

Opinion

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Back Rennels in Farmington

"The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life." — Plato

IT'S A DISTRICT in transition.

In the past year, the Farmington Board of Education has focused on such attention grabbers as imbalanced building enrollments, the concept of centralized kindergarten, a reorganized administration, the need to enlarge elementary schools or build at least one new school, curriculum changes, community relations and future funding.

The seven board members, who serve for minimal pay, are now just as apt to face brickbats as they are laurels.

Still, top-flight leadership helps breed top-flight schools.

Monday, voters will choose between first-term trustee Susan Rennels and political newcomer Jennifer Marti.

Both seem to truly care about the quality of education in the 10,000-student district. But we believe Susan Rennels, former school board president, deserves to be re-elected.

A BANKER, Rennels must limit the time she devotes to the community. But her commitment to young people is well documented.

She's the school board liaison to Farmington Youth Assistance, dedicated to preventing juvenile delinquency, and to Farmington Ethnic Forum, dedicated to spreading awareness about the community's cultural heritage.

In recent months, the school board has repeatedly been challenged for being uncommunicative. That's partly because trustees tend to present a united front, as if they're simply rubber-stamping administration recommendations. Thought may well precede their vote, but that's not always apparent to those in the audience.

To her credit, Rennels has broken rank and tossed some tough questions at the administration when she felt necessary facts were lacking.

FRIENDLY BUT no minger, Rennels readily responds to questions directed to her. But she's not so eager to volunteer information privy to the school board, a shortcoming we'd urge her to address.

During her presidency last year, Rennels kept school board meetings



Susan Rennels
key trustee

moving and on track. She was tactful and seemed to genuinely want community feedback.

She also played an integral part in the hiring of a new superintendent.

A member of the committee that will evaluate the superintendent and his cabinet, Rennels wisely believes in giving administrators enough rein to try to reach their goals.

We see Rennels, with a full term on the school board now behind her, portraying the respect she has earned into helping erase perceptions that the school board is omnipotent.

FOR STARTERS, trustees should make it their business to more fully explain their positions. They should take a cue from deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan. He does his darndest to break complicated financial matters into simple-to-understand terms.

Meanwhile, the school board and the school district would benefit from challenger Marti's continued involvement. She offers vitality, interest and a yen to learn.

She can hold her own in debating classroom philosophy although she's hesitant in discussing the district's \$66 million budget. She's committed to improving the curriculum, slowing the rush to change kindergarten and widening parental participation.

Incumbency doesn't always mean best-qualified. But in this election, we say without hesitation, re-elect Susan Rennels.



LAURA CASTLE/staff photographer

Betty Paine opens gifts and chats with friends at her farewell reception. She has earned a well-deserved rest.

Center is at a crossroads

AS A PUBLIC relations move, it sparked.

In the wake of a \$19,000 budget deficit and \$55,000 in repair needs, the Farmington Community Center board of directors did what it had to do to turn leery faces into smiles May 26.

The board had come to say farewell to Betty Paine, the sometimes-embattled executive director, who grew weary after eight years of trying to juggle fund raising, volunteers and programming.

But it grabbed the opportunity to name former Farmington Public Schools assistant superintendent Larry Freedman interim director and release \$165,000 held in trust for capital improvements.

Freedman, a four-year board member, should provide a strong anchor as the search for someone to replace Paine continues and as the board tries to straighten its financial house.

FREEDMAN BRINGS excitement, commitment and perspective to the pressure-packed job. His idea of developing corporate partnerships to help establish a line of regular contributors is a welcome immediate look.

He also understands the need to cut



Bob Sklar

overlap between community center programming and services and those offered by the better-financed Farmington YMCA, Farmington Community Library and Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation.

The flow of cash at the 19-year-old, non-profit center slowed in 1986, a year after contributions, a quarter of the revenue, peaked amid rising costs.

So the center's board owed it to the community to release the \$165,000. The money is sorely needed to hire an executive director, shore up a skimpy staff and hire a consulting firm.

It's a community signal that says, "We're now doing our part. Will you do yours by including us in your charitable donations?"

PUT BLUNTLY, the drop in contributions means the board has unwittingly lost its edge in pinpointing what the

community wants or needs through the center.

Restoring that edge is a must. If the community center goes under, it reverts to the Farmington Community Library or to Farmington Hills, both of which have more pressing financial concerns.

For starters, the community center seems a natural for more cultural events.

It's also time to play up the center's picturesque setting, address its catering shortcomings and push for more in-kind contributions of labor, equipment, supplies and services.

AS FREEDMAN takes the community center reins, Betty Paine deserves a heartfelt salute for her tireless pursuit of excellence.

