

OCC won't extend pact

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

This week, Oakland Community College trustees start figuring out what kind of president they want next.

Retiring OCC President Robert F. Roelofs has a suggestion. "That's easy. He should be four-sevenths wimp and three-sevenths leader," Roelofs bitterly told the board Thursday after it voted 4-3 against extending his contract another year.

In a special meeting to act on Roelofs' request, the board unanimously gave him a 3 percent pay raise, upping his annual salary to \$72,000.

But over objections from faculty members, a narrow board majority then denied his request to stay a year beyond his June 30 contract expiration. A six-month extension also was denied the 56-year-old president.

ANGRY OVER the decision, Roelofs charged that the four board members voted against him for personal instead of professional reasons. During the 2 1/2 hour session, he kept pressing his opponents to explain their decision.

For months, the board has been visibly split in its loyalty to Roelofs. In July, faculty and staff representatives expressed concern over the "deterioration" of relations between the president and the elected officials.

As expected, opposed to the extension were trustees Earl Anderson, Madison Heights; David W. Hackett, Rochester Hills; Margaret A. MacTavish, Birmingham; and chairperson Suzanne K. Reynolds, West Bloomfield.

In favor of giving Roelofs another year were trustees Edward Pappas, Farmington Hills; Sandra L. Ritter, Waterford; and Douglas Wakefield, Southfield.

"I've not fawned over the board the way a lot of presidents do and the way the board would like," said Roelofs, who came to OCC in 1978 from Macomb Community College where he was also president.

"You have said that how I treat you is more important than how this college runs. You have sent my successor and the entire college a message."

ROELOFS ASKED for a year extension in order to work on several college projects and to prepare one of his vice presidents to take over at the top.

He told the board he wants to be involved in the evolving Oakland Technology Park and new UAW-GM Human Resources Center. Both projects are based at OCC's Auburn Hills campus.

Roelofs also is concerned about the effects of Tax Increment Financing Authority (TIFA) act, which puts tax money slated for schools into downtown development instead.

"Why should an old buck going to be 67 years old want to hang on?" asked the president, adding that there are always going to be ongoing projects to complete.

"But these are things that come once in a lifetime that I'd like to see elaborated."

Roelofs added that there have been many recent administrative changes at OCC, which has two new provosts. "I am strong for promotion from within and would like to see that happen," he explained. "If I am here another year, it would put our administrators in positions to qualify for the presidency."

"The last reason I'd like to stay for another year is the people here want me to."

DURING EVALUATION of Roelofs last year, six trustees rated the president "superior" or "good" in achieving college goals.

But the board said he should improve communication with trustees. It said he "does not keep the board of trustees adequately informed about all pertinent college matters and does not show sufficient trust or respect for the board."

Taking part in the evaluation were present trustees Anderson, Hackett, MacTavish, Pappas, Reynolds, and Ritter. Former trustee David Preston abstained. Wakefield had not yet been elected.

In July, faculty and staff representatives wrote letters to the board asking for an end to the "apparent rift" between the board and Roelofs. At that meeting, the president apologized to the board for saying at a previous meeting, "I'm not going to live up to a bunch of idiots any longer." He said he was "badgered for months" before he made the statement to trustees.

HIS THREE supporters all praised Roelofs' performance while expressing concern that six months is too short a time to find another president.

"I'm concerned about how we select a good president in less than five months. I do want to make sure we have a good transition, a smooth transition and get the best person we can," said Pappas, a Farmington Hills attorney in his first board term.

Surprised by the vote, Ritter, a district aide to a congressman, said her decision to extend the contract was based on the positive evaluation. She expressed concern there was no "support material" to back up such a decision.

"I feel it's unfair that we're doing something we have told our administrators not to do," said Ritter, a second-term trustee. "We made a decision with no backup material."

Wakefield said he believes it would help upcoming union negotiations if Roelofs stayed. "I think we are facing some trying times with contract negotiations. This is not the time to have dissension."

NONE OF THE four who opposed the contract extension offered reasons why. But a visibly upset Roelofs pressed for them, asking for a closed session to discuss the "charges" against him.

The president withdrew the request for a closed session when OCC's attorney said there had been no charges made. Roelofs asked the board members one by one to explain why they opposed his request.

"I think the board owes me an explanation of their decision, and I'm asking for it now," he said angrily.

"I NO LONGER have the kind of faith and trust in you I started out with, try as I may," said Hackett, a teacher and longtime trustee. Hackett said the president has not pushed hard enough for hiring of minorities and women.

Longtime board member Earl Anderson, a retired union official, said Roelofs has stated publicly that he "doesn't need a board." He added,

"This board has been trying to work together and get Bob to do things."

"But that's Bob's way and the way he wants to operate, and he's going to use the board."

Chairperson Reynolds, a former teacher and currently head of the Foundation, explained that she and Roelofs have "talked long and hard — at one point for four hours."

"I've done a lot of soul searching. But my charge as an elected official is to do what I feel is best for OCC. I voted tonight as I feel is best for OCC," said the second-term trustee.

IN ATTENDANCE were 18 faculty members, several expressing concern

over refusal to extend Roelofs' contract.

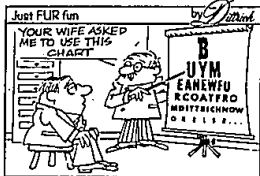
Haywood Pearce, chairman of biological sciences at the Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills, asked the board to reconsider its move. "He (Roelofs) has done more to unite this college, done more to instill professionalism in the faculty, than anyone in the 17 years I've been here," he said.

A narrow (4-3) board majority denied Roelofs' request to stay a year beyond his June 30 contract expiration.

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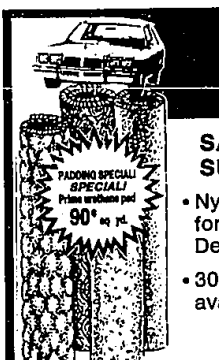
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Robert F. Roelofs
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Robert Roelofs
OCC president



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