

Candidates face off for June 13 election

Richard Wallace

By LYNN ORR

School finances are Richard Wallace's chief concern as a candidate for the Farmington Board of Education; and he believes his extensive background in municipal finance is his prime asset as a potential member of the seven-person board.

"I have 26 years of experience in municipal finance, primarily in bonds, but it spills over into school finance," says the Farmington Hills resident who is seeking his first term in office. His experience on the variable millage election campaign two years ago as well as his study of the financial pinch suffered by schools as a member of the Task Force on Declining Enrollment, have given him an insight into the understanding of school finance, he says.

And future financing of schools is an area the school board must explore, he adds.

"I think we've done a good job in equalizing the financing of schools, but in doing so, support has been taken away from the wealthier, local districts. I would like to see a program whereby half of the support would come from the state."

Wallace believes strongly, however, in local control of schools and contends that prime financial support determines that control.

"He who's paying the major dollars is going to tell you how to spend it," he says. Consolidation of neighboring school districts, often considered a financially beneficial move for some areas, would fail to prove beneficial for Farmington he says.

"Elementary school should be close to home," he says firmly, and Farmington may have to pay the price to preserve that principal.

"I can see building a school in one area of need while closing a school in another area," he says. "It would be unfortunate, but it may be appropriate at some time."

WALLACE sees the board's function as one of policy setting and tailoring programs to the revenues at hand.

"I do not believe in trying to become an expert in education or administering the education system," says Wallace, who defines his interest as one of a volunteer.

"I believe one should serve his community, church and schools, and as a board member, the primary emphasis should be on policy setting which includes enough familiarity with what is going on to make sound decisions."

Wallace's position on the board's input into teacher contract negotiations is an example of his definition of the board's function.

"I believe we're fortunate to have a



RICHARD WALLACE

professional negotiator, but the board has to establish guidelines as to the limits," he explains. "I do not think it's necessary for the school board to have a day-to-day report or to have input on the items within the bargaining process."

However, Wallace is opposed to lengthy negotiations without a current contract.

"Three months without a contract and something is wrong—we'd have to give it an all-out effort. I wouldn't want to be on the board with an unsigned contract for very long," he

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Peter Sanders

A Farmington Hills resident for seven years and an educator himself, Farmington Board of Education candidate Peter Sanders believes the board must address itself more sharply to curriculum concerns and communication with the community.

"I see evidence of very inadequate communication between the boards of education and communities," says the 41-year-old candidate. "Boards, for the most part, are not made up of people experienced in education, because of that they lack vision and insight and a feeling for curriculum."

"They're very much dependent on the advice from administration and oversimplified and abbreviated reports."

As a Wayne State professor in education who specializes in reading, Sanders has also taught in public schools. He believes his educational background would be an asset on the Farmington School Board.

"Some of the most important problems in education could be solved if the community understood them," he says. "More direct and consistent communication with the public, perhaps through a newsletter, would be one of my objectives."

SANDERS CONTENDS the legal re-

sponsibility of the board is to be the agent of the community; but he sees a higher priority and a larger function for future boards of education.

"We must establish a dialogue among segments of the community and make the meetings more meaningful to the public."

To accomplish that goal, he would like materials under consideration at board meetings made available to persons attending the meeting.

"The business of the board is dependent on the board's communication being more direct and concerned with the public."

"No one pays an awful lot of attention to what's going on until there's a millage vote—and then the community doesn't understand all the implications."

Sanders believes the faculty needs more direct input into board decisions, instead of the current reliance on administrative advice.

"Administrators spend little time observing classrooms, yet they make value judgements about the quality of instruction. The district then makes a judgement that everything is going on all right."

Sanders doesn't believe that's the case. "The first thing I would propose is a very detailed evaluation of what we have at the present time. Much of what we do in education is for admin-



PETER SANDERS

istrative convenience.

"We operate with the assumption that all kids must spend an equal amount of time in a certain subject. Adjustments might allow students to be more successful."

Learning how, not what, to think is Sander's goal of the educational process; he's convinced that much of what educators know about learning fails to be incorporated into the classroom.

"We know a great deal about education and learning, but I don't know what we know about what's being practiced in the schools."

An evaluation of the teaching pro-

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Eugene Lemberg

School board candidate Eugene Lemberg is hoping his record of civic involvement will pave the way to a seat on the Farmington Board of Education in the June 13 election.

But his prime concern is passage of the variable millage in the election, and his political stumping concentrated on the millage first and Lemberg second.

"Whether I'm on the board or not, they're still going to need the money," says the president of the North Farmington Parent-Teacher Organization. "One of the responsibilities of the school board is to make it clear to the voters what they're going to buy and what they're not going to buy."

Telling the voter what he's going to get for his money is what Lemberg has been doing the past few months. And his experience at the Drakehire apartment complex convinced him what voters will support millages if they understand what they will buy.

"It was the first time since Drakehire was built that any candidate came down there, the manager told me," Lemberg says. "We think too narrowly about where our support can come from."

LEMBERG is a believer in going to the community for support in any endeavor.

"My record of involvement in civic things is getting things done, and I don't mind stepping on some toes if I have to," he says. "Most people don't have the momentum and perseverance, but a lot of people are willing to do something if you ask them to do it."

