

Opening General Session speaker Dana Bowman says he came back from a near-fatal skydiving accident by focusing on his ability, not his disability.



BLI: 'This year was the best ever'

*by Gary Motz
managing editor*

The fifth annual OSBA Board Leadership Institute (BLI) drew over 200 school board members to downtown Columbus for two days of learning, networking and fellowship. The 2006 BLI was held at the Hyatt Regency on April 28 and 29.

The institute — which is designed exclusively for school board members — featured two dynamic keynote speakers, a variety of in-depth breakout sessions, two luncheons, a reception and plenty of time for networking. The 24 breakout sessions were divided among six learning tracks: boardmanship, communications, critical issues, finance, legal/legislative and student achievement.

Among the education professionals leading the sessions were school board members; arts advocates; the State Board of

Education president; district administrators; financial, legislative and labor experts; board development specialists; school law attorneys; and Ohio Department of Education representatives. Topics included school funding; gifted education; long-range planning; community engagement; effective evaluations; paperless board meetings; legislative and legal issues; special education; collective bargaining; and policy development. Two luncheons and a Friday evening reception gave board members the chance to ask presenters and OSBA staffers questions, as well as share ideas and experiences with each other.

When they arrived, participants received a binder containing handouts from all the breakout sessions, which helped them make more informed choices about what workshops to attend. The binders also provided board members with information on the sessions they couldn't attend, and enabled them to take information home to



colleagues. More resources were available at the on-site OSBA bookstore, which offered a wide variety of publications on school district leadership.

OSBA President **Linda F.R. Omobien, Akron City**, and Deputy Executive Director **Richard Lewis** welcomed board members to Columbus before the General Session. Omobien also introduced the session's speaker, **Dana Bowman**.

"On behalf of the Board of Trustees I bring greetings to you, and thank you so very, very much for attending the conference this weekend," Omobien said. "I have found this to be an exciting time, and also a very informative time. Sessions are smaller ... and you can ask all kinds of questions and get a lot of information to take back to your respective districts. I think that's critically important."

"I would like to extend the appreciation and the gratitude of the OSBA staff to you on several accounts," Lewis said. "First, thank you for your dedication to continuing in-service. That's a very, very important thing for school boards to do. Secondly, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to come all the way to Columbus for this event. And third, we'd like to thank you for choosing the Board Leadership Institute, and for the confidence you've shown in OSBA to select this in-service opportunity."

Bowman's inspiring story of drive and determination in the face of unthinkable adversity got the institute off to an incredible start.

"You are a team and you have a lot of responsibility," Bowman told the audience. "There's power in this room; this is a powerful crew."

"What type of opportunities do you seek out ... how do you put your life together? Are you good board members or are you *great* board members?"

Bowman knows a lot about finding and taking advantage of opportunities. A mediocre student in high school, he joined the U.S. Army at the age of 18 as a heavy equipment operator. With hard work and determination, he went on to become a member of the Special Forces and the Army's elite Golden Knights skydiving team.

But the soldier's world changed forever in the skies over Arizona in 1994. That's when he lost both his legs in a mid-air skydiving collision that killed one of his teammates. That horrific moment was captured on film, and was part of a video shown at the General Session highlighting Bowman's journey.

Back at square one, he seized opportunity again by focusing on his abilities, not his disabilities. After a long, tough period of rehabilitation and fitted with artificial legs, he returned to skydiving and became the first double amputee to reenlist in the Army. He served as the U.S. Parachute Team's lead speaker and recruiting commander, and continued his speaking career after retiring from the Army.

"I didn't have a book when I graduated from high school to teach me how to deal with tragedy," Bowman said. "It was hard ... I just wanted to get my life back, maybe jump again, or even walk across the street."

"Five months after the accident I walked out of the hospital, went to North Carolina, jumped out of a plane and landed right on target. I showed the military what I could do."

Bowman, whose story has been profiled many times on TV and in print, told the audience, "We can adjust to anything ... You go from good to great by adapting to changes with a positive attitude. Lead by example, because the kids you serve are looking for guidance."

In addition to his speaking career — which includes appearances at schools where he often parachutes in — Bowman works extensively with the disabled, inspiring and motivating them with his accomplishments. He also makes frequent visits to veterans' hospitals, where he encourages those trying to bounce back from devastating combat wounds suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"If I can adjust after what happened to me, so can you. You *can* make a difference ... Think about life, think about why you are here. You have to leave a legacy, you have to leave something behind."

The closing luncheon speaker, **Carol Ritz**, also focused on effectively dealing with change and adversity. Her specialty is teaching leaders the skills to empower their organizations to perform at their best — even in the face of events that may be beyond their control.

Ritz's extensive staff development experience includes work with the Ohio Department of Education, The Ohio State University, an international management consulting firm and her own training/speaking business, started in 1988. She's an expert at identifying training solutions that enable individuals and organizations to adapt to and surmount the ever-changing challenges of the 21st century.

"Leadership is all about sharing," Ritz said. "And what are you sharing? You're sharing the budget, the concerns, the risks, the issues, the possibilities. Who are you sharing it with? Others on the team, others on the school board and the parents and community. Why are you sharing it? So that together you can accomplish that overarching mission."

She pointed out that in organizations, 99% of the leadership happens at the middle levels. One person is at the top, but there's influence from many different leaders throughout the organization.

BLI 2007 planning under way

Planning has already begun for the sixth annual Board Leadership Institute (BLI), scheduled May 4-5, 2007, in Columbus.

If you have previously attended BLI, you already know the value of condensing multiple workshops, previously spread throughout the year at different locations, into one convenient package and venue. If you have never taken part in the institute, don't miss your chance to attend in 2007. Look for more details in upcoming issues of *OSBA's Journal* and *Briefcase*.

If you'd like to help plan the curriculum for next year's BLI, be sure to attend the Board Leadership Institute Focus Group in November during the OSBA Capital Conference. Contact OSBA's **Rob Delane** for details.