

## *A Tribute to the Clasens*

*WATG Conference, November 2, 2018*



Most of you are here today because of Donna Rae and Bob Clasen. They were pioneers in gifted education in Wisconsin: Bob at UW-Madison and Donna Rae at UW-Whitewater. They worked individually and collaboratively for decades on programs for gifted children, professional development for teachers, and research on gifted education. Bob passed away this past March; Donna Rae is here with us today, and it is my privilege to say a few words of tribute regarding their contributions to Wisconsin's gifted children, their parents, and their teachers.

Robert Earl Clasen (known by all as Bob) was born in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and started his career teaching in the Milwaukee schools. He received his Ph.D. from UW-Madison and worked for the Ford Foundation for several years, including curriculum development work in Spain and Venezuela. Back in Wisconsin, he joined the faculty of his alma mater and introduced the Head Start program to Madison. With respect to gifted education, he developed several programs for children, including Lego Logo, the Badger Brain Games, the Haiku Project, and College for Kids. Most of these programs also had a strong component of teacher professional development. Bob developed a master's program with an emphasis in gifted education at UW-Madison, and he also organized a group of gifted coordinators under the umbrella of the university. That group, called the Dane County UTAG, grew and flourished and later struck out

on its own as a non-profit, now known as the Greater Dane County Advanced Learner Network. He and Donna Rae also developed a number of distance learning opportunities for teachers, including radio, television, and video instruction on gifted education, thinking skills, and teaching for creativity.

Bob and Donna Rae laid the groundwork for Wisconsin's licensure programs many years ago, as they went around the state collecting information and grassroots support for the need to challenge kids appropriately. They spearheaded the efforts that resulted in Wisconsin Statute 118.35, Programs for Gifted and Talented Pupils, and the administrative rule known as "Standard t," as well as some behind-the-scenes work that allowed us later to develop the current gifted teacher and coordinator licensure programs.

Donna Rae James Clasen was born in Platteville and raised on a farm near Rewey; she began her teaching career in South Milwaukee. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology at UW-Madison, and was asked to join the faculty at UW-Whitewater. In addition to her collaborations with Bob, she also started a master's program with an emphasis in gifted education (at UWW), and she organized the Whitewater TAG Network of gifted coordinators from the southeast part of Wisconsin, now known as the Southern Lakes Advanced Learner Network. Donna Rae also helped guide the development of EAGLE school in Fitchburg and served on its board for many years. She was also the president of WAEGT, a precursor to WATG, and like Bob, she presented scholarly papers at state, national, and international conferences.

Donna Rae received Wisconsin's first Javits grant in 1992 (and we think its only Javits grant until recently) to develop and run the STREAM program, a well-researched program for urban secondary school students. After the federal grant funding ended, she kept the program going for another decade through sheer determination and with state and local school district funding, and those students benefited tremendously from challenging classes, time spent on a college campus, and the belief that they were in fact "college material."

Bob and Donna Rae also did a large amount of pro bono consulting for school districts on how to identify, nurture, and program for students from all walks of life who had gifts and talents. Please stand with me and applaud the Clasens for all they have done for gifted education in Wisconsin and beyond.