

Leach appointed to interim post as board bids farewell to Tattan

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Clarenceville's Assistant Superintendent Cheryl Leach is usually not a procrastinator.

But for some reason, while she submitted a letter in January announcing her plans to retire, she never filed her official paperwork. That turned out to be a good thing for Clarenceville Schools.

On Thursday night, school board members rescinded acceptance of her letter and appointed her interim superintendent, replacing Dr. Tom Tattan, who leaves for a new post in Watford July 1.

"My husband and I had planned my retirement for a long time," Leach said. "I had made some commitments to spend more time with my son."

When officials approached her about staying, that was a family decision as well.

"We did have to talk about it,

and my staying on in the district I've come to care about and made a career in for the past 15 years," she said.

Her tenure with the district — and her plans to retire — made her the first choice with both Tattan and a board committee charged with hiring his temporary replacement.

"Cheryl brings to the job a respected and trusted individual who has been in the district for a long time," Tattan told board members at Thursday night's meeting. "I think she'll do a great job, because she's not interested in the superintendentcy."

Speaking on behalf of the search committee, board member Gary Garrison said, "We looked at all the possible people we'd like to see step in. It just came back to Cheryl Leach every time."

Leach believes strongly that she made the right decision, even though it may delay her

retirement plans. "I think it's going to be good to have some stability in the change," she said.

How long will she have to wait to be a stay-at-home mom? Garrison, who has been through the search process once and is on the committee again, said he'd do his best.

"I would expect to have your replacement on board within four or five years, max," he joked.

In formally announcing his plans to leave, Tattan read his letter of resignation aloud at the meeting.

"This resignation letter is difficult to write because of the pride and sense of accomplishment that has been enjoyed while employed in the Clarenceville School District," he said. "I have been blessed with excellent administrative team members, a positive and collaborative board of education and excellent teacher and support staff contributions to serve the needs of the

Clarenceville School community."

Tattan's comment that the school district had been improved was termed by board member Garrison as an "understatement."

"I can't begin to name the number of ways we've been improved around here since you came," he said. "You corrected things we didn't even see were wrong."

Board president Matthew Bootcher said if it was within his power, he'd reject the letter of resignation and convince Tattan to stay.

"You have demonstrated over the years I have known you nothing but the sincerest convictions for the interests of the children and parents in the community. You will be missed."

Board member John Kanyo agreed. "You had nothing but the district, the people and staff in mind."



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRESLER
New chief: The halls are empty, but Cheryl Leach's new job as Clarenceville Schools' interim superintendent is just beginning.

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Trespass case dismissed, Shahs' battle continues

BY PAUL R. PACE
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Representing themselves in Oakland County Circuit Court Wednesday, the Shah family failed to prove the city trespassed on their property during a motion to dismiss hearing on the charge.

Judge Steven Andrews told Ajay and Betty Shah they should have hired an attorney to prove their case and dismissed it.

The family has been embroiled in lawsuits with the city and the homeowners association in the upscale Oxford Estates subdivision, where residents have been complaining to city leaders. Neighbors say the Shahs' unfinished house and landscape have been an eyesore for too long, four years.

The city in January sent a work crew to clean up construction debris on the property. The

Shahs stated the city trespassed on their property.

After Wednesday's hearing, city attorney John Donahue said he will file a motion early this week to contest the family living in the home under an expired certificate of occupancy permit. He said the judge could order the family to move out of the house until it's completed.

Ajay Shah said he plans to file for an extension on the occupancy permit while work on the home continues.

After the hearing, the Shahs repeated claims that neighbors are trying to force the family from the neighborhood.

The couple said people are telling contractors not to perform work on the house, alleging the family can't pay the bills. "All we want to do is live here civilly," said Ajay Shah.

"I'm sick and tired of this," he said. "I'm trying to finish this."

He said under the state building code there is no time limit for a house to be completed.

Dale Countegan, director of planning and community development for the city, said it's true a house building permit can go on as long as progress is made upon inspection every six months. Most builders don't take long to finish a project because they want to make their money, Countegan said.

"But the Shahs are very slow to make progress," he said.

The director said Ajay Shah can apply for an extension to occupy the home while it's being built, but the request will be reviewed by the city attorney since the couple has sued the city.

"We'd review the request and see whether they meet the code for another extension," he said. The review typically takes about a week.

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