

Farmington's top librarian tackles politics

By SHIRLEE IDEN

The first question G. Gordon Lewis and his wife asked real estate agents when they moved to Michigan was which districts have the best school systems.

Now four years later, the 33-year-old librarian is a candidate for Southfield's school board. He is contending with four other candidates, two of whom are incumbents.

"The vitality of the schools maintains the vitality of the community," he stated. "I believe in good public education."

Lewis also said he believes in being an activist just as he was in his high school and college days. He has three children, the oldest of whom is a first grader at Leonhard Elementary School.

Lewis was questioned, as his opponents were, on matters such as basic education in Southfield, his priorities, education for the gifted and handicapped, teacher strikes and declining enrollments.

Additionally, he talked about a school board that he said should be composed of people with diverse backgrounds to achieve balance.

His background is in public administration. He is the director of the largest library in Oakland County in terms of circulation, the Farmington Library.

HE SAID library programs have doubled during his tenure and his library has won several awards. He is also employed as a consultant to other libraries.

Lewis holds an MA in education and another masters in library science. He is a native of Ohio.

He maintains his top priority if elected would be to keep up the top educational programming in the city. "Beyond that, I'd like to improve vocational education," he said.

"Fifteen per cent of Americans across the board have college educations, but the public schools have programs almost entirely academically oriented," he said.

"Recently the intermediate school district had 12 applicants for beauticians and only four spots. I don't think the vocational education program is strong enough, and I've looked into it here in Southfield."

On the other hand, Lewis said the schools are doing a good job on the basics, and most people are satisfied. "The University of Michigan offered 20 scholarships for pre-med students and five of them went to Southfield students," he said. "That speaks for itself."

"What I'm opposed to is slogans and in some ways, back to basics is a slogan. Eighty-five per cent of Southfield students get a quality education."

He thinks declining enrollment cannot be allowed to diminish any child's right to an equal opportunity to learn. He contends the school board must be flexible about what action to take regarding school population.

LEWIS said one of the board problems is the meetings themselves.

"There's obviously a problem," he said. "The meetings don't move along in a timely fashion and they frequently run very late. The agenda is organized so that an individual on the floor can monopolize the floor on incidental issues and important points are treated with dispatch."

Endorsed by the Southfield Education Association and the Southfield Democratic Club, Lewis said his father was a school principal and he has had "a lifetime of educational discussion."

In terms of the handicapped, he said handicapped can be defined as "any individual whose needs are not being met."

"So schools can fail to meet needs if there is no ramp for a wheelchair or no challenge for the gifted," he said.

"We can challenge the gifted without additional expense."

He explained that with more use of library facilities for independent studies and small group interaction, gifted students can be stimulated.

"For the cost of one teacher, we can buy 1,500 books," he said.

Concerning strikes, Lewis said, "Teachers are people too."

"I don't particularly support mandatory arbitration, but things do work out better when both sides come to bargain in good faith. The right to strike is part of the bargaining process and employers and employees both have rights. We wouldn't take them away."

"Other than the military, police and firemen, people should have the right to strike."



J. GORDON LEWIS

Legal fund use prompts board's donation denial

Farmington school board trustees sent on a bit of good news and a bit of bad news to the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) recently.

While the Farmington board voted to retain membership in the organization, trustees voted against contributing \$205 to the MASB's legal aid fund. The fund has been used to protest such rulings as Title Nine, which gives an equal share of time and budget to girls' sports in schools.

In voting to continue membership in the organization, Trustee Michael Shpiece cited MASB lobbying efforts in support of greater state aid to school districts.

But Shpiece switched from praise to disparagement when it came to voting

for a contribution to the legal fund.

"I find it to be philosophically in the wrong position, on the wrong side of the issues," he said of the fund's use.

Districts opposing Title Nine are using the fund to "demolish" progressive measures in the schools, according to Shpiece.

ALTHOUGH he was speaking for a losing cause, Trustee Mervyn Ross called the fund an "important part of participation" in MASB.

"I think it's one arm of the association we have just voted to continue in," he said.

Trustees Richard Wallace and Anne Struble joined Ross in casting the three supporting votes.

Graduation ceremonies planned by Farmington

June is almost here and so are graduation ceremonies for Farmington School District's three high schools. June graduates for this year will number 1,324.

Harrison's graduation will be at 8 p.m. June 13, in Ford Auditorium. The main speaker this year is state Sen. John Otterbacker (D-Grand Rapids). Distributing diplomas to the 422 Harrison grads will be School Board trustees Michael Shpiece and Mervyn Ross.

North Farmington will conduct ceremonies at 8 p.m. June 14, also in Ford Auditorium. Scheduled as the main speaker will be senior class president Todd Schiller. Distributing the 420 sheepskins will be trustees Helen Prutow and Richard Wallace.

Farmington High School students, 482 of them, will receive their degrees on June 15 at 8 p.m. in Ford Auditorium. Speaking will be U.S. Rep. William Comerhead (D-Detroit). Distributing diplomas will be trustees

Emma Makinen and Ann Struble. Board President William Grievius will speak to the graduates on behalf of the Board of Education.

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