

Clarke

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NORTH FARMINGTON HIGH

give them the very best education. She also was hoping to lead North through the impending challenges of implementing block scheduling in 1999-2000, the same year a massive \$14 million facelift - including that skylight-laden training area - concludes.

"This has been a significant part of my life," said Clarke, who as of today begins her job as Pontiac's assistant superintendent of instruction. "And I'll leave a part of my heart here."

That was clear during the June 6 commencement ceremonies at Compuware Sports Arena in Plymouth Township. Clarke held back tears and said she almost couldn't deliver her speech. "The last two days of school, kids were saying, 'How are we going to do it without you?'"

They will have to. The district is interviewing applicants to take over at North, with the hope of recommending a successor at the Tuesday, July 20 regular school board meeting. Whoever is hired will

work with Clarke to ensure a smooth transition. Often described as strong-willed and a perfectionist, Clarke indeed has a soft spot for North, her home away from home since December 1989, when her appointment marked the first time a female took over a Farmington district high school.

"I love what I do," Clarke said. "And my motivation is... you've got to see their faces when they are so proud of what they have accomplished. It's what creates my energy and drive."

During an interview several days following the school year's end, Raiders T-shirts, jerseys and pennants still adorned Clarke's soon-to-be former office. She recalled pride during a tour of the renovated campus, one of the projects included in the September 1997 bond issue.

"The teachers," Clarke said, "they deserve it. They do such a great job with kids. I want to see it happen for them."



Deborah Clarke

She spoke with even more pride when talking about the leadership exuding from North faculty members (she mentions Carl Gippert, Jenny Lambert and Jason Lowe) and students. Among the latter is 1999 graduate and Student Round Table president Monique Luse. "It's been a pleasure watching her (Monique) grow," Clarke said. "Every year she increases her leadership. She is so bright, poised and articulate."

Planned on staying

Why then, would Clarke decide to take her career elsewhere? She insists the Pontiac job came out of nowhere, and turned out to be too good of a professional chance to pass up. Pontiac is building a new administrative team, following the hiring of Walter Burt as superintendent.

"I wasn't looking for a job, I'm very happy here," Clarke said. "I was looking forward to staying and seeing the new (block) program begin. The building is up next year..."

But one of Clarke's friends, a consultant for Pontiac, contacted her about a newly created position that might suit her perfectly. She attended a two-day retreat and liked what she learned.

"As I listened, it occurred to me there was a real close match to where they are going and my experience."

Clarke compared it to 1989, when the promotion of North Principal Don Cowan prompted Farmington officials to lure her away from an assistant principal's job at Ypsilanti High School.

"When I came here," she recalled, "the board of education was looking for a principal (who) would expand opportunities for all kids, help kids connect better with the school."

During the 1990s, Clarke worked toward that goal. Multi-subject classes, emphasis on performing arts, high tech learning and enhanced teacher input in decision making were among gains achieved during that span. All of those areas will be tested, however, with the move to block scheduling.

"We certainly want our kids to be on the cutting edge and have every opportunity possible beyond high school," Clarke continued. "So we're trying to build the best foundation here."

Only because Clarke believes she successfully attained her mission at North does she step toward Pontiac and the challenges awaiting her there. Pontiac will pose a bigger task, if only because of the number of students she will be serving. In Pontiac, there are about 14,000 students; North's student body for 1999-2000 is projected at 1,300.

That's fine with Clarke, a former teacher who intends on still finding plenty of time to work with youngsters, on committees, for example. "People also said that to me when I went to the principalship, 'Will you miss kids?' I see them all day long."

Although Clarke will miss North and the community it serves, she won't miss the marathon-like commutes to and from her home in Dexter. Those tended to cut into potential time for hobbies such as collecting antiques and gardening. In fact, she expects to move to the Pontiac area soon.

But there's no doubt that Clarke will still keep abreast of what's transpiring over her old haunts in Farmington.

"A goal of mine was always to leave a team of parents, students and administrators working together," Clarke concluded. "That's in place now. You have to have the whole community involved in education and education is everybody's business."

It is a philosophy Pontiac's board will find out about.

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Mercy

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mentary services and where we have services that overlap and try to make sense of that."

In March, Mercy officials put a hold on plans to build new headquarters and an out-patient center in Novi as part of a cost-cutting measure.

Mercy, like other health systems, has taken a hit from a drop in Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements. Catholic health systems make people who are poor as part of their mission.

Economics weren't the overriding factor in the merger, Mercy's Shrivinsky said. Sponsors of Mercy and Holy Cross had been seeking a partner, which will absorb the "peaks and valleys" of the health care industry.

"Strategically, we think it's important," Shrivinsky said.

The combined system will include 62 hospitals - including St. Joseph Mercy Health System in Ann Arbor, Mercy Hospital in Detroit and St. Joseph Mercy-Oakland in Pontiac - along with clinics, long-term care facilities, home health offices and hospice programs across seven states.

The yet-to-be named system will have projected revenues of \$4 billion.