

The DALLAS POST

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SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF THE DALLAS AND LAKE-LEHMAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Hard work, persistence lead to \$1.8 million settlement at Dallas

By DAVE KONOPKI
Dallas Post Editor

DALLAS TWP. — As a graduate, taxpayer, and school board member, Frank Natitus has always wanted the best for the Dallas School District.

So when the district wasn't realizing the expected savings from a new geothermal heating system at the Dallas Middle School, Natitus began pushing for answers.

And pushing.
And pushing.
"Frank was constantly calling me, giving me information and asking questions," said business manager Grant Palfe. "To be honest, it was very hard to do my everyday job and at the same time keep looking into everything Frank was asking about. I was getting tired. But

Frank kept pushing and his persistence really paid off when you look at the end results."

The end result was a \$1.8 million settlement between the district and several companies who designed and constructed the geothermal heating system during renovations at the middle school six years ago. The school board unanimously agreed to settle the 20-month-old lawsuit during a meeting last week.

The district will receive approximately \$1.2 million and \$600,000 in attorney fees and legal costs will be paid to the law firm Rosenn Jenkins & Greenwald. Under the agreement, the payments will come in four separate checks: \$300,000 from Foreman Architects Engineers, \$500,000 from Bergmann Associates, \$500,000 from Summit Engineers Inc., and \$500,000 from Burkavage Design

Associates and principal architect Paul Degillio.

The settlement "is being made without admission of any liability by any party and solely as a good faith compromise of disputed claims," said attorney Howard Levinson, who represented the school district. "The design professionals made representations what future operating costs of the geothermal system would be. "It turns out the actual numbers were a far cry from the estimate."

The geothermal system was put in as an alternative to traditional gas and electric heating and air conditioning units. The architects and engineers promised the school district would save approximately \$400,000 in maintenance costs over a 20-year period.

The design professionals estimated it

would cost the district approximately \$59,000 a year in operating costs for the system, said Levinson. There were two estimates for the actual cost — one for approximately \$165,000 and another for approximately \$190,000.

When those numbers became apparent, Natitus went to work.

"I always took my position on the school board very seriously," said the former board member. "I relied on information given to the board when I cast a vote. I kept all of my records and notes and I wanted to make sure the reason I voted for the project was actually happening. When it wasn't, I felt something was wrong and the district should be made whole."

Although he acknowledged the work of the entire school board, former board member Dave Usavage says Natitus

was the driving force behind the lawsuit. In addition to Natitus and Usavage, other board members at the time the suit was filed were Russ Bigus, Gary Mathers, Maureen Matiska, Dan Nulton, Bruce Goeringer, James Richardson and Dennis Goechel.

"Without his involvement, there would be no settlement. It's that simple," said Usavage. "There was involvement by everyone on the board and people worked hard. By no stretch am I saying it was only Frank. But he took the ball and ran with it."

And Palfe is happy he did.
"It wasn't always easy, but now I'm really happy Frank kept persisting," said Palfe, who added the settlement is the equivalent of 22 mills. "As a taxpayer and a parent, I appreciate it."

VETERANS DAY PROGRAM



Dallas American Legion members Clarence Michael, Walter Galka, Jim Baloga and John Emil look in amazement at the more than 800 handmade commemorative stars hanging at the Dallas Middle School. Each star represents the family member of a student who served in the military.

The veterans are the stars

Dallas Middle School program honors those who have served our country

By CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK
Dallas Post Correspondent

DALLAS TWP. — There were plenty of tears in the Dallas Middle School auditorium last week as eight students read "My Hero" essays during a special Veterans Day program. After reading the essays, the children presented them to their parents or relatives.

"There's too many tears here today," Anthony Martinelli, the usually jovial school principal said, trying to lighten the mood a bit.

The essays hit close to home as some children spoke about parents being away and the anxiety of it all.

"It was kind of scary having Dad away," said Carl Zimmerman, whose father recently returned from Iraq. He also worries about his father going back again.

More than 800 personalized, red, white and blue stars hung in the school lobby, paper-crafted sentiments from the children in the school who wanted to remember the names of the men and women

in their families who have served in the military.

Middle school teacher Susan Holthaus organized the program and felt a great need to have the children hear about the veterans and their contributions. She also wrote and read her essay in which she credits her father, an Air Force veteran, for giving her the "wind to fly."

Clarence Michael, commander of Daddow-Issacs American Legion Post 672 in Dallas, told the audience the stars reminded him of the song "Pennies from Heaven" and therefore children in the school must be "angels" to have made them.

The legion also received \$941.81 from a school collection held in October to benefit children who have lost a parent in the War on Terror. The sixth grade proudly collected the most money during the "Penny Wars for Veterans."

It was a timely, touching ceremony since some parents are still serving in Iraq, one of remembrance, pride and tribute with historic overtones.



Kunkle resident Robert Ferher, a PA National Guard veteran of 17 years, gets a hug from his son Robbie, who read an essay about his father during a Veterans Day program at the Dallas Middle School.

Baker and Boback going to Harrisburg

The Back Mountain community will be well represented in Harrisburg following last week's election.

Lehman Township Republican Lisa Baker won seat for state Senator in the 20th District, easily defeating Democrat Robert McNamara. The 1979 Dallas High School graduate will fill the shoes of popular state Sen. Charles Lemmond, who did not seek a seventh term. Baker previously worked for Lemmond, as well as former Gov. Tom Ridge.

Republican Karen Boback of Harveys Lake won the seat in the 117th District of the state House of Representatives. The College Misericordia professor and former second grade teacher in the Tunkhannock School District defeated Democrat Freddie Nichols Jr. by almost a 2-1 margin to fill the seat left vacant by long-time representative George Hasay, who held the seat for 34 years.

Back Mountain municipalities part of the 117th District include the townships of Dallas, Franklin, Lake and Lehman, as well as the boroughs of Dallas, Harveys Lake, Noxen and Northmoreland. The 20th senatorial District includes parts of Luzerne, Monroe, and Susquehanna counties and all of Pike, Wayne, and Wyoming counties.

Baker and Boback held their respective post-election parties at Newberry Estate's Appletree Terrace in Dallas.



Lehman Township Republican Lisa Baker talks with her supporters after winning the seat for state Senator in the 20th District.



Harveys Lake resident Karen Boback is all smiles as the election results start to be announced. The Republican won the seat in the 117th District of the state House of Representatives.

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News: 829-7248
thepost@leader.net
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