

**March 9, 2004**

### **WICHE & Idaho Celebrate 50 Years**

Boise -- The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) is celebrating 50 years as a force shaping higher education in the West. WICHE, along with Idaho and 14 other member states, works collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for the West's citizens. WICHE's anniversary celebration will be held concurrently with the Board of Regents meeting on Wednesday, March 10, at 5 p.m. in the Joe R. Williams Building East Conference Room at 700 West State Street in Boise.

Idaho has been an integral part of WICHE since its creation in 1952. Originally founded to broaden access to medical, dental, and veterinary schools for students in states that didn't support such programs, WICHE currently enrolls more than 19,000 students in 13 professional degree programs, 134 graduate programs, and scores of undergraduate disciplines. WICHE is the only organization in the West that focuses exclusively on higher education issues, from accountability to tuition and fees to distance learning and innovation. Its primary issue - access - has been one of the region's most pressing educational and social issues, from the days of the GI Bill down to the present. Today, when our economy demands a highly educated workforce, WICHE actively supports the idea that every student should be prepared for college, and everyone should have access to a college education.

Idaho's students and their families are the primary beneficiaries of WICHE's three Student Exchange programs: the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), and Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP). They saved some \$6.3 million in tuition and fees this year through WUE, which enables Idaho's students to enroll in institutions in other states and pay 150 percent of resident tuition. Over 1,250 of Idaho's undergraduate students, as well as a number of graduate students, are currently enrolled in out-of-state programs via WICHE. Through PSEP, eight of Idaho's professional students are studying optometry out of state in 2003-04. The majority of these students return to the state to practice.

Two Idaho WICHE graduates, Dr. Jeffrey Johnson and Taunia Kerner, will be present Wednesday to speak about their experience in the program. Dr. Johnson opened a private optometry practice in Boise in December 1991. He specializes in treating students and adults with Visually Related Learning Difficulties and Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitation. Born in Ft. Pierce, Fla., he grew up in Craig, Colo, but came to Boise for his undergraduate degree. Kerner currently works at Mercy Medical Center in Nampa as a Staff Occupational Therapist. She works with patients of all ages and has experience in acute care, pediatrics and home health. She graduated in December 1996 with an Occupational

Therapy degree from the University of North Dakota through the WICHE student exchange program. She also has a degree from the University of Idaho in communications, advertising, and public relations that she received in December of 1988. She has worked as an occupational therapist since 1996, and lives in Nampa.

Idaho has been an active participant in WICHE projects to support better-informed decision-making at the state level. One example: the state has been involved in the Western Consortium for Accelerated Learning Opportunities (WCALO). Funded with \$2.4 million from the federal Advanced Placement (AP) Incentive Program over two years, the nine-state consortium is increasing the number of low-income students enrolling and succeeding in Advanced Placement courses and other accelerated-learning options. In addition, teams of policymakers and educational leaders from Idaho participate each year in WICHE's regional policy forums and meetings, which are designed to assist in the creation of good public policy in the West.

#### More about WICHE

WICHE's 15 member states - Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming - work collaboratively to promote innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, strengthening higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life. In addition to its Student Exchange, WICHE's programs include WCET (Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications), an international leader in helping states and institutions use new technologies to improve education; Policy Analysis and Research; Mental Health; and the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC), a rapidly expanding trilateral initiative. Another initiative, the Northwest Academic Forum, addresses regional higher education issues and engages in cooperative resource sharing; a current effort, dubbed NEON (Northwest Educational Outreach Network), will broaden student access to higher education through an innovative interstate collaboration that taps the "anywhere, anytime" benefits of distance education.

Each state has three gubernatorially appointed commissioners who help guide the work of the commission. Richard L. Bowen, president, Idaho State University, Pocatello; Jack Riggs, physician, Coeur d'Alene; and Gary W. Stivers, executive director, State Board of Education, Boise, currently serve Idaho on the commission. In addition, WICHE's Legislative Advisory Committee works to strengthen state policymaking in higher education, engaging legislators in the discussion of higher education issues and seeking their input on strategies for interstate collaboration. Senator Patti Anne Lodge represents Idaho on this committee.