ambush. Chester was sent to a home for orphans in Louisville until he completed the 8th grade and returned to Clay County. At age 16, he had saved \$11 from a summer of farm work and decided to go to Oneida.

In the January, 1973 issue of the *Oneida Mountaineer*, Sparks recounted, "I did not know anyone connected with the School but had been told that no one was ever turned away for lack of money if he would work and apply himself. ... I told the principal, Mr. Walker, that I positively could not get money to pay my way. He said a way could be provided, and told me to keep the eleven dollars to buy my books and other things. I enjoyed every privilege and benefit provided by [OBI] until I was able to make a certificate to teach. ... I have always felt that I owe a great debt of gratitude to Oneida Institute for making it possible for me to go to school. Without this opportunity, I could not have gone at all."



Rev. and Mrs. D. Chester Sparks served as OBI president and Dean of Students from 1948-1962.

Sparks attended Eastern State Teachers College and taught for several years before being ordained as a Baptist minister in 1923. He was well known across Kentucky as a skilled speaker and man of character.

A graduate of New Orleans Seminary, Mrs. Sparks was Secretary of Elementary Work in the Tennessee Baptist Sunday School Department for 15 years before her marriage. As she served alongside her pastor husband, she continued her work with youth through Sunday School, Women's Missionary Union and summer camps.

During the Sparks' tenure at OBI, two major buildings were added—D. Chester Sparks Health Building and James A. Burns Hall. The Sparks gymnasium opened in 1954 and replaced OBI's first gym, destroyed by fire in 1950. The lower floor classrooms were finished in 1965. Burns Hall, a girls' dormitory and dining hall, was made possible by a \$250,000 donation and completed in 1960.

Even in his administrative role, Sparks remained a pastor at heart. He preached in chapel once per week and served in a pastor role to thousands of students. "Papa" and "Mai Mai" as they were known to the young people were best remembered for their love



The 1912 "undefeated" Oneida baseball team included three future OBI presidents: Charles Goins, Saul Houchell, and Chester Sparks.

"May you use your talents wisely and never be satisfied with any achievement short of your best. May your purpose in life be larger than self and your faith enlarged through constant fellowship with the Eternal. This is our wish and our prayer for you."

Rev. D. Chester Sparks' address to the student body in the 1962 Oneidian Yearbook

and devotion to the students. One wrote, "The Sparks' own home prior to their coming to Oneida, while at Oneida, and after leaving the school was always open day or night for any who came knocking. Many young people were taken in, fed and given a bed."

After their retirement, the Sparks moved to a home across Goose Creek in sight of their beloved school. They continued to support the work of Oneida in many ways from multi-state speaking engagements to organizing jam and jelly drives for OBI.

In his final *Mountaineer* article as president, Sparks wrote, "To the Baptists of Kentucky, your moral support backed up by your financial support from the Cooperative Program has not only helped greatly but has, I trust, brought glory to Christ and His cause."

Mrs. Sparks died from a heart condition on Christmas Eve, 1963. Rev. Sparks, who had gone to live with his son in Tennessee, returned for a dinner held in honor of his 80th birthday on January 6th, 1973 and was named President Emeritus. Rev. Sparks was in Springfield, Missouri at the time of his death in 1978. □



D Chester Sparks Hall today. Some OBI alumni remember helping to lay bricks when they were students!

Academic Improvements & Goals for 2024-25

We have been diligently preparing for the 2024-2025 school year and look forward to another opportunity to provide a Christ-centered education to each and every student. Reflecting on the achievements of the past year reminds us of God's grace and faithfulness and prepares us to focus on the next tasks.

The upper floor Baker Hall classrooms have been completely renovated with new carpet, desks and state-of-the-art digital projectors. Professional development opportunities offered on campus have helped to equip teachers to meet the unique needs of our students. We improved communication procedures between administrators, parents, staff and students. We added magnetic door locks on three classroom buildings in an ongoing effort to improve campus security.



Baker Hall renovation completed this summer to make room for our growing middle school.

One of our greatest blessings for the upcoming year is the addition of six certified teachers an additional full-time principal. Increased staffing enables us to keep smaller class sizes and to provide individual attention—the recipe for success for most of Oneida's students. We look forward to a great year! □

Alumni Spotlight



Trey and Christle Abner with their children, Wyle and Ada, named after Trey's grandmother, long-time OBI cook Ada "Granny" Abner.

Trey and Christle (McCann) Abner met at OBI their senior year, 2007-2008. Trey was a local day student from Oneida who had attended OBI his whole life. Christle enrolled as a senior from Louisville. They met the first day of school and started dating after Christmas.

Trey's father and both siblings are OBI alumni. His mother, aunt and "Granny" worked in the kitchen. He said, "OBI was my home away from home all throughout my life." Christle came to OBI needing a fresh start after a difficult upbringing. When she got to OBI, she said, "OBI let me be me. I could finally be a teen and live." She was active in cheerleading, the farm, choir and softball.

After graduation and months of "long-distance" dating, the couple married in 2010 and settled in Oneida. Trey traveled a lot with his job as a commercial HVAC technician for 10 years before becoming an instructor with the Clay County vocational school and starting his own HVAC business.

A stay at home mom who also ran a home cleaning business, Christle decided to apply for a job at OBI in 2022. She recalled, "I was driving

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Would you like to contact us?
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A family missions trip to OBI



Pictured L-R: Steve Parker, Dan & Nancy Parker, OBI staffer Aaron Grinnell and Pat & Tony Callan.

Two brothers, a sister and their spouses from northern Kentucky, central Kentucky and Tennessee met at OBI in June for a week of volunteering. Steve joked that their family vacation plans started out as a trip to Hawaii and ended up in Oneida! He learned of OBI's need for help on the farm when President Larry Gritton, Jr. visited his central Kentucky church last spring.

Reared as Kentucky Baptists on a farm in Owen County, the siblings knew about OBI and they knew they could help. Nancy added, "It's time to spend together and to do something for the Lord." □



In Memoriam

Martha Bain Rice

OBI English teacher 1950-1964
*Organized OBI's first
Baptist Student Union*

Ray Lewis, Class of 1953

Stella Davidson Steely

Class of 1948

Ruby Craft Martin, Class of 1947

Zane Fraker, former staff
Clara Alexander, former staff
Lenda Mock, former staff
Chuck Mullenix, former staff

Abners cont. from p. 3

home one day and something made me stop." Headed into her third year on staff, Christle serves wherever there is a need. Currently, she is the main office administrative assistant. She explained why she is glad she joined the OBI staff: "God puts us where we need to be even if we think it's our decision. Yes, OBI is a workplace, but it is also a big family." □

Bits & Tidbits

Time to enroll for 2024-25!

If you know of a young person who may like to come to OBI, share this contact information with their family.

Email: admissions@oneidaschool.org
Telephone: 606-847-4111 ext. 233

OBI Homecoming October 19, 2024

Make plans to attend! Share the date with your OBI friends!

Alumni & Former Students

We want to stay connected!

Fill out a short survey by scanning the QR code. You can also email: alumni@oneidaschool.org



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