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Local welfare faces more trouble in future

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Incumbents seek re-election to SAD 46 school board

by Kimberly Sawtelle

DEXTER - Unlike last year's election when 10 candidates competed for five empty slots on the SAD 46 Board of Directors, this year's field is limited to three incumbents running unopposed for re-election. Each of the veteran directors has expressed some disappointment that more members of the community did not show interest in joining in this year's race, but are looking forward to being able to continue their duties as Dexter representatives to the board.

Georganne Dow is the longest standing member of the school board running for re-election this year. Having served four years on the board. Dow said she has been pleased with the recent trend of activities in the district. While expressing her approval of the completion of long-needed plant improvements, Dow said the board has facility improvements yet to be met.

"Facilities are still a problem," Dow said citing construction of a Garland multi-purpose room and Dexter Primary-Middle School library complex as the top two physical plant improvements that need to be addressed. Dow said although the issue is not a major one currently, the need to expand classroom space should also start being brought into the picture.

"I don't want to sound negative about this but we do have a little over crowding at some of the grade levels," Dow said she explained that much classroom space has been turned over in an effort to address some of the growing needs and number of students in the Special Education program.

Dow said since joining the board she has been pleased to see that academic standards at Dexter Regional High School have been improved through the efforts of both administrators and the Board of Directors. Changes have included increased graduation requirements and the addition of an advanced English class. Dow said the time has come for the board to turn its attentions to the K-8 grade levels.

Dow advocates a district wide K-12 coordinated curriculum. Although the secondary level currently has such

coordination, Dow said she would like to see it extend to incorporate the lower grade levels. "I think it will help the teachers and definitely benefit the students," Dow stated. Although she agrees with the concept of up-dating classroom materials, Dow said she would rather see the curriculum developed first, then supplied with the necessary teaching tools.

David Mosley has served one the Board of Directors for a single year. Active in the school's sporting events, Mosley contends that academics are the priority of the board and administrators. "You can play all the sports you want, but it's not going to help you much when you start looking for a job," Mosley has said.

In the next three years Mosley is looking for ways in which the school board can address the issue of truancy. Mosley said he would like to focus mainly on the junior high level. The development of a plan to combat truancy was recently included in the district's school improvement plans.

He also expresses a concern about the increasing lack of room at school facilities but questions whether or not tax payers are ready to take on the

costs of building additions to the plants. "I think we're going to have to really take care of the existing buildings before starting with a new project," Mosley said referring to the recent completion of several small scale capital outlay projects at each of the schools in the district. "My main concern now is bringing the existing buildings back to par," he said.

The biggest problem facing the district in the short term, said Mosley, is the issue of establishing some form of policy to deal with AIDS. "It hasn't come up yet," he explained, "But I have a feeling that the AIDS problem could eventually be working its way into Dexter. It has gotten so that it's every where you look." Mosley said that while the State develops a mandate concerning AIDS, he would prefer the district to "take good measure" and establish a policy very soon.

Mosley also said he would be interested in seeing improved educational programs for both students and teachers concerning the issue of AIDS-facts about the disease as well as preventative measures. Mosley said he understood that at least one teacher workshop has been conducted dealing with AIDS but is interested in seeing the program continue.

Frances Field was appointed to the board three months ago by the Dexter Town Council to fill out the remainder of 1987 in a seat vacated by Michael Keyte who resigned from the board due to conflict of interest. Field advocates a "back to basics" form of education and stated that one her main concerns since joining the board is the lack of funding to accomplish construction of a library/art/music room complex in Dexter and a multi-purpose room in Garland. Field said increased efforts to make the public aware of the needs may be the best recourse available to the board at this point in time.

Field said along that line, she feels efforts to replace out dated text books, classroom and reference materials "should be resolved this year." Field said she looks forward to going through the extensive budget process to find out where all the money in the district is appropriated.

The newest school board member also expressed a great desire to work with building administrators in the creation of an effective program dealing with youth drug and alcohol problems. "It's real important to begin education about drugs and alcohol at the grade school level," Field said. "The younger you start, the better off the kids are going to be when they get into high school."

Field continued to express her opinion that more parents and community members should attend school board meetings to learn the process the board uses and express their views and concerns. "I'd rather see more people come to the meetings rather than question everything after the fact. I'd just like to tell people, come to the meetings and air your gripes."



Jeanne E. Sawtelle

Snacks provided

PISCATAQUIS - Students in grades K-4 will be provided with doughnuts and cider for their parties on Oct. 30, in schools throughout SAD 4. According to Boys and Girls Committee Chairman, Gary Knowles, of the Guilford Kiwanis Club, approximately 35 dozen doughnuts and 35 gallons of cider have been ordered and will be delivered to Piscataquis Community High School on Friday.

Knowles said, Michael Thomas, president of the Key Club at PCHS, has arranged for members of the Kiwanis subsidiary club to deliver the treats to the elementary classes in time for their parties. Approximately 428 students will benefit from the club's generosity.

