

Taste treats

(continued from page 1)

faculty and administration in the college decision process," he wrote.

Michelle Coombs, a Region 1 candidate, said her involvement with parent-teacher groups has provided a firsthand view of the district's educational strategy. "On the elementary level, I was a member of the Lake-Noxen PTO, and the superintendent would visit with us and talk about the future of our schools. I feel there is a plan in place and I have been able to watch the progress of my children as they are preparing for the future so that I know it's working," she said.

Other candidates feel the district should focus more time and energy on improving educational opportunities. "I don't think they have a clear direction in mind, especially when it comes to using technology in school, but I know they are developing a strategic plan so hopefully things will improve," said Sheila Gionfriddo, an independent candidate from Region 3.

Lois Kopcha, an incumbent from Region 1, said the school directors spend too little time discussing the quality of education. "Well, unfortunately, we don't really talk about that very much. If you've been to meetings you know that everything is about finances and construction so I don't really have a clear picture of our plan for educating the students."

Joseph Kapitula, a region 3 candidate who was appointed to the board recently to fill a vacancy created by the resignation of Karen Whipple, said he is in the process of learning more about the district's schools. "I was just appointed in September so I haven't had a chance to look into everything just yet," he said. "I am still investigating the situation but, personally, I think what you put into a child is what you get out of a child. Some parents expect teachers to do it all, but a child needs love and attention at home to be successful."

Charles Boytin, another newly appointed member of the school board, who is seeking election from Region 2, is confident the district is progressing toward a clearly defined strategic plan. "I think we're getting there," he said.

Planned improvements to the district's educational facilities, including the renovation of Ross Elementary School and the construction of a new Middle Level Building, received support from all the candidates, while several school board hopefuls said the adequacy of the projects over time needs to be discussed further. "We actually had more students in the 1970's than we have now and unless we get some large influx of people, I think the projects will be sufficient for the next 20 years," said Kopcha.

Boytin agreed the projects will provide students a better learning environment for years to come. "That's why we're doing this," he

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Joseph Kapitula
Region 3 candidate

said. "We want to make sure our schools are adequate and we're taking the steps necessary to accomplish that," he said.

Expanding schools to accommodate growth over a 20 year period is essential since reimbursements from the Pennsylvania Department of Education will not be available again for two decades. "There are some people who think the district is definitely growing now," said Gionfriddo. "Just listening to the information Mr. Trumbower, the district's architect, has presented, I think the projects will be adequate even if there is some increase in population."

Recent discussions regarding enrollment figures add to the confusion about whether or not expansion plans are adequate. "I think we first need to see what the trends are," said Coombs. "I know the population in the Hunlock Creek area is increasing, but it's difficult to forecast how many people are coming into the district."

DeCesaris said he would like to have more information about both projects and enrollment figures before offering an opinion. "I do not know if the renovations and construction will be adequate for the next 10 to 20 years," he said. "I have said throughout my campaign that should I have to vote on the construction project that my vote will be based on a thorough understanding of the project and various alternatives. I say this with the realization that the middle level education facility as it presently exists must change, and the sooner the better."

Kapitula said he expects the planned improvements to be sufficient for generations. "When I was a kid I went to the same school my mom did and let me tell you we were happy to have it," he said. "If you're going to spend that much money, it better last and not just for 20 years."

"I didn't realize how much was involved in this until I was appointed to the board, but there is a lot to know and a lot to consider," said Kapitula. "The way I understand this whole thing, we can take back the bond issue if there is a problem or we decide to

go a different way."

Kopcha said the district should use some of its savings to offset the cost of capital improvements. "I certainly think we should use the fund balance for renovations," she said.

Several school board hopefuls urged caution about rushing into a decision. "I think we have to look into using some of the fund balance for renovations," said Gionfriddo. "But it has to be done carefully, you wouldn't take every penny you have to pay off your home mortgage. There has to be enough money left over for maintenance on the other buildings and everything else."

Lake-Lehman has entered into an agreement to borrow \$10 million to finance construction, but this step is a short term solution. "This is not the time to make the determination whether to appropriate the fund balance to reduce the debt," said DeCesaris. "The more appropriate time would be when the district is investigating a long-term financing arrangement... In addition to this debt, the district has previous outstanding debt, approximately \$7 million requiring accumulated payment of approximately \$2.8 million over the next three years."

Coombs said she would like the school board to provide more detailed explanations of its financing options. "I need more information on that," she said. "I think, and this is just an educated guess at this point, that we should use some of the money on hand to pay for these projects because nobody wants to see their taxes go up."

Keeping millage rates from increasing is a high priority. "I think we should apply a portion of our fund balance to the construction costs but we should keep enough in reserve so that we don't have to do anything as far as raising taxes," said Boytin.

