OCC board applicants strut their strengths

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Oakland Community College needs a minority member on its board of trustees to enable the school to more successfully reach out to ethnic students, according to one of six finalists applying for the job.

It needs a trustee with experience — and a financial background — to help the school weather tough economic times, said another.

What OCC really needs, insisted yet another, is someone with a business background to assure the curriculum is tailored to the realistic needs of people who can compete in the market place.

These were some of the views expressed last week when OCC trustees interviewed four of six candidates hoping to be named to fill a vacancy on the board.

Two other candidates — Ruthanne Okun, a lawyer from Huntington Woods, and Janice Simmons, a Rochester Hills resident who is a vice president at Pontiac General Hospital — were interviewed the previous week as trustees prepare to fill the vacancy created by the Sept. 9 resignation of Norma L. Ross of Madison Heights.

TRUSTEES MAY ANNOUNCE that appointment Monday (tonight).

"We haven't met since last Tuesday," said Margaret A. MacTavish, a Rochester Hills resident who is vice chairman of the board. "So we haven't discussed the relative qualifications of each candidate.

"But we aren't scheduled to meet again until December. So there's a chance we will announce our choice," MacTavish said Friday.

Board chairman Sandra L. Ritter agreed. "I wouldn't bet on it," said the Waterford resident. "But I expect somebody to make a nomination and we could very well go from there."

The appointee will serve until the term expires in June, at which time he or she will have the option of seeking re-election to a six year term.

Of the four candidates interviewed last Tuesday, only Marcia VanCreveld, a Realtor from Farmington Hills, said she would not seek re-election if appointed.

Running as an incumbent would give her an advantage, VanCreveld acknowledged. "But it would be unfair to seek re-election while also serving as a trustee."

Neither the trustees, nor the other candidates interviewed, however, saw any conflict with running for re-election. There's no law against it, and many voters see experience as a reason to support a candidate.

"I'm leaning toward running again (if appointed)," said Jay B. Shah, a candidate from Waterford Township. "Unless, after six months, I've decided I had enough."

SHAH, VICE PRESIDENT of corporate development at Spalding, DeDecker & Associates in Madison Heights, ran unsuccessfully for the OCC board in 1990.

He was born in Bombay, India, and came to the Detroit area in 1969.

Sam Yono, a businessman from Novi who is also active in the Chaldean community said the OCC board needs a representative from a minority, possibly the Arab community.

"Ethnic communities are shy about speaking out on their needs," said Yono. An ethnic trustee would be able to identify with minorities and help with recruitment, he said.

Metro Detroit has the largest Arabic community outside the Middle East, said Yono, with as many as many as 30,000 Arab-Americans in Oakland County.

While ethnic statistics on the 29,000 students at OCC are not complete, available data shows that 86 percent of them are white and almost 10 percent are black. Other minorities — Hispanics, Asians, Indians and Arabs — make up less than four percent, according to OCC records.

Candidate Richard Lindgren of Bloomfield Hills said the new trustee should have a financial background along with an understanding of the role OCC plays in the lives of its students.

Lindgren is the former president and chief executive officer of the Cross & Trecker Corp. and helped design and equip OCC's flexible manufacturing facility at the Auburn Hills Campus. He is also chairman of the OCC Foundation.

HIS FAMILY HAD a very meaningful experience with OCC, he said, after his daughter attended the school after leaving Vanderbilt University.

"Vanderbilt turned out to be a very expensive babysitting service," said Lindgren. After her experience at OCC, his daughter returned to a four-year university, graduating with honors.

Lindgren attributes those kinds of success stories to OCC's faculty being more available to and concerned about studentss futures.

Harkin may cancel on county Dems

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Excitement generated by last week's election results may have cost Oakland Democrats a top attraction.

Presidential hopeful Tom Harkin — scheduled to attend the AFL-CIO convention in Detroit next week — may not be able to attend Tuesday's meeting of Oakland County Democrats as announced.

"We got word today that he may not be able to make it," a disappointed Donald Tucker said Friday. "There's a possibility he will make it, but I don't want to hold out false hope."

That Harkin might not show is a reality of big time politics, said Tucker, Democratic county chairman.

Democrats got some good news in last week's elections, and suddenly Harkin is in demand. So much so that he may cancel the scheduled Oakland County appearance in favor of a more recent invitation.

"That's life in the fast lane of politics," said Tucker, a Birmingham resident. "I don't particularly like it, but I understand it."

Tucker, a veteran of numerous campaigns, noted that Harkin visited Oakland County for the party's annual Soapy Williams Golf Classic fundraiser Sept. 6 in West Bloomfield.

"Harkin's been here, but he might not have been in places like Washtenaw or Ingham counties," Tucker said. "I'd do the same."

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