

OCC 'was there' for candidate Early morning fire forces family to find new quarters

On Monday, June 12, Oakland voters will elect two people from a field of six to the Board of Trustees of Oakland Community College, which has about 24,000 students at five campuses. Trustees are elected officials who set policy for the college. This is one of a series of brief profiles on the candidates.

By PAT MURPHY
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At a crucial point in her life, Athena Dumas-Lawrence turned to Oakland Community College. That was in the 1980s when Dumas-Lawrence was a single parent working two jobs and trying to get an education.

"OCC was there for me," said the Pontiac resident, who is seeking election to the OCC Board of Trustees. "It was affordable and flexible, and I got a good education there. I'd like to be a voice for taxpayers and students."

Dumas-Lawrence, a 1983 graduate of Pontiac Central High School, got an associate's degree in 1989 before enrolling at William Tyndale College in Farmington Hills where she graduated with a degree in business administration.

She was a case management assistant - which included development and implementation of the school-to-work program - in the Walled Lake School District prior to becoming a work force development specialist at the JobLink Career Center in Pontiac, a state and federally funded program to promote employment and training opportunities.

"I work with people who are trying to find jobs," Dumas-Lawrence said, "or sometimes, they're trying to get better jobs."

Dumas-Lawrence is married now. She and husband Kenneth have two children, Nataleah, 10, and Kendra, 4.

But she hasn't forgotten her days as a student and how OCC and its faculty helped her out. "The faculty was accessible, and they were accountable," she said. "I'd like to have a voice in the decision making process at OCC, to make sure the college is there for future students. Education is the key to success."

Dumas-Lawrence declined to criticize or to throw verbal stones at the current trustees. She said they monitor the budget and do a variety of things to promote OCC. "I believe we can do an even better job," she said.

The budget, for example, would be her highest priority, especially with the important millage renewal vote coming up next year - when OCC will ask voters to renew an 0.8 of a mill in property taxes to provide more than \$20 million in operating revenue.

She's ready to promote the millage renewal, Dumas-Lawrence said. "But it's going to take community involvement," she insisted.

Dumas-Lawrence said she'd also like to see more out-reach programs. "I'd like to see more internships," she said, "and I'd like to see OCC more accommodating to would-be students. Students need more information about the local job market."

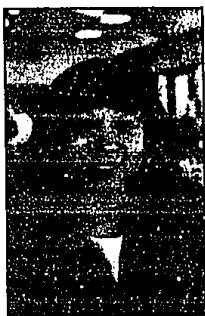
She favors so-called distance learning - using television and/or the Internet for classes - because it enables OCC to be flexible on behalf of students. Distance learning is particularly helpful, she said, for disabled students and those with transportation problems.

Asked about her community involvement, Dumas-Lawrence said she works with numerous agencies - including the Family Independence Agency (formerly the Department of Social Services) and Lighthouse - through her job.

"When somebody needs assistance, such as emergency shelter, we help them find it," she said. "Sometimes that involves working long hours or skipping lunch. The important thing is helping people."

She is also a member of Antioch Baptist Church in Pontiac and sings in the choir.

Other candidates for the OCC Board are Richard J. Akehurst, Carol L. Crew, Pamela M. Davis, Marjorie Nanian Mugerian and John A. Wangler.



Athena Dumas-Lawrence

By TIM SMITH
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Monday morning's house fire on Cass Court in Farmington started in the garage and caused enough damage for the residence to be uninhabitable, said Michael Wiggins, deputy director for the Farmington Public Safety Department.

The fire began at approximately 4:30 a.m. Monday in the 34100 block of Cass Court, west of Fleming. An investigation completed later Monday determined that the probable cause for the blaze was a collection of various petroleum products and a plugged-in record player. It is

■ The fire began at approximately 4:30 a.m. Monday in the 34100 block of Cass Court.

not being considered a suspicious fire.

Wiggins said the family and their pets escaped without injury. But one of their two children is oxygen dependent, and needed to be transported to Children's Hospital in Detroit until the family can find a place to stay, he added.

Some of the petroleum prod-

ucts in the garage - which is attached to the ranch home - include gasoline, stains and varnishes. The record player was plugged in, but was not turned on at the time the fire started, Wiggins said.

"Ninety percent of the fire's damage is in the garage," Wiggins said. "It got up in the attic over the garage and started heading over toward the house."

Firefighters were able to quickly respond to the scene, safely remove the family and pets from the house, and put out the flames.

However, the house received significant water and smoke damage.

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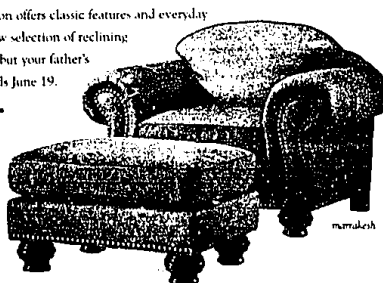
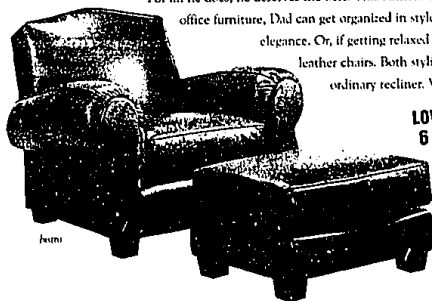


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