

Search begins for school chief

Continued from Page 1

"I'm going to look for someone with a successful track record," he said. "I'm going to do more thorough field research. I would hope we would stay in the area of someone who has experience. This is not a starting job."

Trustee Susan Rennels said the board needs to set time-lines on important, on-going projects and keep those moving before getting involved with the search for a new chief. Building the new elementary school and the necessary changes that will come with that, how the Highmeadow program may impact other elementary school curriculum districtwide, and getting information to the community about curriculum are big areas of immediate concern.

she said.

"Then we'll get onto the superintendent search."

RENNELS STRESSES that the board is committed to looking at innovative programs for the district, and that will be a focus in the search.

Trustee Graham's resignation has nothing to do with changes in the district, she said. "That's what we wanted. Like Rolnick, she wants a longer search, giving qualified applicants plenty of time to respond. She would like to see at least 100 qualified applicants from which to choose."

"I think the district's in a very positive situation. We're in much better shape now than when we looked for a superintendent before," she added.

Resignation seemed surprising, but . . .

By Casey Hana
staff writer

On June 20, the night of Lewis' official review and his resignation, outgoing board president Jack Cotton said although it may have appeared as a sudden move to the public, it really was not.

The annual review process for former superintendent Graham Lewis began last March, so his resignation and subsequent contract revision in June was no surprise to those involved.

Outgoing board president Jack Cotton also said last week he feels the evaluation process is of utmost importance in future superintendent's contracts.

On June 20, the night of Lewis' official review and his resignation, Cotton said although it may have appeared as a sudden move to the public, it really was not. Preliminary review work had taken several months.

The review was conducted in an executive session at Lewis' request. Cotton asked for trustee comments March 1, as he and board members Helen Prutow and Helen Ditzbar held the annual review process, which culminated with the June 20 meeting. Trustee Susan Rennels explained the review process really starts "unconsciously," before that time, as board members interact with the superintendent.

"School employees and those in the audience all appeared shocked at the announcement made at the end of the June 20 meeting. Deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan was named acting superintendent following the acceptance of Lewis' resignation.

Lewis, who earned a \$100,000 annual salary plus other benefits as school superintendent, will receive \$88,000 for the remaining year of his two-year contract, when he can be called upon as a consultant. He will also receive health coverage and retirement benefits. Lewis has not commented on the resignation.

Individual trustees have had little comment on the situation either,

most referring to outgoing president Jack Cotton as spokesman. Cotton commented briefly after the action, saying "none of us feel wonderful about something like this."

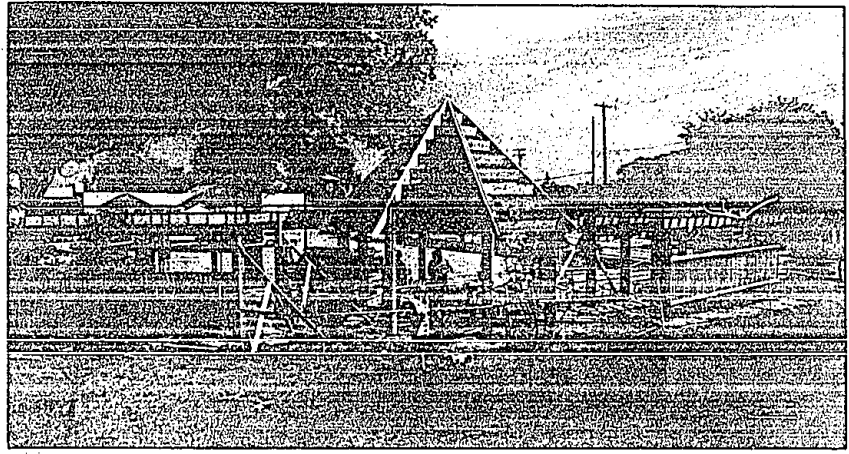
RENNELS SAID only that the board was able to separate personal feelings from running school district business, and that there were no bad feelings between Lewis and the board.

Trustee Janice Rolnick said she was surprised at the reaction from the community, which has been fairly calm. "I'm really amazed," she said. "I'm only gotten a couple of calls and they were from parents."

She said she felt acting superintendent Flanagan diffused staff questions by holding immediate meetings to discuss the situation.

