

Walden-Hughes from page B1

the fireman can show off what they have," he said. "The city is very proud of them."

"If you think about it, 24 hours a day, day or night, 365 days of the year, they drop whatever they are doing," said Werth, to answer the call.

Fortunately, no calls came this past Sunday while pancakes were being served. Should that happen, said Sergeant Neal Bartholomew, "you'd have to wait."

This was the department's last pancake breakfast for 1997. Traditionally, the breakfasts happen once in January, February and March. This Sunday nearly 500 people trooped to the Fire Hall.

Aside from helping raise funds for special projects, the breakfasts also introduce visitors to the machinery and the men that make up the Rochester Fire Department.

To that end, not only do you get great pancakes — made by fireman such as Craig Alfred and Bob Robinson — but they are placed on a place mat full of department info.

Did you know, for example, that the department protects property valued at \$226,522,800?

And that there are 10 vehicles owned by the department to handle about 450 emergency calls — fire or otherwise — per year? And that there are 38 men who volunteer to protect our property and save our lives?

Maybe we ought to serve them breakfast.

One More Time

Laurie Pucias is nodding her head, phone glued firmly to the left ear. She's listening to the question. Now, it's her turn to talk.

"Operating the new school will cost about 2 per cent of the total operating budget," she says, "that works out to about \$1.7 million."

"Now, hopefully, what we will save in operations through the planned renovations will help with some of that."

Her hands are dancing through the air, plucking a word or a phrase as she works at what has inadvertently become her mission in the last few months — the Rochester Community Schools bond issue.

Pucias was one among many who spent Sunday afternoon calling residents to inform them of the upcoming vote. She is chairman of the group organized to pass the Bond, Citizens for the Advancement of Rochester Education — CARE. She was also co-chair of the steering committee who helped put the issue together.

She is articulate and well-informed and just one of a group of individuals who are dedicated to a cause that concludes next Tuesday.

She continues her phone conversation and it is clear that this voter is, probably, on the

fence. This voter is asking the questions.

"Yes, we did consider that, making separate issues. But they really are all connected," she said.

Technology, maintenance, renovation and more room are intertwined. Move the bus garage and you have more space at the Rochester High School site that you need to make the improvements there.

Move the bus maintenance out of Hart, where it is now performed, and give that space back to the students.

Even something as simple as parity among toilets (my phrase, not hers) means cost savings in future maintenance, she explained to the voter. Savings in bulk buys and future maintenance translates into savings in the operating budget, which is a very sticky issue with voters.

"There will be start up costs . . . new athletic uniforms, that kind of thing," she tells the voter. But there will not be more administrators. Instead of the six administrators currently at the two schools, there will be six spread over three schools.

She pauses, listening again. It's her turn.

"We considered just renovating and expanding the two schools," she answers, but a student population of 1500 is considered the magic number for size. More than that and you start limiting opportunities for the

students — academically and extracurricularly.

The conversation proceeds and the voter keeps asking the tough questions. And Pucias keeps fielding them.

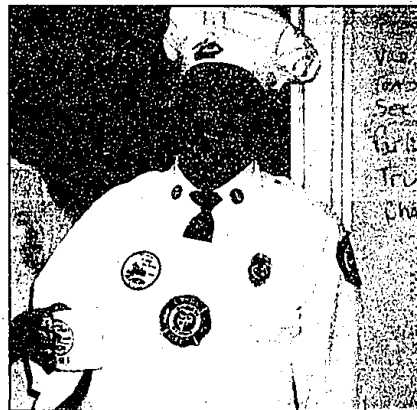
The same process is going on in the rooms around her. Paul Funk and Betty Conger are two more volunteers who are dedicating their afternoon — and much of their recent free time — to passage of the bond issue.

"I want all Rochester kids to have a good education," said Conger. A 1970 graduate of Rochester High School, she lived through the construction of Adams and the overcrowding that occurred before that school was built.

It wasn't fun. But the result was really great education for her two older children — ages 19 and 22. Now worries about her two younger kids — ages 10 and 13.

"I want to see that our children will be educated in an environment that is conducive to learning; that there's enough space to learn," she said. "I don't want to see a generation of kids who don't get a good education," she added. "Our kids are our future."

Chris Walden-Hughes owns a business in downtown Rochester. She can be reached through the Rochester Eccentric, 661-7575.



Cook & chef: Fire Chief Bill Gray directs his crew on Pancake Sunday.



Family affair:

Fritz Quitmeyer (left), Barbara Smith, Mary Lynn McCrindle and Allison Quitmeyer (holding Vivian) are all smiles.

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