

No contest, but some issues among Dallas candidates

By GRACE R. DOVE
Post Staff

BACK MOUNTAIN - Five candidates are seeking five seats on the Dallas school board in the May primary. Incumbents Ernest Ashbridge, Jr., and John George are in for another term, while, barring an unprecedented write-in vote, John Litz, Reese Finn and Thomas Russ will fill the seats vacated by Ellen Nagy, Clarence Michael and Dr. Richard Coslett.

Finn, a self-employed electrician and registered Republican, is the only candidate who hasn't cross-filed.

"I'm not ashamed of my political affiliation," he said. Finn, who ran unsuccessfully for school board in 1983, said he wants "to lend a conservative viewpoint to the board."

"In the past decade the district's budget has nearly doubled," he said. "This is during a period of relatively low inflation. I don't think we have been getting as much quality education for our money as we could."

He describes serving on the school board as "taking on four years of frustration for community service."

Ashbridge, a retired chief financial officer for Hanover National Bank, will begin his sixth term. He has been a school director for 24 years.

He has represented Dallas on the Luzerne Intermediate Unit #18's board, of which he has been president for the past six years.

George, a retired businessman with a background in real estate, will begin his fourth term. He has headed the buildings and grounds committee for 16 years.

He wants to refurbish the district's buildings and centralize all elementary classes at the Dallas Elementary School.

"Westmoreland was originally built as a high school," he said. "It isn't really suited to be an elementary building."

George's children and grandchildren attended the Dallas schools; two grandchildren are

presently teachers, he said. "They received a good education," he said.

Finn favors Governor Tom Ridge's proposed school voucher system, although he disagrees with the provision which would prevent districts which lose students to other schools from laying off teachers.

Ashbridge doesn't believe Ridge's voucher system would affect Dallas very much, while George adamantly opposes vouchers, which he has described as "the dog's breakfast."

Litz wants to find out why test scores go down in the higher grades.

It would result in "mass confusion" for the public schools, George said. "There's no way for the districts to figure their enrollments, who would pick up the tab or how they would work out busing problems. It's like an experiment - I don't know if it will work."

Russ and Litz want to study vouchers more before voicing an opinion.

Finn believes that changing the high school's traditional seven-period day to compressed scheduling "isn't the way to go."

"I think the people see it as a non-issue," he said. "I haven't seen large groups of concerned, disgruntled parents asking board members about it."

Ashbridge has mixed feelings about it.

Although longer class periods and more material will better

"I don't think we have been getting as much quality education for our money as we could."

Reese Finn
School board candidate



ERNEST ASHBRIDGE, JR.

prepare the students for college, he's not sure they'll want to sit through 90 or 100-minute classes.

George favors keeping traditional scheduling rather than switching to compressed schedules, so students can take as many additional courses as possible for



JOHN GEORGE

college. Litz and Russ want to study the issue more thoroughly before committing themselves.

Russ, a territory manager for Ralston-Purina and the father of three girls, said he's concerned that students' standardized test

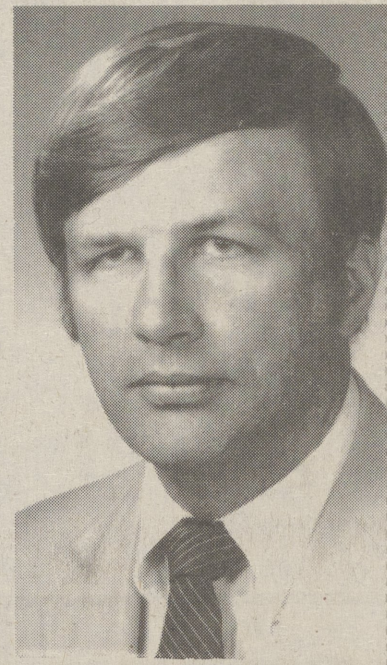


THOMAS RUSS

scores, which are high in the elementary grades, gradually go down as students go through middle school and into senior high.

"We must find out why this is happening and correct it," he said.

Litz, a division controller for UGI and the father of three chil-



JOHN LITZ

dren, served on the school board from 1988 to 1991.

"I'll need time to get reacquainted with the issues and the challenges," he said. "You tend to see them differently when you're more involved with them and have more information on them."

