Clarenceville candidates assess status of district

John Shaw and Crystal Waack were adults before ever setting foot in Clarenceville.

Bryan Bentley, Gary Garrison and Brian Silvernail have deep and long roots in the tiny school district that serves parts of Livonia, Farmington Hills and Redford Township.

What brings the five together is the June 8 school board election. Each is a candidate for a seat on the Clarenceville Board of Education. The district serves portions of Livonia, Redford Township and Farmington Hills.

Incumbent Garrison and challengers Shaw and Silvernail all seek four-year terms. The second seat unexpectedly opened when board president Linda Brandemihl decided not to run again.

Bentley and Waack both seek the two-year term that opened with the resignation of trustee Gary Gasser.

The candidates lamented losing Gasser and Brandemihl and the breath of experience both brought to the board.

"Linda and I were like oil and water at first," said Garrison, who lives on St. Francis. "But she has helped me grow, and became a strong advocate for me to run again."

Probing the candidates to find differences and issues is a lot like nitpicking mother at a family reunion. Clarenceville is beloved by all for being a close-knit community where everyone pitches in to help and everybody knows everybody else.

Words of praise

The candidates praised Clarenceville for being small enough to let students participate in any activity they wish, not just sit on the sidelines.

And they praised the district for being large enough to give students an education on par with bigger school districts and their well-padded budgets.

The candidates, all with heavy commitments in the district, run into each other at school functions and have become well-known faces to each other, if not friends.

So if it's not dissent that brings them into the race, what is it?

"The trustees are there because they love the kids," answered Shaw, who lives on Pershing.

"The school board is like a seven-course meal," answered Bentley, who lives on Brentwood. "Everyone brings something to the table."

Here's what the five candidates would bring to the Clarenceville table:

■ Bentley, an independent distributor for Little Debbie Snack Cakes, a job he took over from his father. Bentley knows the value of education; he skated through Clarenceville High, went to work for his father, and didn't go to college.

"I have three kids in the district, and I want to see them do better than I did. I was lucky I fell into my dad's business. It's a far more competitive world than when I got out of high school. I would look out for my kids, and every child in the district."

■ Garrison, an equipment maintenance supervisor for the city of Livonia. Like Bentley, he is a Clarenceville High graduate and has two children in the district. He's proud of the fact that he has lived his entire life in the district, except for a three-year stint in the U. S. Army.

His first four years on the board, he said, was spent "learning." If re-elected, his next four years, he said, would be spent "doing."

■ Shaw, a media specialist-teacher in Walled Lake Schools. Shaw came to Clarenceville from England, where he was born and educated at Cambridge University. He has four children in the district.

"Society has changed so much since I was in school, when everyone was expected to go to college. We have to find a way for everyone to be successful, even those who don't go to college. The days are gone when you go to college, get a job, and stay in that job forever."

■ Waack, manager of American House in Farmington Hills, Madonna University student, and resident of Angling. Waack and her three daughters moved to Clarenceville from a rural area in Colorado after remarriage. It was a coming home for her new husband, Tim.

At first, she was apprehensive about leaving the rural West for a Detroit suburb. But settling in Clarenceville, she said, has allayed all her fears.

Her biggest challenge as a trustee would be making sure all students stay in school and graduate. "Part of the responsibility lies with parents."

■ Silvernail, a Fremont resident and technician with Phillips Service Industry. He did not attend the roundtable discussion with the Livonia Observer.

Bentley had a reminder for Clarenceville residents on the importance of voting in the June 8 school election. "School elections have more impact than presidential elections."

In the months ahead, the board will spend Clarenceville's Durant settlement money, make curriculum changes, continue discussions on a "closed campus" high school, bring new technology into the classrooms, evaluate Superintendent Tom Tattan, approve a $13 million school budget and fulfill the mandates of accreditation, among a host of other tasks.

"Our job is to provide everything the district needs to provide," Garrison said.

Snap Judgment

Frame fame: *Inge Baessler of Farmington won first place for color photography in the Plymouth-Civitan Club's annual photographic contest. This year's theme was "Friends." Baessler's photo is featured among the winners in a display at Plymouth District Library through the end of the month.*

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