

The Dallas Township High School, opened in 1929, was the backdrop as Joe Stuccio, who lives across the street, waited for the bus last week. POST PHOTO/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

## Board had offer to buy old school

By KYLIE SHAFFERKOETTER  
Post Staff

DALLAS - For Blair W. Haddle the old Dallas Township High School is a building representing the good times and character of a passed era. He made an offer to buy the building, which the Dallas School District had planned to tear down in order to make room for a new elementary school.

Now that the school board has decided against building on the property, Haddle may again attempt to purchase it, in a manner that would preserve the playing fields used by hundreds of Back Mountain children.

Haddle, who went to the K through 12 school from 1947 to 1958, has kept an affection for the old building that now overlooks the Little League fields on Church street. Although he has lived in the Chicago area for the past 30 years, he has continued his interest and is always curious about the state of the building when he visits.

"I remember coming back to school after the summer break and the hardwood floors were always refinished for the new year. It was a nice place to come back to," explained Haddle of the school that had its first graduating class in 1930. "As a kid, I knew it was a nice place, but as I got older I grew to appreciate it more."

In August he was informed that the property might be for sale. The thought crossed his mind that if he purchased and restored the school to its original condition, it could be put on the National Historic Register and never be torn down.

After taking a tour of the building with his architect, John Filips of Shavertown, Haddle found the structure sound. Restoration would be costly, but not impossible he said. Haddle then decided to make an offer on the building and surrounding parking lots, approximately three and a half acres.

Haddle invited Back Mountain Baseball, which runs the Little League, to join in his effort and make a parallel offer. The league accepted and added \$150,000 for the purchase of the fields to Haddle's offer of \$340,000. Filips

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Blair W. Haddle  
Local man, now living in Chicago

At the time of the informal proposal, the board members present were not interested in the idea for a couple of reasons. "We dismissed it due to the consideration of the elementary school. It was still very preliminary, at that point every option was open," said Reese Finn, board member. Finn thinks if the board overturns last month's decision to build the new elementary school on the property, "we would be sorely neglect in not selling it."

John George, board member, said he would vote against selling the property because, "it was the taxpayers property" and the district wasn't interested in selling the land, estimated to be worth approximately \$1 million. Ernest Ashbridge, board president agreed with George.

Despite the high asking price, Haddle plans to bring his offer back to the district if the decision to tear down the building is overturned. He cannot believe the board voted to build on that land in the first place. "I don't know why they feel that building a school one quarter mile away from the other school is a good idea," he said.

Haddle thinks his and the league's proposal is a sound and viable option for the district. If the district sold the land to him and the league, it would save spending the \$250,000 demolition cost, preserve history and save all of the little league fields, he explained. "The district would actually come out ahead."

Finn said if the land isn't used for the new school, the district should be open to all offers.

## School vote

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Banks said at this early stage there are too many variables to put a figure of any kind on the demolition cost of the building and urged the board not to make it's decision based on the estimated cost.

The discussion went back and forth as the board tried to decide which of the four locations on the main campus would be best. A main point of discussion focused on whether or not to connect the new school to the existing Dallas Elementary. James Richardson, board member, who left the Dec. 17 meeting because he felt "the board wasn't getting anywhere," said the board should discuss a site near the corner of Hildebrandt and Conygham Rd. in greater depth. The plan for that location proposes to adjoin the new and old schools, sharing a gymnasium, cafeteria, nurse, library and administration offices.

"I feel we can enhance two buildings for the cost of one," said Richardson. "We've been listening to too many people and not looking at the facts. Everyone is looking at the cost and not looking at what is important," he said.

After nearly two and a half hours of deliberation, Landon suggested the board and the public meet and walk the main campus with the architects, who can then point out the approximate location of the proposed sites. The board agreed and will meet this Sunday at 1 p.m. on the campus site. The public is invited to attend the session.

*"It's unbelievable the way they keep changing their minds. Maybe none of these options are best."*

Susan Baiamonte  
Westmoreland parent

Many Westmoreland elementary parents were dismayed by the board's decision to put the building on the main campus and the threat that the schools could be connected. "We want the board to stick to their word. They told us that they wouldn't build one huge school," said Susan Baiamonte of Shavertown, mother of two children at Westmoreland.

"I'm disappointed on how votes are being railroaded for the advantage of certain board members," said Bev Hetro of Kingston Twp. and mother of two children at Westmoreland. "I really feel the school should be a community family based school and I think the board should be concerned about providing adequate supervision for the high number of children that will be concentrated on the main campus."

