

Board hopefuls discuss district needs

Name: Tom McConnell
Age: 38
Family: Wife, Sharon. Children, Matt, 15, and Jacob, 10.
Occupation: BASF shipping department.
Education: Roseville High School.
Years in district: 11
Community involvement: Boys' baseball, Boy Scouts.
School activities: Walled Lake Schools board of education vice president, district redistricting committee, volunteer recognition, leadership committee and parent-teacher association.
Previous offices held: Walled Lake Elementary PTA president 1989-1997, Walled Lake school board trustee 1993-present, Teamster Local 247 plant steward for past 10 years.



Name: Michael Karson
Age: 39
Family: Married, Anne. Two children ages 7 and 11.
Occupation: Health Care Administrator at Health Management Inc. in Wayne.
Education: Bachelor of science in health care administration and gerontology.
Years in district: 13
Community involvement: Walled Lake schools district health care advisory committee and Lake Angelus Police community relations.
School activities: Pleasant Lake Elementary PTA member for seven years and 1997 redistricting committee.
Previous offices held: None.



Name: Randolph G. Ston
Age: 54
Family: Wife, Mary. Children, Sara, 12 and Adam, 11.
Occupation: College professor and counselor at Oakland Community College.
Education: Doctorate degree in economics and educational development, master's degree in sociology and bachelors degree in social science.
Years in district: 25
Community involvement: Cub Scouts/Boy Scouts, Interlakes Girls Softball League, Commerce Little League, active supporter of "Save the Byer's Farm Project" and Walled Lake Schools Drug/Alcohol Information/Intervention.
School activities: Walled Lake school board member, school bond election steering committee member, enrolled in certified board member program and handles legislative action correspondence for board, volunteer at Commerce Elementary.
Previous offices held: Trustee for past year, chairperson of the Auburn Hills Oakland Community College faculty association, secretary of homeowners association.



Editor's note: Three candidates are running for two, four-year terms on the Walled Lake Consolidated Schools Board of Education. They are incumbents Thomas McConnell and Randolph Ston and newcomer Michael Karson. The district includes part of Farmington Hills.

How can school officials best address district growth concerns?
 Karson: By re-evaluating district attendance areas. "I think there's been such a tremendous amount of growth in the district that (the attendance areas) don't reflect the areas." Karson said he understands concerns about children being bused to school instead of walking to schools closer to their homes. "I'm totally in favor of using some of the money from the Durant lawsuit to build additional classrooms at smaller elementary schools. We could really absorb many more kids into these schools and avoid moving the amount of children that we had in the past."

McConnell: "We need to be prepared to... build classrooms whenever necessary. Redistricting isn't the only answer." McConnell said district officials should consider building lower elementary schools, which are not as costly than typical elementary schools, and using alternate schools for classroom space. "We need to make real-estate properties available to build buildings if we continue to grow at this pace. We also need to have a group of people that study this constantly... a committee of people from all different areas of the district so when it's necessary to make moves these people are well-informed."

Ston: Recapture the sense of a small community by developing a community-wide committee to study growth in the district over an extended period of time, rather than the 90-day redistricting process. "It was a reaction process when we redistricted. The community's changing much faster than it did before and there's more of a likelihood that any changes you do abruptly... are going to deteriorate the sense of the community." By extending the process, Ston said better statistics could be gathered. "I think this has to be a continuous process of looking at the growth and what to do about it. One thing about stress, if you can predict how it's going to go, you're comfortable with it."

What is the school district's greatest strength and weakness and what would you recommend to combat that weakness?
 Karson: "I think the greatest strength the district has is the high level of education that all the children are receiving, and now that the state core curriculum is being adopted along with the technology, I am sure that every child will receive the same information. I don't believe that there is an overall great weakness in the district," however, Karson said, "I think we have to review spending. I think we have to work more aggressively with the legislative branches of state government to redefine Proposal A."

McConnell: The greatest strength is staff and parent involvement and cooperation. "We have a tremendous amount of parents who are willing to volunteer - to do whatever it takes to ensure their kids are well educated." McConnell said the district's greatest weakness is communication since the district is 55 square miles. "We need to make people see more than just their immediate building." McConnell said district officials are making improvements through newsletters, more mailings to homes, postings throughout district and more communications via the newspapers.

Ston: "The biggest strength we have is our ability to coordinate many of the different varying functions and activities and focuses that are present in the community." These include change in the community and the curriculum. "The weakness... is the knee jerk response to deal with all the various differences by trying to make everything the same. We're not focusing on the small groups and small communities that when put together with one value system, namely education, will strengthen the whole system. There is no such thing as one large group."

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