"It hasn't been the way I thought it would be," she added.

Cotton said he had been approached at events by members of the community during the past several weeks. "There was no opposition to the direction we took," he said.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Gazebo grows

Construction began last week on the new \$40,000 gazebo/pergola in downtown Farmington. Here, 11-year-old Matt Jondrychowski walks his dog, Boomer, past the new structure located between the Village Commons Center and the Farm-

ington Place apartments along Grand River. Although on city land, funds for the structure were raised through private donations. It will include pedestrian seating areas.

Judge defends hiring practices

Continued from Page 1

BOTH ALDRICH and Hage said they decided to speak up about the firings and subsequent hirings because of concern for the court and taxpayer's money.

"It's at a point that taxpayers should know what's going on there. There is no administration. There is no responsibility. It's all a whim," Hage said.

Aldrich said he knew he was directly employed by Hand, but Hage did not know.

"I was never told that. I was never hired by Judge Hand. I was hired by Marilyn DuGuld (47th District Court administrator). Everything they did led me to believe I was being kept on," Hage said.

Rosch said that's impossible.

"There's no way I know of her being vested without serving the full eight years. Once he (Harris) terminated her, that ended her service."

Lindsey said other courts that faced similar situations have worked around the problem so the employee does not lose their pension. Hage said she offered to be placed in another position for two months.

"It was cold and callous. It seems as if they could have done something. They didn't have to return her in the same position. They could have had her doing something else for two months," Lindsey said.

Schaeffer said there were no other court reporter positions open and she is not sure it would have been reasonable to put Hage in a lower-paying clerical position.

"We certainly could look at it," she said.

LIKE HAGE, Aldrich is critical of the way in which he and the court reporter were terminated.

"At the time of his (Judge Hand's) retirement, he (Hand) said, 'You're going to like Fred Harris.' I did always have the understanding I was appointed by Hand as a personal employee. But I expected I would remain for some period of time to get him (Patrick Harris) oriented."

Harris said he hired his son temporarily because it's easier to tell him rather than a new employee that his services are no longer needed.

"He knows, as my son, that once I get a police officer, he's history," Harris said. "Before I even took the bench, I had a meeting with the city managers and I made it plain and clear my ultimate objective was to have a police officer as a court officer. I got the distinct impression everyone's concerned about this security question, but how do we do the nuts and bolts?"

Still Lindsey believes Harris could have done things differently.

"They (court officer and reporter) are not tied to the court, they are tied to the judge. But it may not have been the swiftest move to hire his son."

Law firm secretary hired as court reporter

By Joanne Malazewski
staff writer

New District Judge Fred Harris of Farmington has replaced veteran court reporter Cindy Hage with his law firm secretary of 25 years, Christine Snellgrove.

She was hired at a higher salary than earned by eight-year court reporter Hage. Snellgrove is not trained and not yet state-certified as a court reporter.

Harris defended Snellgrove's undisclosed salary. Judge Margaret

Schaeffer, who also presides in the 47th District Court, said Snellgrove's salary is within the new salary schedule recently approved by the two city councils.

According to state court administration records, the 1989 salary range for court reporters is \$18,822 to \$24,248. When terminated, Hage, trained and state certified as a court reporter, was earning approximately \$21,000 after almost eight years at the court.

"I came in here and pointed out what I was paying her (Snellgrove). I

wouldn't tolerate a pay cut for her. I paid for her insurance and pension. To take a pay cut and deductions for insurance and pension doesn't make any sense," Harris said.

While Snellgrove is awaiting temporary certification as a court reporter, the court also is paying for a substitute certified court reporter, who uses a stenographer machine. Snellgrove can receive temporary certification just for the asking, Lindsey said. The next court reporter's certification exam is in October.

"This is a red herring as far as her not being trained," Harris said of

Snellgrove. "Nobody is trained in this. If you can listen to the radio, you can do the work."

Snellgrove is using recording equipment, recently bought by both cities. Hage used a stenographer machine, which she was required to buy because it is not reimbursable by the state.

The state does buy recording equipment for courts. In this case, however, the state is out of money and the cities may or may not get reimbursed, Farmington Hills City Manager William Costick said.

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