Age discrimination cited in grievance

by Gary Knowles

GUILFORD - Ralph B. Wentworth, a former history teacher at Piscataquis Community High School, has filed a grievance with the Maine Human Rights Commission, (MHRC), stating that he feels he was discriminated against when his name was not submitted as one whose contract would be renewed for the 1987-88 school season. Wentworth cited age and financial

responsibility by SAD 4 as being two possible reasons for the non-renewal of his contract.

During a Monday morning interview, Wentworth said he had twice tried to follow proper grievance channels, as per contract rights, but stated that his first filing had been refused because of its wording. The second grievance was filed by John Conners, president of the Maine Teachers Association, (MTA), in SAD 4, on Oct. 16, only to be retracted by Conners three days later. Wentworth said he was not apprised of the retraction until it had already been initiated.

The initial grievance, filed on Wentworth's behalf, by Conners, states that Wentworth was not nominated for contract renewal and his contract was not renewed, "instead of utilizing the Reduction In Force, (RIF), procedures in the collective bargaining agreement." It also states that Wentworth became aware of the lack of proper procedure in September.

In a letter to Wentworth, dated Oct. 19, Conners said he had researched the number of personnel on the teaching staff for the '86-87 and '87-88 school years and found no reduction in force. He also found no reduction of teachers or classes taught in the Social Studies department. "I therefore cannot justify continuing the process for the reasons stated in the grievance," it read.

Wentworth said that because ordinary procedures had failed to pro-

duce any results, he contacted the MTA and began grievance procedure through the MHRC. Stating that he believed that: he was not notified of other openings in the district, for which he might qualify; such a position (science teacher), was filled with a younger teacher, who did not have seniority, nor as much teaching experience; Principal Norman Higgins had confided to another teacher that Wentworth's dismissal was indeed reduction in force; the decision not to inform Wentworth of other openings was made because it is less costly to hire teachers with fewer years of experience, (Wentworth has 15 years teaching experience).

Wentworth said that because of the manner in which probationary teachers are dismissed, it is very difficult for them to find employment in other districts. It is not necessary for the principal, superintendent, or school board to state any reason for non-renewal of a probationary teacher's contract. Therefore, when those teachers apply to other districts, are asked why their contracts were not renewed, they have no answer to give.

Wentworth said he hoped, by bringing the situation out in the open, that it would prevent future such actions by the administration.

Higgins declined to comment on the grievance while the case is under consideration.

Local welfare faces more trouble in future

by Kimberly Sawtelle

DEXTER - With the words, "I'm willing to put everything on the table with the exception of Social Security," President Ronald Reagan last week virtually insured an increased burden on local welfare and general assistance programs as Congress and the rest of the federal government looks toward decreasing the federal deficit by increasing budget cuts.

As in the past, when federal funds are cut off a greater responsibility for social programs falls on the head of the State which in turn, drops matters into the hands of General Assistance Directors at the municipal level. Concerns rebounding about Dexter for several weeks have focused in large part on the town's current welfare rate which, according to Welfare Director Dave Pearson, is no higher than rates in many other towns of comparable size. That fact has not always been true.

In 1983-84 Dexter recorded a welfare expenditure of \$87,591 (before state reimbursement) ranking the community tenth of 494 towns in the state, according to Pearson. The vast spending prompted the formation of a General Assistance Advisory Committee in 1984 that revised the welfare ordinance and cut spending. By the end of the 1984-85 fiscal year up front expenditures had dropped by more than \$26,000.

Pearson pointed out that the up front figures do not reflect State reimbursements to the town for those years. Pearson said by subtracting the reimbursement figures, net expenditures, met with money raised through local property taxes, would be less than half the overall figures.

The rate of General Assistance expenditures has fluctuated by a few percentage points over the past three years, but levels are currently the lowest they have been for several years, despite the fact the community is growing at a rate which exceeds both the state and national levels.

In 1986, \$60,000 was appropriated in the town budget for welfare expenditures. Up front costs came in at \$45,233.41 in 1986-87. State reimbursement that year, said Pearson, was \$27,163.03, leaving the town with a net

cost of \$18,070.38. Pearson said subtracting welfare figures would leave a total cost of \$7,587.58 borne by local property taxes. Appropriations for welfare in the 1987-88 budget were reduced to \$50,000.

Pearson credited welfare with helping keep welfare costs down over the past few years. The program allows applicants to earn their general assistance payments by working for the town. Pearson said the difficulty of enforcing such a program is the reason so many towns have abandoned the concept of workfare. "We're one of the last hold outs," Pearson said. "How long we can hold on to it, who knows?"

A majority of work provided through the program is channelled through the Dexter Parks and Recreation Department, allowing general assistance applicants to mow lawns, rake leaves or do janitorial work to earn food vouchers. Pearson credited the efforts of Gervais Ronco, who oversees the jobs, for the success of the program.

Pearson admitted that a number of recipients of general assistance in the Town of Dexter reside in rental housing. Although the exact number of rental units in Dexter is currently unknown, Pearson estimated that one of every three households in town is a rental household. "Very few welfare recipients are home owners. Sometimes somebody who's having a rough time comes in but usually you'll only see them once or twice. They recover pretty quickly, where renters tend to keep coming back," Pearson said.

