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Librarian speaks on why she resigned

By Julie Brown
staff writer

Librarian Jill Locke — whose February resignation from the Farmington Community Library sparked public protests — has spoken out.

Locke, a 13-year veteran of the Farmington library system, submitted a written statement to the Farmington Observer Friday.

Her resignation set off a flurry of protest, including a financial audit and the suspension of library director Gordon Lewis.

Her resignation followed a decision to move her to a new position, that of coordinator of community services. She had previously worked as branch head for the Farmington Hills library and as children's coordinator for both the Farmington and Farmington Hills branches.

WHEN CONTACTED at home Friday afternoon, Locke said she wished to confine her comments to her written statement.

"There are problems at the Farmington Community Library," her statement reads. "I left the community with

regret and a heavy heart. Under the circumstances, I had no alternative. As I said in my letter of resignation, the management techniques and practices were unfair and intolerable.

"On two occasions, I communicated formally to the Library Board about my concerns (Dec. 6, 1984, and Feb. 15, 1985). The library director received a third communication. When none of the above investigated my concerns, I had no recourse but to remain employed under intolerable conditions or to resign. My resignation was immediate and effective Feb. 16, 1985.

"Farmington and Farmington Hills

are fine communities. The library patrons deserve the best of personnel and services. It is evident from recent newspaper coverage that the Library Board is not aware of all of the facts relating to the personnel problems. My resignation was not submitted precipitately. In the same spirit, I trust that the administrations of the respective communities will thoroughly investigate and resolve the matter."

LIBRARY TRUSTEE Jonathon Grant says he is unsure of the letters' content.

"I don't really recall," he said. "I be-

lieve she's talking about letters.

"She, I believe, made it clear in those letters that she was not happy with the position she had been transferred into. We discussed it with Mr. (Gordon) Lewis at a board meeting."

The coordinator of community services position was a non-supervisory one. In her previous position, Locke had supervised library employees.

"I believe that was the whole content, her dissatisfaction with her new position," Grant said. "Like I say, it's been a while since I read them."

Grant said he was sorry to see Locke resign.

"Yes, I was, because I think she was a fine children's librarian."

Ashley Lipson, who is representing Lewis, said he was not familiar with Locke's letters.

"I don't think I've seen it," he said Friday. "To be honest with you, I don't remember seeing it specifically. When something is vague and general, you can't trust it."

"I understand from everybody else that was one of the things that threw wood on the fire," Lipson said of Locke's resignation.

Lawyers set for witnesses on Wednesday

By Julie Brown
staff writer

A hearing is scheduled for 5 p.m. Wednesday to determine the fate of Gordon Lewis, director of the Farmington Community Library.

Lewis was suspended without pay at the conclusion of a four-hour meeting with library trustees on May 2.

The Wednesday meeting is scheduled to be held at the Farmington Hills library branch.

"It's an executive session to hear testimony on disciplinary actions, and the disciplinary investigation that's been going on," said library trustee Jonathan Grant.

"I have no idea which ones (employees) will be interviewed (at the hearing)," Grant said. "Our attorney, Mr. (Dennis) Dubay, is handling that."

"I can't say with 100 percent certainty, but I certainly hope some action can be taken and the matter cleared up," he said when asked about the Wednesday meeting. "If that clears up our investigation, then I'm sure we will make a decision."

"I certainly have thoughts on how I'd like to see all this end up, but I don't think I want to make those thoughts public," Grant said. "I'm only one person on the board."

"I think that our services and our staff speak for themselves, and I don't think it's going to harm the reputation of our library system," he said. "I think it's an unfortunate incident, but it's happened, and there's nothing that can be done. You can't change the past."

AT THE CONCLUSION of the May 2 meeting, a report was released on the findings of an audit done by Plante and Moran, a Southfield accounting firm.

Those findings included the following:

• A check for a life membership in the American Library Association for Lewis was apparently charged to the wrong account.

• Accumulated compensatory time was used to reimburse the library for payments of Security Bank and Trust credit card charges for Clara Bohrer, head librarian at the Farmington Hills branch.

• Credit card charges were made at two restaurants where the specific purpose could not be documented.

• Shell credit card charges showed the library vehicle license plate, but were signed by Lewis' wife.

"That's not for me to say," library

trustee Grant said when asked if the findings merited criminal prosecution.

"That's for the prosecutor's office to say."

"That was not the action of the Library Board. (It was) an action of the cities."

"It was not our place to decide. It's the prosecutor's place to decide that. The cities determined that. They are the ones that brought the allegations to the Library Board."

"That's just a standard procedure," Farmington Hills City Manager William Costick said Friday. "That's just standard. An investigation is going on. What it will reveal remains to be seen."

"They've asked our police department to do some of the investigation. They'll turn their findings over to the prosecutor."

"Whatever the findings are, they'll be returned to the prosecutor. We want to clear up any cloud that might be hanging over this."

Ashley Lipson, who is representing library director Lewis, said his client had done nothing that merited criminal prosecution.

"Absolutely not. There's nothing he's done that could approach criminally. There's nothing that he's done that's even come close."

Lipson said he was "given more formal specific charges" last week, to help in preparing for the Wednesday hearing.

"They basically formalize the items you were given before," he said, referring to the Plante and Moran findings.

There is one really key issue and that is reimbursements. That's the central issue.