"You have to motivate people to be

come involved." As president of the North Farmington PTO, Lemberg used a technique of community involvement to get a number of North Farmington projects off the ground, including a series of career programs that includ-



EUGENE LEMBERG

ed bringing in barbers and cosmeticians for the non college-bound. From a defunct financial status, the PTO managed to start a \$400 scholarship program awarded on the basis of competitive essays.

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James Peponis

When several members of the community approached James Peponis about running for the Farmington Board of Education, he decided he was in a position to give something to the board—experience as an educator.

"After 23 years in the education field and knowing how kids operate, what the system is and how it operates; and being on both sides of bargaining units, I think I know something about schools," says Peponis, principal of a Southgate middle school.

A Farmington Hills resident, Peponis believes his experience as a teacher and administrator of both a middle school and high school will allow him to give valuable experience to the board.

"The board's role is to set up policies for the district and see that those policies are equally distributed among staff, students and the community so the district functions for the benefit of the community."

And Peponis believes the chief con-

cern of the board's for the next four years will be functioning and the effective use of funding.

He thinks more equal distribution of state funds will result in self-sustaining financing for Farmington in the future—but unlike most educators, he doesn't foresee drastic financial problems as a result.

"THE FUNDS available can be utilized by decreasing staff when you're in the situation of declining enrollment," he explains.

"I think the variable millage question is a good means of presenting the facts to the people so that what funds are needed can be acquired."

Transporting students, closing schools, and transferring budgetary items out of salaries and into the expanding budgetary accounts are ways to accommodate a decline in state funding, he says.

"Some schools will have to be closed because you have a population shift," he says. "I don't think it's nec-



JAMES PEPONIS

essary to build schools. It's cheaper to transport students and reset boundaries."

And Peponis is convinced that if the community and staff are prepared and well-versed in the particulars, change can be accepted.

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Emma Makinen

After serving four years on the Farmington school board, Trustee Emma Makinen believes the present board is functioning smoothly with experience under its belt.

"The board works together really well and speaks entirely to the issues," says Mrs. Makinen, who will seek re-election on the June ballot.

Although she contends that no one member can be responsible for board actions, she admits that as one of seven members, she's had some influence on the board's direction. "Getting an organization chart, with functions and job descriptions, was a real accomplishment," she says. "It's a big help in determining salaries at each level and trying to make those equitable in terms of job responsibilities."

She hopes to have an updated version of the chart soon that will include the many changes instituted by Supt. Lewis Schulman. And she's pleased that the board hired Schulman.

"Hiring someone within the district meant upward movement in some other areas, and that's a good thing."

MRS. MAKINEN says that serving as a board member alters preconceived notions of the job.

"When I first ran for the board I had lots of big ideas and assumed that everything would happen overnight. You go in being the eternal optimist, but you discover that some things can be accomplished and others can't."

"I'm probably more realistic about what my accomplishments can be. No one person does anything by him or herself. You learn that whatever I see as an accomplishment has to be done with other people."

She is particularly pleased with the openness of the board's actions and the lack of dissension.

"We never discuss things ahead of time to make decisions, and once a decision is made, everyone is behind it. No one tries to undermine a decision."

She also believes the board has been fiscally sound in its decisions and considerate of taxpayers in its actions.

Her primary interests include a kindergarten through 12th grade program for above average students, one of the proposed items in next year's budget; a superintendent evaluation program about which she'd like to interest other board members; curriculum objectives including the headstart on metric implementation and the special education programs at Cloverdale and Farmington Junior High; and the learning disabled program.



SHE IS ALSO PLEASED with the district's efforts to comply with Title IX, the federal statute prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex.

"We're providing equal opportunity for women in athletics, and trying to guarantee equal pay for equal work," she says. "It takes time, of course, to really get at everything, but the effort isn't just half-hearted."

"We have to recognize that we discriminate against boys also, who receive the toughest discipline, and we need to look at the options we offer both sexes. We need to think about careers in terms of ability and desire, rather than sex stereotypes."

She believes compliance with Title IX may not change attitudes but will change behavior. Attitudinal change may follow.

The decisions to close schools, she believes, are tough, but she is pleased with the board's actions in following up decisions.

"Closing Farmington Junior High was a studied decision based on economics, but we tried to help the population understand a year in advance why it was necessary. I think people can understand what you're doing if you prepare them and make decisions up front, like the closing of Ten Mile Elementary."

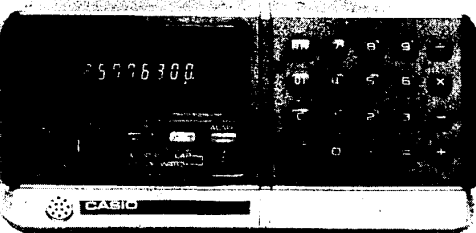
For the future, she would like to see more community use of school facilities, especially with senior citizens, if the money is available.

And she'd like the board to deal more directly with vandalism and drop-out problems in the schools, important challenges for the future, she says.

"The problems are there, but it's an exciting time to be involved in education. To make our educational system viable for all youngsters and to provide options is the challenge we face."

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