

Inch from page 1A

at the meeting to get a kindergarten class returned to the school in their subdivision.

He's been known to silence audience members by simply clearing his throat.

In the process, another side of Inch gets obscured.

During a conversation with the long-serving trustee, topics can include William Shakespeare's uncanny insights into human behavior, Winston Churchill's unappreciated brilliance in his own country and the imaginary wonders of early radio.

When it comes to education, Inch gets a wistful look in his eye. He champions reading. He thinks students should be doing more.

Inch is also proud of his accomplishments in 10 years on the board, including involvement in hiring two "excellent" superintendents, Michael Flanagan and current schools chief Robert Maxwell.

As a trustee, Inch sees himself representing many constituencies.

'Empty nester' insight

He's an economics professor at the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College. His four grown children are products of Farmington schools.

And, with his children now adults, Inch said he has an insight into being an "empty nester," a person who pays taxes for schools but no longer has children in the system. Farmington has a lot of them.

They want the district to pro-

duce good, quality students they feel comfortable around, he said. Farmington schools deliver, he said.

"Many of us would like to go back to some of the best attributes a school system had in the '40s," Inch said. "At the same time, those school systems only graded 50 percent of the students, which is something often overlooked."

That touches on back-to-basics issues. The Farmington school district has approached the matter carefully, Inch said.

He favors longitudinal studies, which Farmington does not do. "We don't take a look and say, 'Why are students who graduated in 1978 known as a good class in the fourth grade?'" Inch said. "Why do they have these attributes?"

"Why are the ones who graduated in 1983 a bad class in the fourth grade? Do they continue this all the way through?"

How boards of education will ask such questions in the future is unclear. Many are still awaiting the outcome of sweeping changes in Lansing.

Inch said he thinks boards might do more priority setting. He doesn't see recent legislation fining teachers for strikes and board members for lockouts as affecting negotiations in the short term.

"However, I see the potential for the mother of all strikes where a bunch of them go out," Inch said. "I could see one board acting capriciously and the MEA saying, 'if they can do it, everyone can.'"



SHARON LEATHUR/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

For starters: R. Jack Inch, who seeks re-election to the Farmington Board of Education, is a familiar sight at high school track meets.

No FEA donations

Inch said he's never received a campaign donation from the Farmington Education Association. Then again, he added, he's never had the chance.

In the 1990 campaign, the FEA endorsed Robert Ranney and current trustee Cathleen Webb.

He also upset the teachers union endorsed Ranney, whom

Inch said advocated not honoring bargained contracts. In characteristic fashion, he let the FEA know.

"I blew up about it," Inch said. "I said, 'I wouldn't give a damn if you endorsed someone else. Cathy, I'm not going to argue one bit about. But I think you should ask your committee to look at things more closely.'"

Trustee tracks marathon career running, coaching

As a board member, R. Jack Inch knows what it's like to be under the gun.

So, naturally, operating a starter pistol should be no problem. Inch is a regular starter and timer at area track meets, which is something he enjoys.

"It's like some people like fishing," Inch said. "I find it a very

straight-forward competition that there's a fairness to the stopwatch that's not available to other sports. That's true to swimming also."

After running and coaching, there's no better place to be than a track meet, Inch said. He finds it heartening to see kids make a commitment and compete.

Inch, 63, coached cross country at Oakland Community College, Farmington Hills Harrison High and Detroit Redford High. He was a cross country runner at Detroit Redford High, where he graduated in 1949, and later at Wayne State University. Inch also ran the mile (4:40) and 880-yard run (2:03) on the

high school track team. He said he couldn't do better in terms of time, but running has provided other types of good times.

"I got mixed up with some of the neatest people in the world," Inch said. "Through the years in track, I've been involved with some of the neatest people; be they parents, coaches or runners."

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