"It all comes down to personal reimbursements. It's not unusual and it's not extraordinary (for library personnel) to have personal expenditures."

LIPSON SAID he and his client were looking forward to the Wednesday hearing.

"The really nice thing about our system" is that "you can take these general allegations, cut away the rumors and the inferences, and get to the facts."

"Once you get to the specifics, you find out very quickly who's lying and who's telling the truth."

Think Gordon's looking forward to it. The library director was able to provide his own explanations at the May 2 meeting with library trustees, his attorney said.

"Better than his own explanation is the cross-examination of the accusers."



RANDY BOST/Staff Photographer

Getting ready to set up road blocks along Farmington Road between 12 and 13 Mile are Frank Benton, left, and Steve Ashley. The road will be closed beginning today to repair the extensive damage from weather and intensive automobile traffic.

Finally

Bad stretch of road will be fixed

A section of Farmington Road in Farmington Hills is scheduled to be closed for repairs, beginning today.

"They're closing the section from 12 to 13 Mile Road, because of the base repair that's necessary on portions," said Tom Blaisell, director of public services for Farmington Hills.

"They're excavating and then they're

putting new material in.

"It is scheduled for Monday," he said Friday of the Oakland County Road Commission project. "They're going to detour traffic along Orchard Lake Road. They hope to have it wrapped up by Friday, so it's one week."

"That's what the plan is. Of course, if it rains, they can't work, but the con-

tractor's all set for Monday."

After the base repair is completed, work can begin on the road's surface.

"That will be done under open traffic, because they'll do it one side at a time," Blaisell said. "It'll be much more congested through there, but they'll maintain traffic."

School budget ready

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Only one resident put in a complaint about the Farmington School District's proposed tax rate for 1985-86.

School officials propose to reduce the district's total tax rate in 1985-86 to 34 mills (\$2.5 mills for operations and 1.5 for debt) from the current 34.7.

Despite the proposed reduction, resident Tom DeWard recommended that school trustees take another look at the 32.5 mills for operations. A further reduction of another mill might be order, DeWard said.

DeWard's recommendation came last week during a public hearing on the district's preliminary \$49.7 million 1985-86 budget, as required by the state's Truth-in-Taxation law.

After questioning many of the budget increases, DeWard took issue with the district's projected fund equity. Last year, he said, school officials, who increased the operating levy, predicted the fund equity as of June 1985 would be \$1.8 million. Although final figures won't be in until at least the end of July, Prisk estimates the district's fund equity will actually be about \$2.6 million.

Considering that the fund equity will be higher than first projected coupled with last year's increase in operating millage and increased expenses, DeWard again asked school trustees to consider further reducing the district's tax levy.

"It just seems to me if you are in private industry you are forced to do certain things . . . forced to make cuts you don't want to do," he said. "Here the taxpayers are the only ones who say don't spend that much."

Bill Prisk, school district finance director, told DeWard that school officials don't get their revenue, sit down and say "how are we going to spend it?"

INSTEAD, SCHOOL officials look at the expense of the type of education the taxpayers in the Farmington district want.

"What do we need to give them for that (educational) basis," is the next question in the process, Prisk said. "When that decision is made we see how much it is going to cost."

"I don't think we have promiscuously budgeted," Prisk told DeWard.

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Teachers' contract breezes through

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Both sides say they got what they wanted in a new two-year contract between the Farmington School District and the Farmington Education Association (FEA).

"I think this is the most win-win contract we have ever achieved," said Zan Alley, FEA executive director.

Superintendent Lewis Schulman had similar sentiments, calling the contract an "amicable, wholesome decision" that "continues the relationship we have with our teachers."

The board of education last week approved the contract containing a 5.4-percent salary increase in the first

year and a 5 percent increase in the second year for the district's more than 600 teachers.

In the first year (1985-86) of the new contract, the salary increases will cost the district \$975,000, said Robert Coleman, district personnel director.

Based on the current number of teachers in the district, the 5-percent increase scheduled for the second year of the contract is expected to cost the district \$890,000. But that is subject to change if the number of teaching positions is reduced, Coleman said.

In 1985-86, a teacher with a bachelor's degree without experience will earn a beginning minimum of \$19,000.

Teachers with at least 10 years of experience with the district will earn a maximum \$33,013.

The following year, teachers with a bachelor's degree without experience will receive a minimum \$20,000 and a maximum \$34,664 for a teacher with a bachelor's and at least 10 years of experience.

TEACHERS WITH A MASTER'S degree without experience will earn a minimum \$21,280 in 1985-86 while those with a master's and at least 10 years of experience will earn \$36,391.

In 1985-87, teachers with a master's degree without experience will earn \$22,400 and those with at least 10 years of experience will earn \$40,311.

Changing the teachers' salary schedule was also of interest to district officials who are anticipating the need to hire new teachers in the next few

years, Coleman said.

The district's proposals, Coleman said, were based in part on a report called "The Coming Crisis in Teaching," put out by the Rand Corp. The report discusses attrition rates, qualifications for math and science teachers, and the fact that "fewer teachers are being prepared for the profession than ever before," Coleman said.

Improvements in the teachers' salary schedule, as well as tightening qualifications for teachers, are designed to help the district attract the best qualified teachers when others retire in the next few years, Coleman said.

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