

**2017 EDUCATION IMPACT AWARD—GAIL BALLINGER**  
**Presented by Gary Akin**

Historically, ask any real estate agent, “what is the number one reason why young families move to Owasso?” The answer will almost always be the quality of education provided in the Owasso Public School system. It’s a correct answer and comparative scholastic scores will bear the proof. We know that the center of academic excellence lives inside the classroom with dedicated teachers. Today, we salute a special lady whose life has been dedicated to educating our children, leading our school board, and setting an example of service above self.

This exceptional lady received her Elementary Education Degree with a minor in Biology, from Northeastern State University. She went on to become a wonderful classroom teacher for over 30 years, 18 of those years in Owasso teaching 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies. She was Owasso’s Teacher of the Year in 1987. She was known for making her classes exciting for her kids. You see, she’s always loved to travel, she’s visited over 60 countries, and with each visit, she would bring back clothing and other items from that country. She would then enter her classroom dressed in the native attire, serve native food, and then tell stories of her adventures. The kids would be captivated. They loved her stories, and they learned.

After retiring from the classroom, she wanted to continue to serve and be involve in education. So, in 2003, she ran for the Ward 3 seat on the Board of Education, and won! She is now completing her 15<sup>th</sup> year as a school board member and is currently serving in the capacity of board president. She recently announced that she would not be seeking another 5-year term, and thus, will bring an end to a marvelous 45-year stint in education. Owasso is a better place because of her service.

She has always been adventurous. Just a couple of years ago, to celebrate her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, she jumped out of a perfectly good plane for her first skydiving experience. She said it was a great thrill.

It’s a great thrill to announce the 2017 Education Impact Award winner, Gail Ballinger.