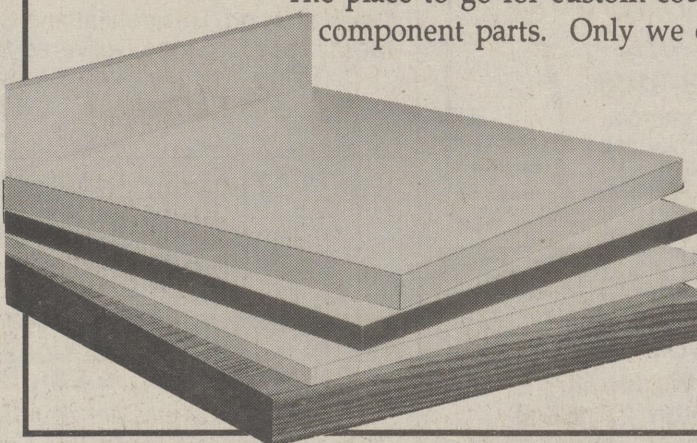
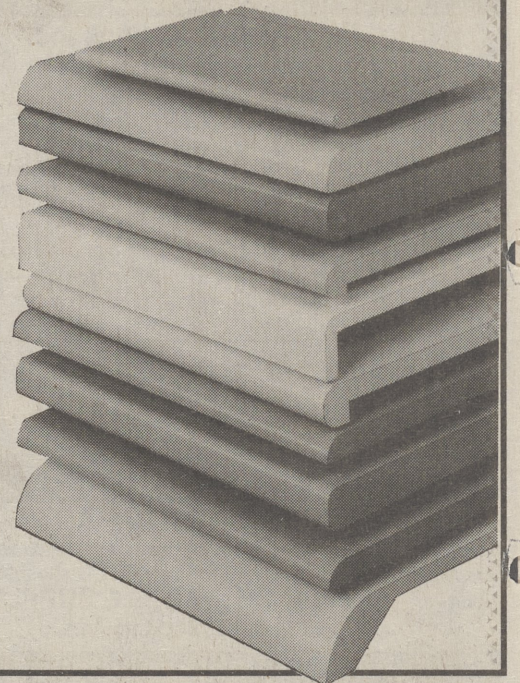
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3 board

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break," she said. She advises future board members to, "Do your homework. Be prepared for every meeting. Really listen to the community, its concerns and its needs. Solicit input from organizations and the general community."

Michael, who is beginning a new career selling insurance, must devote his time and energy to his work, rather than to the district.

He served as school board vice-president and president, was a member of the education, policy and transportation committees and represented Dallas on the board of the West Side Vocational-Technical School.

He said his 34 years of hands-on experience in education, as a high school teacher and guidance counselor, helped him as a school board member, but the combination of career and school board eventually became too hectic.

"I became so immersed in education that it ended up more like a busman's holiday" he said. "I need a respite."

Michael said the district has accomplished a lot during the past eight years - purchasing computers, replacing the equipment storage building, "getting a handle on finances," moving forward with the building program, bringing its facilities into compliance with federal regulations on asbestos and is moving toward compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

"I'd like to see the district hire a full-time computer coordinator," he said. "Jack Wega has done an excellent job. The board must also thoroughly research outcome-based education and decide whether or not it's good for our children."

Dr. Richard Coslett said he wants to spend more time with his daughters, Chelsea, 9, and baby Catherine, born last August.

He also needs more time for his very busy dental practice. Coslett was recently certified as a fellow in the Academy of General Dentistry after completing 500 hours of continuing education and passing a rigorous examination.

"I want to become a master in the Academy and become board-certified, which will require more courses, seminars and time away from home," he said. "While I was

on the school board, I never missed a meeting. Continuing my professional education would mean missing important meetings."

During his four years on the school board, he was president and served on the personnel, transportation and strategic planning committees.

He was also a member of the negotiating team during contract talks with both the professional and non-professional staff.

Since Coslett was elected in 1991, the district has hired an assistant superintendent, director of curriculum and assistant senior high school principal, which he strongly favored.

Both elementary schools have full-time nursing coverage, with either an aide or a registered school nurse.

The middle school ceiling has been replaced and safety arms have been installed on the school busses.

The curriculum has been updated, with clearly defined continuity between elementary, middle and high school grades.

"The district didn't have these things when I was elected," he said. "I have strongly supported them."

Coslett said he is frustrated and disappointed that so few candidates are running for office.

"There's no competition," he said. "We must involve the people who have children in school. If they don't want to serve on the school board, they could help out on the Citizens' Advisory Committee."

He's also frustrated because the public seems to have a distorted idea of the work and personal motivations of a school board member.

"It's not a political position," he said. "You're elected, but people don't get on the school board just to get other people jobs. If a board member's relative is applying for a position and is the most qualified person, it's a loss to the students and the district not to hire them simply to avoid the appearance of nepotism. It's an injustice."

All three outgoing members said their service was a positive experience, which Coslett summed up best: "I've grown incredibly as a person and have met many really great people in the community."

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Father John O'Leary Knights of Columbus, Council #8224, Dallas will hold its Annual Knight at the Races, May 6, at Gate of Heaven School Gym. The first race begins at 7:15. Admission is \$3.00. Admission is free with purchase of a horse. Tickets and horses will be sold at the door.