

Board must do more with less, Webb says

By SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER
sbuck@oe.homecomm.net

Until last fall, Farmington School Board Member Cathy Webb was solid in her decision not to run again.

Then came Sept. 11 and its aftermath, when Webb found herself talking to others about the importance of contributing to the community.

"Shortly after that I was I was speaking at the Senior Adult Breakfast and I pulled (Farmington Schools Superintendent) Bob Maxwell aside and I told him that I had an epiphany preparing that speech and I decided was going to run again," Webb said. "Why should I walk away when I still had something to contribute to the community?"

Her original plan was to emulate the term of Janice Rolnick, who served 12 years as Webb has.

"That was my purpose and plan," she said. "The last time I ran, I threw out all my campaign signs and my literature."

Webb was disappointed to hear she and Jack Inch would run uncontested for the two open four-year terms. More candidates lend more dialogue and more interest. "I think it's healthy to have other candidates who are interested," she said.

This election is a contrast from her first in 1990, when there were 11 school board candidates. Having no opposition can also be considered an indication that the district is doing well at what it is doing, Webb said.

Changes and school funding

While her position won't change, the times have and Webb



Cathy Webb

knows change isn't easy. Some parents were concerned when the district made a decision to keep Alameda and Fairview Early Childhood Centers open primarily for early childhood learning. This was done because of both enrollment and budget issues, she said.

"The most challenging issue is ensuring we are doing the best we can for each child with fewer dollars," Webb said.

Balancing remaining capital needs in 27 buildings with shrinking dollars is also demanding. The district anticipates spending about \$1 million on capital needs from the general fund when needs range about \$4 to 5 million.

Webb believes in keeping budget dollars as close to the students as possible, in the classroom and staffing. Staff development and classroom size are important to her.

Webb believes parental involvement is key to every child's success. She suggests parents join the PTA, a booster group or volunteer to serve on a committee. Before she was elected, Webb served on a boundary committee.

While she works toward consensus, Webb recalls saying no to the nutrition budget, which for years was in the red. Efficiencies and raising lunch prices have helped. She has also voted "no" on some capital expenditures.

But for a board to work together, members need to share a common vision, she said.

Open meetings

Webb supports the Open Meetings Act, which indicates when a meeting is open or closed to the public. "Having the press at meetings is a wonderful service for us," Webb said. "It keeps everybody honest."

However, she believes board retreats would be more effective without a media presence, even though they are open meetings. "It's not like there's anything to hide, it just makes it less personal," Webb said. "There's a loss of that sharing. When the press is there there's a loss of that."

She sees retreats as a time when the board gets to know about each other's lives away from the board table. "We have to trust each other," Webb said, adding since they don't socialize or hang out together, "How else can board members get to know each other?"

Center was under renovation, retreats were held at the Detroit Athletic Club and the Doubletree Suites Hotel in Novi. The plan is to move retreats back into the district.

Webb, 50, a 23-year resident, is married to Jim, an insurance broker for AON Inc., in Detroit. They have two sons, Jim and Matthew, who both graduated from Farmington Schools.

Webb is a part-time retail advertising artist. She holds a bachelor of science degree in political science from Eastern Michigan University where she graduated magna cum laude.

She is also a graduate of the Michigan Political Leadership Program at Michigan State University.



For Inch, education opened many doors

By SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER
sbuck@oe.homecomm.net

Jack Inch believes in reviewing what he said during previous campaigns before making statements for his current election pitch.

Inch, 71, an economics professor at Oakland Community College for 34 years, has a lot to look back on. He served on the Farmington School Board since 1978.

He and Cathy Webb are running unopposed for two, four-year terms in the June 10 election.

Inch is known as the board historian with a commitment to public service. He has seen four school superintendents, not counting those who served in the interim.

Inch says he's not ambitious politically but would consider an appointment to another position if he felt he had the expertise. He believes when it comes to the length of service, the voters should decide.

"If I had never been elected to the board, I still would not have been in favor of term limits. There is a knack and ability to be on an elected board which you lose when you begin flip-flopping people around."

Inch's commitment stems from his belief that education opened doors for him and gave him a comfortable life. He gets excited over reading and finds it enjoyable.

"The long and short of it is somebody taught me to read well," Inch said. "They didn't teach me to do all things perfectly but they expanded my world."

The ability to read changed his world in Great Depression-era Detroit from a black and white to a Technicolor world, he said.

Inch earned both a bachelor of arts and a masters of science degree from Wayne State University. He's lived in Farmington with



Jack Inch

wife Sandy for 42 years; they raised four children, Terry, Amy, Christopher and Patrick.

Sandy works for LOC Credit Union in Farmington.

Being a teacher affords him additional insight as a board member and in the community, he said.

Completion of the bond millage to renovate the schools is his greatest accomplishment during the last four years. Inch's personal goal, however, is something he knows he'll probably never see: a science room in every school. The district devotes space now to special education and services that it didn't in years past.

"I don't think people my age can visualize the number of people we service who would have one time sat at home," Inch said. "This is history. I don't think all the board members can appreciate this."

Collective goals

Effective use of funds and high school requirements interest him. He's not supportive of a senior project requirement, which students will need to complete in future years. The senior project was approved in concept but the exact cost to implement remains unknown, he said.

"My goal in the classroom is objectivity," Inch said. "If you have various people acting as mentors along the way what is one person's mentoring may not be another's. I'm also concerned about budget and best use of funds."

Not a rubber stamp

While school board members often see eye to eye, Inch isn't shy about casting a dissenting vote.

He didn't support the proposed shared time concept with Our Lady of Sorrows, which was opposed by some private school parents, and noted that Farmington Public Schools can't solve the disagreements between parents.

Inch also didn't support a switch to the Oakland Athletic Association, based on tradition and travel time.

"I'm blunt about things," Inch said. "I think the board sitting there can tell which way I will go."

He isn't reluctant to tell the board or Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxwell if he plans to vote no. "You sort of get what you see with me," Inch said. "We tend not to embarrass each other. There's a courtesy. It's the nature of the people who are elected to that board. They are courteous."

Open Meetings

If Inch could pick, he would prefer not to see the press at board retreats. "Sometimes, there's private matters in the family and about why you feel this way on an issue and why you approach it from your own experience," Inch said. "It's sort of private."

He sees retreats as "exploratory," to get to know each other. "It's a way to get to know each other," Inch said. "If there is somebody from the newspaper there, there is a tendency to back off."

Board retreats are open, public meetings.

There's been retreats in the past but not consecutively as they are now, he said. "There's been times when I've been on the board when there were no retreats. I've never been involved with the planning of the retreats."

Typically administration with one or two board members plan the retreats.

Rec program teaches kids about safety

Farmington Hills Recreation Division is getting ready for another exciting season of Safety Town, a program that teaches children ages 4-6 about everyday safety tips.

Topics such as fire, police, playground, and bicycle safety,

along with a trip to the fire station, are a few examples of what will be covered.

Each session is two weeks long. Monday through Friday, for two hours each day (totals 20 hours). Sessions begin on June 17 and run through Aug. 9 and

will be held at Alameda Early Childhood Center.

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