Many of the candidates believe Lake-Lehman residents pay higher taxes than they should. "For the years ending 6-30-97 and 6-30-98, there was an Excess of Revenues Over Expenses of \$878,892 and \$1,329,929 respectively creating a fund balance as of 6-30-98 of \$2,208,821," said DeCesaris. Since the balance has risen to more than \$4 million on the latest report, "I do think the residents of the district are over taxed," he said.

Gionfriddo said a few residents bear the brunt of the tax burden. "Certainly, some people are over-

"I don't really know what we do well, but I don't think we ask enough questions and I hope that's going to change."

Lois Kopcha
Region 1 candidate

taxed. Anyone who has newly moved to the area is paying high rates because the property values have never been this high," she said. "But I think senior citizens, who no longer have school age children, also feel the taxes are very high and maybe they're worried about how the district is spending that money."

Kapitula said he decided to seek a position on the school board because he is concerned about high taxes and district expenses. "If you're going to spend my money I want to know what you're getting for it," he said. "I live on a fixed income and it's not easy."

Kopcha, who has been a member of the school board during a period in which millage rates have increased substantially, said further hikes are out of the question. "Taxes have gone up 31 mills since 1996 and in 1998 the administration asked for another 3 mills when we had all this money in the bank," she said. "It has to stop somewhere."

Curtailing expenditures is one way to prevent tax increases said Coombs. "I guess we really need to look at where we compare to other districts and we have to decide how we can cut costs without reducing the quality of education for the students," she said.

Boytin said this is one area the school board is working hard to improve. "I think we do a good job managing the costs we have control over," he said. "Things like salaries that are stipulated by contract can't be cut, but the board makes every effort to reduce expenses by joining consortiums and buying pools that allow us to purchase equipment and supplies at lower prices."

Kapitula said another strength of the school board is its ability to remedy problems quickly. "I think they take care of things fast, they don't let a little thing get out of hand," he said. "I mean not everybody is going to get along all the time but I think everyone tries to

work together."

Commitment is an important attribute for school directors said Coombs. "They do continuously say that they want to give the students the best quality education," she said. "I like that because it's the reason they are on the board and most of the members have good attendance records which shows me they care."

Gionfriddo and DeCesaris had no comment about the current

school board's performance.

Kopcha said improving communication among board members is one of her goals. "I'm in the minority, but it seems to me, our current board president calls and gets his five votes and we don't really discuss some of these issues before we vote on them," she said. "I don't really know what we do well, but I don't think we ask enough questions and I hope that's going to change."

Candidates

Region 1

2 seats available
Candidates: Michelle Maher Coombs, Lois Kopcha

Region 2

2 seats available
Candidates: Charles Boytin, Angelo DeCesaris

Region 3

1 seat available
Candidates: Sheila Gionfriddo, Joseph Kapitula

Questions:

1. Do you think the district has a clearly defined plan to prepare students for life beyond the classroom?

2. Do you think the construction and renovation projects are going to be adequate for the next 10-20 years?

3. Do you think all or a portion of the fund balance should be applied to construction costs?

4. Are the district's residents over taxed?

5. Name one thing the current school board does well.

PROPERTY TRANSFERS

The following property transfers were recorded at the Luzerne County Courthouse for the week of Oct. 8 - 14:

Julia M. Schlosser, per atty, to ABBCO Development Co., 2 parcels, Dallas Borough, \$51,000.

John Tarantino, et ux, to Omar Valgardur Hallsson, 4 acres, Dallas Twp., \$140,000.

Regina Whitesell, per atty, to Kenneth Bond, et ux, see deed, Dallas Twp., \$90,000.

Lo-Meadows, Inc., to Anne Marie Lenahan, see deed, Dallas Twp., \$267,500.

Mark Freedman, per atty., to John E. Halbing, III, partners, see deed, Dallas Twp., \$65,000.

Coates Electrophysics, Inc. to Gene E. Esopi, et ux, see deed, Dallas Twp., \$200,000.

Chadsford Development II, to William J. Thomas, et ux, Lot 6 Chadsford Estates, Franklin Twp., \$36,500.

Lee Sorbers, et ux, to Alex J. Apaliski, Lots, 75, 76, 77, Harveys Lake Bor., \$12,500.

James Wido/Jeff Federici, et ux, to Jason R. Boice, Lot 2, Harveys Lake Bor., \$19,000.

Mark F. Kelly, et ux, to Mark G. Miller, et ux, Lot 49 Sutton Hills, Jackson Twp., \$320,000.

David J. Bylsma, et ux, to Spencer M. Gordon, et ux, Lot 8 Wesland Manor, Ross Twp., \$105,000.

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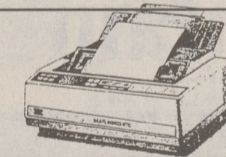
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