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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Longtime Portage County Advocate Honored By Ohio MRDD Group

COLUMBUS, Ohio – One of the “founding mothers” of the *Portage County Board of MRDD* recently was honored at the *Ohio Association of County Boards of MRDD (OACB) 25TH ANNUAL CONVENTION* held at the Easton Hilton Hotel on Monday, Oct. 27.

Bonnie Sisley was one of three board members from across the state of Ohio who received the *Distinguished Service Award*, which began in 2006. There are 616 *County Board of MRDD* members in Ohio’s 88 counties.

Board members are nominated and chosen for their outstanding service and commitment to their local *County Board of MRDD*.

“These volunteer board members are the backbone of every school and agency across the state that helps individuals with developmental disabilities,” said Dan Ohler, *OACB* Executive Director. “Without their guidance, experience and wisdom, the 80,000 people we serve would not have their abilities and programs they enjoy today.”

In 1955, Bonnie Sisley, along with her husband Walter and other members of the Portage County community, build the *Happy Days School for Retarded Children*. Seven years later, the Sisleys found out they would have a child attending the school when their daughter Kathy was diagnosed with a developmental disability.

Bonnie immediately became actively involved in leadership positions. In 1967 when the *Portage County Board of Mental Retardation* was formed, she was appointed to serve, and went on to serve four terms, holding the secretary and president offices.

“I was privileged to be part of a very significant expansion of Board programs, services, and operations,” Mrs. Sisley said. These included passage of the first and several following levies, construction of a new *Happy Day School* in 1974, conversion of the old *Happy Day School* into an adult workshop and administration building, the provision of nursing services and physical, occupational, and speech/language therapy services, the construction of a transportation facility in 1978, and the opening of a new

larger workshop, *Portage Industries*, in 1980. To a significant degree, what the Board is today, said Pat Macke, superintendent of the *Portage County Board of MRDD*.

Even though her tenure as a board member ended in 1983, to the present Bonnie has continued to be active in her support of board.

“Kathy was my reason for dedication,” Mrs. Sisley told the crowd of almost 600 convention attendees. She noted that work with people with developmental disabilities is continuing in her family as her son Tom has a daughter with Down Syndrome.

“Even after Bonnie retired from our board, she remains very active by helping with levies, Special Olympics and other areas where we need her,” Mr. Macke said. Current Board Member Tom Cochran helped present the award to Mrs. Sisley.

The other board members recognized were Paul Shaeffer from the *Preble County Board of MRDD* and Dennis Butler from the *Highland County Board of MRDD*.

The *OACB* is celebrating its 25th. Its mission is to “support *County Boards of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities* in providing services and supports to individuals with disabilities.”

All 88 *County Boards of MRDD* in Ohio are members of this organization whose purpose is to educate and advocate for the 80,000 individuals with developmental disabilities who reside in the Buckeye State.

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