

# Labor relations, next chancellor big issues in OCC race

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HOMETOWN NEWS SERVICE

Labor relations, efficient use of tax dollars and who the next chancellor will be after the current one retires have all emerged as leading issues in the race for Oakland Community College Board of Trustees.

Two seats are up for election this year, in the annual school elections Monday, June 10. Six candidates including the two incumbents, have filed to run. Both seats are for six year terms which begin July 1, 2002 and expire in 2008.

The candidates include incumbents Sandra Ritter and Jeanne Towar. Challengers include Royal Oak accountant Philip Abraham, retired OCC employee and former union president Rose Couture, Walled Lake Central graduating senior Michael McGuinness and Royal Oak resident Sandra Tyndell.

McGuinness, who has enrolled in classes at Oakland University for the fall and plans to major in Political Science, raised the issue of marketing strategy. He said that while college recruiters were present at his high school

at various times throughout the year, looking to attract students to their institutions, he doesn't recall seeing recruiters at his school from OCC.

McGuinness has been interested in politics for years, saying in student government and writing for his high school newspaper. Even though he'll be a student at another institution, he said he believes he will be able to bring a student's perspective to the board.

Abraham believes the college must come up with an "overall marketing strategy." As a certified public accountant with offices in Royal Oak, he said taking a close look at the budget is tops on his list. Once on the board, he said he believed he would be able to examine college accounts closely and find areas of fat to be trimmed.

He did specifically name one area of the budget to be reviewed. He said the college's Datatel computer system, intended to consolidate the college's administrative computer files, was over due and over budget. Contracted for \$4 million, he said the project is now costing over \$6 million.

Rather than hiring more con-

sultants to improve on the system, Abraham said the board and administration should be going through the original contract to make sure the vendor had delivered the system as promised, and at the price promised.

Incumbents responded that a recent audit showed the project is proceeding on par with other data processing projects of this magnitude. While there have been some additional costs, they were the result of unanticipated software needs.

Abraham said he was motivated to run for the OCC board because of his support for higher education and wanting to take his public service "to the next level."

Couture blames the board for failing to settle an outstanding contract with administrative employees. She believes the contract has been unsettled because sitting board members don't want that bargaining group to be represented by the union which employees have selected, the Teamsters. Incumbents denied the charge.

Couture worked at OCC for 32 years, mainly in the business office at the Royal Oak campus.

And she served for a time as the president of the union representing clerical workers. Although she retired, she decided to run for office saying she still has more to contribute. She said she was asked to run by her former coworkers.

Ritter initially got involved in OCC after seeing how the school programs helped her husband, Dennis Ritter, by preparing him for a good career. Ritter counts as her top accomplishments that the college has kept pace with the growth of the county, and provided students with quality educational programs while keeping tuition very affordable.

An educator with Waterford schools, serving first as a teacher then as an administrator, Ritter retired recently. Finding that she missed the job, Ritter took a position at the start of the current school year as the principal of a charter school in Burton, near Flint.

Towar says the board's highest priority in the coming term will be the hiring of a new chancellor, since Richard Thompson has already announced his retirement later this year.

Towar said the selection of the next chancellor will be important

because that person will set the tone for the school in the future. She said she had no strong feelings about whether that person should come from inside or outside the school, but she said the search should include all "stakeholders" in the college, from the board and administration to students and employees.

Towar has been involved in the college more than 18 years through work with the OCC Foundation, which raises money for primarily for scholarships. Towar said she was motivated to run for the board because it provides educational opportunities to many students who wouldn't be able to attend a four-year college.

Tyndell did not participate in the Observer & Eccentric interview process. She declined because she believes Towar has a conflict of interest, serving as both a member of the OCC board and being employed as Vice President of Editorial of the HomeTown Communications Network.

Towar responded that she does not have any control over the day-to-day content of the newspaper, nor does she control its editorial or endorsement process.

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