Pearson also estimated that a majority of those living in rental housing are AFDC recipients. Seventy-percent of those individuals and their families are currently living beneath the 1973 poverty standards, Pearson said.

It is estimated that over 50 percent of the cases which pass through the door of the General Assistance Office are AFDC recipients, sent to the town by State case workers. "The State has different standards than towns do," Pearson explained. "The State has upward limits where the towns are based on need. We can't establish any upward limits or we'd face a suit from the State."

While the town is limited in the amount of regulations and requirements they impose, a great deal of the money expended is reimbursed by the state at the end of the fiscal year. Workfare does not, however, help reduce the figures, Pearson said, explaining that AFDC mothers are not

allowed to take part in the program. Person went on to explain that if an unemployed man resides in the same household he is usually required to participate in the program.

The remainder of the recipients of General Assistance, Pearson said, are persons who have been affected by cutbacks in the Veteran's Administration, SSI and unemployment benefits. "General Assistance is the last resort. We're suppose to be the last crack a person can fall through," Pearson said.

Pearson is hopeful that two bills currently pending in the legislature will pass, helping to establish some options for local welfare directors and revamping the reimbursement program to more accurately reflect long term support of some recipients.

The first bill, said Pearson, will provide an alternative for general assistance directors to cut off welfare recipients for 60 days for non-compliance with regulations. Pearson said this ruling would be most effective in the workfare program when a

worker does not show up for his or her assignment. "Right now I can disqualify them until they work their hours then I have to take them back on," Pearson said. Currently an applicant can be disqualified for 60 days only in the event of fraud or failure to report income.

The second bill will call for an increased ratio factor for State reimbursement concerning long-term welfare recipients. "General Assistance is suppose to be a short-term, last resort program, not a steady replacement for income," said Pearson. Pearson said the bill identifies six months as long term, on-going support.

Despite the hope for more options General Assistance Directors throughout Maine face a long, tough winter as letters went out from state agencies earlier this month explaining that funds for the 1988 Home Energy Assistance Program have been cut by as much as 32 percent. "Eventually it all comes back on the towns," Pearson said.

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Sawtelle candidate for one-year term

DEXTER - A single candidate is running for the one one-year term presently available on the School Administrative District 46 Board of Directors. Jeanne E. Sawtelle, a newcomer to local politics, states that the motivation of students at all grade levels is one of her greatest concerns.

Citing an ever increasing divorce rate and low income levels locally, Sawtelle said she feels many students' ambitions are smothered early in life. "Many children lack the feeling that they have a great future," she stated. "We have got to motivate the kids starting with kindergarten."

An improved core curriculum and updated text books are two methods Sawtelle mentioned as possible means to prompt student interests. She also advocated guidance at the primary school level.

Upcoming issues facing the school board that concern Sawtelle greatly include the need for an AIDS policy for the district as well as some form of a program to deal with drug and alcohol abuse. "I understand that the State is currently developing some sort of mandate dealing with this issue but I just feel that the district should be prepared before being faced with the problem," Sawtelle said. "Drug abuse is another problem that has to be faced head on," she added.

Over the past 22 years Sawtelle has watched her three children attend Dexter schools and go on to college. Having had good relations with faculty and administrators during that period of

time, she said she feels comfortable attempting to become involved on a ferent level. Having volunteered "my share of field trips, parties and other activities" Sawtelle said she has a feel for the schools. "I have been posed to the good and bad aspects of school living," she said.

When it comes to budget time Sawtelle said priority will be her word. In talking to the public at large, Sawtelle said she has received the impression that tax payers are willing to bear the burden to provide children the community with the best possible education.

Admitting that while Dexter is sports minded community and stressing that two of her three children were very involved in the athletic program at Dexter Regional High School, Sawtelle said she feels that time has come for a re-evaluation to be made concerning the amount of funds spent on high school athletics in relation to the amount of funds provided for classroom materials and expenses. "I reason she said, "(People) are beginning to grumble about the amount of money being spent on sports."

Sawtelle has been married for years to Elmer C. Sawtelle. They have two sons, David who is married and living in Colorado Springs, Colorado and Brian who is a sophomore at the University of Presque Isle majoring in Theatre Arts. They also have a daughter who is employed by a local newspaper.

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Park promotes forest products

by Margo Dyer

GREENVILLE - The Forest Products Industrial Park is in the process of accepting and approving businesses to be constructed on the 85 acre tract of land. Swift River/Hafslund has sold the parcel of land to the town of Greenville. The park is located adjacent to the Swift River Biomass Plant.

All of the 14 lots are five acres in size, and can be beneficial to forest products businesses because the land is inexpensive, ready for development, and contains a common scale house to be used by all the businesses. The park is away from residences, and the area is quite suitable for this type of business.

The subdivision was approved by the Planning Board, according to Town Manager David Cota. He added that the financing was out of the ordinary in that Swift River/Hafslund provided the money to develop the park. Now that the town has become the owner, Swift River/Hafslund will hold the first mortgage. When the town sells lots, the price will be based on development costs; and as the lots are sold, the money will go to Swift River/Hafslund. According to Cota, the company has been very cooperative with the town during the entire effort.