Her management style triggered disension among some volunteers at a time when a public airing would have accomplished more. In recent months, weariness and illness intervened.

Still, she carried the community center banner proudly. She cared enough to tough it out as the going got tougher.

Enjoy your newfound days of rest, Betty. You deserve it. You've earned a place in the sun.

Suburban educators lose out

THEY WERE conspicuous by their absence — suburban education leaders, that is.

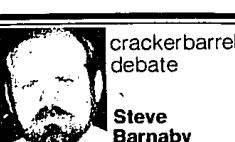
This past weekend the Crackerbarrel picked up and headed for the north country to listen as area leaders debated how business and education could best forge an alliance to aid one another and society in general.

Detroit area business people, educators, legislators and an assortment of other politicians wrestled with the issues on and off for nearly three days.

But you would have been hard pressed to find your local school district representative at this conference. Neither board member nor administrator could be found.

That's a shame. Ultimately, suburban students will be the losers.

DESPITE THE absences, the list of area participants was impressive. Both county executives — Wayne's Ed McNamara and Oakland's Daniel Murphy attended. Several suburban legislators made their many and diverse views known. Included were: Livonia's 35th District House Rep. Lyn Bankes; West Bloomfield state Rep. David Honigman



crackerbarrel
debate
Steve Barnaby

of the 24th district; and Canton's state Rep. James Kosteva of the 37th District.

Oakland University's Frank Carden made one of the best presentations of the conference.

All of the above mixed it up with other state business and civic leaders over such issues as property tax reform, quality of education, curriculum, business/university cooperation, teacher and administrative evaluation.

Alliances were formed, points were defended, biases were broken down.

Everyone in attendance came away a better-informed person — everybody who was there, anyway.

That's why it's so difficult to under-

stand why not even one suburban school district representative bothered to peek out from behind the pile of administrative paperwork to say, "Hey, business community, we care about your support."

IM SURE that Troy-based K mart's CEO Bernard Fauber would have been glad to hear suburban school district views on many of these important issues. He was there. Detroit Edison's chairman Walter McCarthy might have lent an ear to their concerns. He came, too.

They could have exchanged views with a whole list of business people of various rank who seem to realize that if America is to remain competitive and profitable it must forge an alliance with educators at all levels.

As an observer, I could sense the void created by the missing suburban school district officials. Whether it was at one of the formal sessions or in casual conversation, the discussions were incomplete without them.

Oh yes, one school district superintendent did attend — Detroit's Arthur Jefferson. His views were heard.

In C'ville — support Sherman, Dunklee

TIME AND TIME again, Clarenceville Board of Education candidates referred to the positive gains the school district has made in the past few years.

And the best people to help the district continue making progress are incumbent Barry Sherman and Vernice Dunklee. The district includes southeastern Farmington Hills.

Sherman, a Livonia police officer, has served the district well during his 10 years on the board. He has served as president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

He has firsthand knowledge of the district. And he has a genuine commitment to education in Clarenceville. He has lived in the district 22 years and is a 1969 Clarenceville High School graduate.

Sherman is involved in the Livonia Youth Assistance Program-Community Action Council and chaired the group in 1985-86. He has served on the Livonia Youth Commission-Scholarship Selection Committee since the scholarship was created in 1980.

IN 1983, he was recognized by the Livonia Jaycees as "Police Officer of the Year" for his community service. He also is a member of the Clarenceville and Farmington Community Education Advisory Council.

His experience as an adult education teacher in both Livonia and Redford Union schools also gives him insight into the teaching profession.

He favors improving the vocational

education programs to help students not going to college prepare for a career.

Vernice Dunklee has been actively involved in Clarenceville.

She has served as president of the Boltsford School Parents Teachers Organization for five terms and as secretary for three.

She served on the Clarenceville Educational Excellence Committee and coordinated Boltsford's Bucket Brigade — a volunteer program designed to tutor students.

DUNKLEE HAS firsthand knowledge of both the gifted and special education programs in the district. She has been editor of the Michigan Association of Children with Learning Disabilities newsletter.

Her interest in the job can be seen in her regular attendance at school board meetings for the past two years.

Dunklee knows how both the school board and the schools function. She would like to see more excitement put into math and science education, the libraries open full time and an educational tie-in with the business community.

The other candidates — Timothy Wiggle and Sharon Pommerville — have the experience and ability to serve. Both presented interesting ideas and goals and would be worthy trustees if elected.

But Barry Sherman and Vernice Dunklee are just a little more deserving and should receive your vote Monday.

— The Farmington Observer