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Nancy Vesper Snyder-Lieftenck, MS, OTRL,  
FAOTA

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## **Sponsor Profile:**

**Nancy Vesper Snyder-Lieftenck, MS, OTRL, FAOTA**



*The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy* (OJOT) is pleased to recognize Nancy Vesper Snyder-Lieftenck, MS, OTRL, FAOTA, as the sponsor of the Fall 2019 issue. Nancy is an occupational therapist with a distinguished and celebrated record spanning 6 decades as a clinician, educator, and persistent advocate for occupational therapy, as demonstrated by her career-long record of leadership and service. She is most recognized for her contributions related to the development of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF). In 1987, when a decision was made to separate the AOTF from AOTA, she strongly advocated for the necessary leadership to ensure a collaborative structure between the two organizations. As she stated in a seminal article in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* (AJOT):

Our profession has developed an excellent collaborative structure between the Association and the Foundation. Collaboration will bring to fruition the hopes and dreams of our pioneers, leaders, educators, and committed practitioners that the consumer of health care and society consider occupational science and occupational therapy to be of paramount importance in the delivery of health care. (Snyder, 1988, p 8)

Nancy initially served as president of the AOTF from 1969 to 1976, prior to the transition to a separate organization, and was again elected in 1985, serving until 1989. The emphasis on scholarship and research was a hallmark outcome of her leadership that today continues to be the essential purpose and mission of the AOTF. Under her direction, the AOTF board of directors established the AOTF state scholarship program and hired the foundation's first full-time executive director. In 2003, she was honored with the distinct designation of Honorary Life Membership by the board of directors of the AOTF and was also recognized with the Leadership Commendation Award in 2012 for her many contributions and distinguished service. In addition, Nancy was inducted into the Roster of Fellows of AOTA in 1975 and received the Retired Educator's Award in 2003. She is also listed in *Who's Who in Rehabilitation*.

Nancy held many other prominent positions in the profession, including membership on the AOTA executive board, the Investment Advisory Committee, the Personnel Committee, the Standards and Ethics Commission, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE), and the Dues and Fees Committee. In addition to national service to AOTA, Nancy has held offices in the

Ohio Occupational Therapy Association and was a board member for Goodwill Industries of Central Ohio and president of the ECCO Family Health Center.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, where she has lived her entire life, Nancy has been a life-long devoted Ohio State University (OSU) Buckeyes fan, as was her father, who was a member of the OSU marching band in the years 1917-1918. Dressed up on football Saturdays in OSU gear, she enjoyed home games for over 50 years, noting that, "I breathe Buckeyes!"

Starting out at OSU as an undergraduate planning to pursue a degree in medical technology, Nancy renewed what would become a life-long friendship when she realized that a childhood friend was in a class in which they were both enrolled. A student in the occupational therapy program, her friend shared her enthusiasm about her course of study. After a few conversations, Nancy decided to switch her major to occupational therapy. Sixty years later, they continue to be in contact after many years of personal friendship and professional activity, working together on many AOTA committees throughout their careers.

Following completion of her undergraduate degree in occupational therapy, Nancy immediately began her first job as a staff occupational therapist in 1954 at the Department of Physical Medicine, treating persons with polio. Soon after, she was given the opportunity to establish the first occupational therapy program at Dodd Hall Rehabilitation Center at OSU, where she eventually became the director of Occupational Therapy Services, followed by an appointment as director of Administrative Services. Nancy has also served as a personal injury evaluator and worked in the Perry County Community School in Ohio as an occupational therapist along with managing a private practice from 1988 to 2004.

In 1968, Nancy completed her Master of Science degree in Home Economics at OSU. Her thesis, "The Utilization of the Management and Decision-Making Process in Homemaker Rehabilitation," was completed simultaneously with a 3-year research project as co-investigator to study the rehabilitation of claimants applying for disability benefits, old age, and survivors' insurance of social security. Both clearly show evidence of an occupational therapist who led the path in occupation-based practice and research.

In 2010, while browsing through an OSU publication that profiles distinguished alumni, she noted the name of John Lieftenck who had "pinned" her 57 years prior, when they were both undergraduates at OSU. She decided to contact him, and following many phone calls over a short period of time, he invited her to accompany him on a Caribbean cruise, where he proposed to her. Married in 2011, they enjoyed a brief yet very loving marriage, as he passed away only 2 years later.

Reflecting on her career, she indicated that her most significant accomplishments occurred as chairperson of ACOTE, in which she developed a streamlined system for program evaluation during her 9 years of service on the council. In addition, her role as president of the AOTF provided an opportunity to strengthen the mission of its operations, including the development of the executive director position. This resulted in the critical need for a strong business model that enabled the AOTF to evolve into the viable organization it is today.

She notes that significant lessons learned from a career over 6 decades includes the value of the interprofessional approach in which health professionals collaborate in the best interests of the patient and client. She recalls the joy of mentoring occupational therapy students and learning of their postgraduation success. She recalled her mentoring of Dr. Ruth Hansen, who worked as an occupational therapy aide while an occupational therapy student and who decades later was honored with the highest award given by AOTA, the Award of Merit. In her acceptance speech, Dr. Hansen ended her comments

with a special recognition to Nancy, stating that “I would not be standing here if weren’t for Nancy Snyder” a tribute that indeed deeply touched her.

Nancy is clearly a treasured colleague and friend and a distinguished member of the AOTA. We are, indeed, honored to add her name to OJOT’s roster of sponsors.

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### **Reference**

Snyder, N. (1988). American occupational therapy foundation: Promoting the occupational therapy profession. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 42, 7-8