Maureen Banks, board member, echoed their protests as she maintained the administration site to be the best option. "Going back to smaller schools is the best decision," said Banks. "I can't imagine being only as tall as a table and facing 1,200 other kids every day."

She went on to say that "the only way to keep the administration and little league land is to build a building on it. Otherwise, some board down the road will sell it and turn it into a nice little strip mall." Banks said if the board did not build on the administration site she would support the little league in purchasing the land. The little league supporters showed their gratitude with a round of applause.

Some parents felt the board's

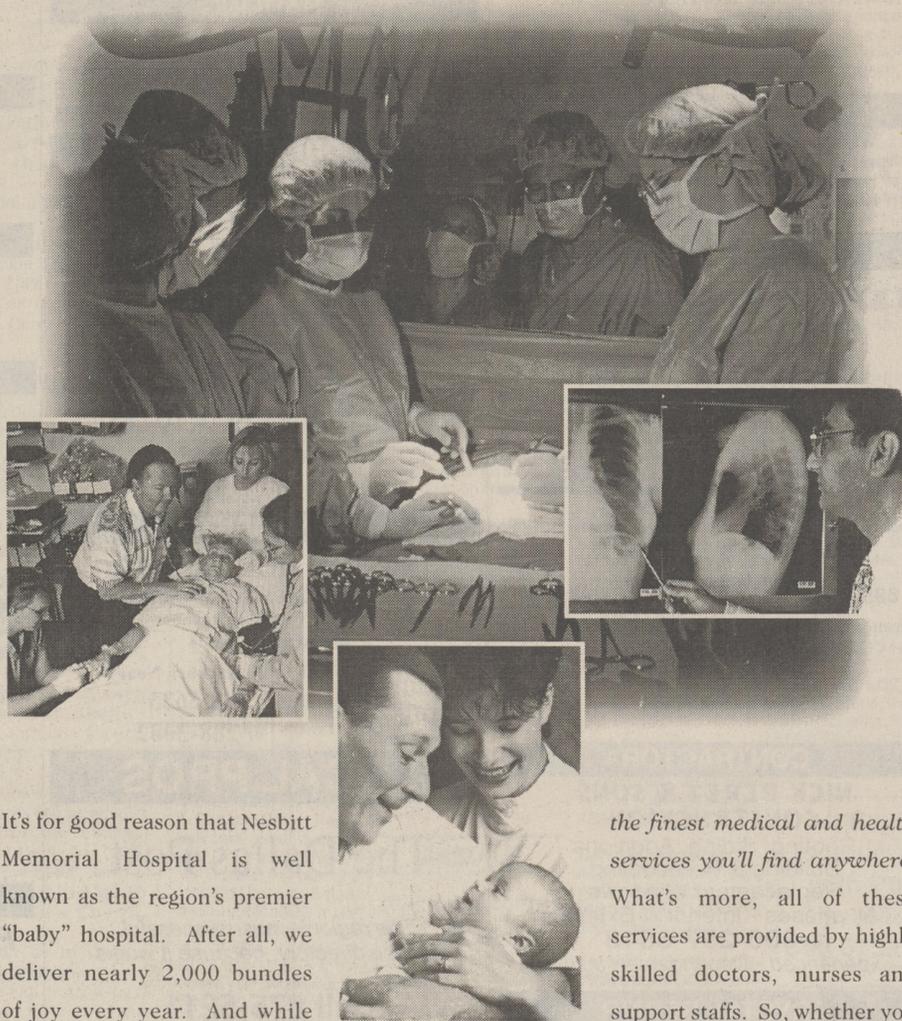
indecisiveness might be an indicator that none of the current options are the best. "It's unbelievable the way they keep changing their minds. Maybe none of these options are best," said Baiamonte.

Board member Joseph Kunc said he understood the Westmoreland parents wanting the best for their children. "I fully respect the wished of Westmoreland, but I have a responsibility to all taxpayers," said Kunc who thinks this process is an example of democracy at work.

Representatives of Back Mountain Baseball, Inc. were at the meeting in force to acquire information and show support for their league. They were pleased with the board's decision. They knew this vote gave them another chance to save the fields that 1100 kids play on a year, 75 percent from the Dallas School District. "We came on a fact finding mission to make sure we had a place to play this year. We are still interested in purchasing the land," said Jack Snyder, league president.

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