

Board Chief Ponders College Goals

By MARTHA MAHAN

Chairman John LaRue of Schoolcraft College's board of trustees would like to take a look back as well as ahead on school affairs.

"I'd like to see a study on what has happened to these kids" who graduated from the college in years past, he said. "How many are we really helping?"

Schoolcraft has an "open door" admissions policy which lets "almost anybody in," LaRue said. "Of course,

they have to perform to stay, and some would make good anyway. A lot have gone on to four-year universities.

"But how many made good in the university and how many have gone on into the work world and performed successfully? How many have we salvaged? We've never had a study like that."

He places an even higher priority, however, on looking to the future.

"I'd like to see us beginning to look where we're going in the next, say, five years," LaRue said. "Then in five years, I'd like to see the board begin to look at the future again."

"We must reexamine some of our goals," he declared. "We need to get some estimates of potential student population and residence trends."

There's been a "sort of a break in growth in student enrollment" lately, LaRue said, with some colleges reaching an enrollment plateau and others reporting a decline.

"We've got to look over our growth potential and whether it's going to continue going up at the same rate or at a different rate and look at the various factors," he went on.

For example, men students have been carrying fewer hours since the Vietnam war and the draft ended, he observed. Previously, they had to be fulltime students to qualify for military deferments.

"Then a year or so ago, we had a minor recession" and that affected student hours, the board chairman said.

"We've got to put all the facts and opinions together and try to come up with a judgment and keep on doing it from time to time," he said.

Moreover, "it's time to look at the future not only in enrollment but in the type of facilities we will need," he maintained.

"One problem with buildings is predicting when you have to have them," he said. "You can't decide you need a building and have it in a month or two."

LaRue said he has no "grandiose plans" for his tenure, but "whatever we do has got to be essentially a board effort and we've got to work closely with the administration and others at the college."

He's happy about the board's recent decision to revise the by-laws to add an open study session each month.

"The meetings were getting pretty long," he said, "and many things just can't be covered thoroughly enough in a meeting once a month."

He'd like to see counseling and academic presentations at the study sessions, as has been done in the past.

LaRue concedes the Schoolcraft board is widely regarded as the most political community college board in the state.

But he thinks the reputation undeserved.

"We may be more politically conscious than some," he said, "but I don't think politics enters into decisions of the board."

"When I joined the board four years ago it wasn't political," LaRue said. "In the past two years or so there have been some political figures on it, but I think if you look at their records you'll find their votes were not along party lines. Many, many votes were unanimous."

"There have been two examples of people whose work on the board led to further political office," he observed.

"But I think the reputation of being a political board goes back more to the nature of the people who got on it. And after all, you have to be some kind of a political animal to get elected."

A bigger problem than politics, LaRue believes, is the matter of community recognition.

"A lot of people don't know we are there," he said.

"Being located in a big metropolitan community where there are a lot of things going on" is a disadvantage, he maintained.

The combined population of Schoolcraft's drawing area is about 200,000, he said.

"If we existed in a city that size about 100 miles from Detroit, Schoolcraft would be known," he declared.

Two other factors prevent active student participation in school affairs, he believes.

One is the fact that around 90 per cent of the student body works either full or part time. The other is poor transportation.

How to stimulate community awareness has LaRue baffled.

"We get wonderful coverage in the Observer," he said, "but sometimes I get the feeling people don't read."

"We need to try a number of things" to make folks aware of the campus, LaRue said. "We've tried cultural programs and community programs. The rock concert brought in thousands of young people. The summer chamber music concerts have been great. The Garden City Center has helped."

"The community gardens have been an attraction. The open house we held before the last millage election (which we lost) drew others, and I think we ought to have some sort of open house every few years."

"The spaghetti dinners this spring were very successful in bringing in high school seniors. Making Schoolcraft known is just a continual process, and we have to try a variety of means."

One difference between Schoolcraft and the resident campus is that "many students are there just for classes," LaRue said, adding: "I don't know what percentage of Schoolcraft students take part in extra curricular activities but I expect it is fewer than at a college where the students live on campus."

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goes before deciding whether other centers would be useful," he said. "The question is whether we get enough students in one place to give a variety of courses."

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Continuation of the Garden City Center beyond this year "depends on how things go," LaRue said, and how well it "takes care of people."

LaRue disagrees with his board's recent vote to go on record as favoring a board made up of one elected trustee from each of the five districts with the remaining trustees elected at large.

He favors at-large balloting for all trustees.

He called "cumbersome" a proposal to cut the Schoolcraft area into districts for election purposes.

"We already include parts of three counties," he said, "and some, including me, don't think we need a new set of districts overlapping each other."

(Schoolcraft takes in the Livonia, Garden City, Plymouth, Clarenceville and Northville school districts.)

Moreover, LaRue says the Schoolcraft area's rapid growth -- and he cited Plymouth and Canton Townships and Northville -- would "make it difficult to reapportion often enough to keep districts fairly equitable."

"The State Board of Education and trustees of large universities all are elected at large," LaRue argued. "So is the Livonia school board."

"It's my personal opinion that it (districting) just wouldn't go."

LaRue sees it as "unfortunate" the term "Haggerty High" ever got started as a nickname for Schoolcraft College.

"Junior colleges in some states are regarded as the 13th and 14th grades," he said. "I think that's true in California, for instance, and I think it's too bad. I like to regard Schoolcraft young people as college students, not high school students."

Husky, grey-haired and a man who enjoys talking, LaRue has been a resident of Livonia's Rosedale Gardens subdivision since 1952. He is director of university and scientific relations for Bendix Corp. and has been involved at various volunteer tasks over the years with Livonia public schools.

His father was a zoology professor at University of Michigan.

Right now LaRue and his wife are looking forward to Sept. 23 when they leave for Tunisia and a visit with their son, Mike, who is attached to the Peace Corps there.

The LaRues also have two other grown children, Ellen and David.

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