

Meet the candidates —

By Karen Krien

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The general election will be held from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday, April 5. Both St. Francis and Bird City will hold elections for school board and city council members.

In Bird City, there are four positions open on the Cheylin Board of Education but, the position for District 2, position 4 has no candidates. It is rumored that there will be a write-in but, as of Tuesday, no one had contacted the newspaper. There is a race in District 1, position 5 with both David Frisbie and Nick Ketzner running. Belinda Serrano is running for District 2, position 2.

On the Bird City City Council, there are three seats up for election and only three candidates running: Shannon Ambrosier, Frank Serrano and Dennis Wright.

On the St. Francis School Board, there are four seats up for election and three people, Norman Morrow, Cory Busse and Jerry White, are running for District 2, position 2. The other positions are uncontested. Running are Dr. Mary Beth Miller, Mila Bandel and Sherry Weeks.

On the city council, two council members are needed but three people, Roger Jensen and Dale Weeks, both incumbents, and Robert "Bud" Erskin, are running. For mayor, incumbent Scott Schultz, and Larry Wilson are on the ticket.

Articles on why the candidates are running and a little about them is featured in this week's papers. Candidates from Bird City are in the *Times* while candidates from St. Francis are in *The Saint Francis Herald*.

Candidate sees tough decisions are ahead

Cory Busse is running for a seat on the St. Francis Board of Education, District 2, position 2.



Busse

Over the next few years, Mr. Busse thinks there are going to be a lot of tough decisions to make for our communities in general and schools in specific.

"I want to be involved in helping to make some of those decisions," he said. "I love challenges and I enjoy fiscal management and working with budgets. I feel I have some abilities to offer in that area."

Another reason for caring is he and his wife, Jenny, have three young kids in school so they have a direct interest in the betterment of the school.

Mr. Busse's agenda is to maintain a top level school in our small community. He thinks that it is important that a school excels at the core basics that all kids need and offers a broad base of electives so that students can be well rounded.

"I know that the state is in a very tight budget crunch and that it affects our communities directly in several areas," he said. "One of the biggest areas of crunch is our school system."

"I want to see our programs maintained and our academics excel. I believe that there is almost always a way to get things done if everyone is willing to accept some changes along the way."

I think things will continue to change as our population decreases and as our state economy fluctuates, Mr. Busse said.

"I think the state will continue to do less and less for our small schools in terms of money and that leaves more responsibility on our shoulders," he said. "I think there is little doubt we are going to have to be more creative to solve the problems we have coming in the community and in the school system."

Mr. Busse was born in Cheyenne County and raised on a farm southeast of Bird City. He graduated from Cheylin in 1992, went to college, then returned home to farm in 1996.

He married Jenny Cassidy, who grew up in St. Francis. They have lived in St. Francis since 2001. They have three children, Tate, who is 10 years old, Cassidy, who is 9 years old, and Ben, who is 6 and they attend the St. Francis schools.

"We have a vested interest in the longevity and the quality of this community as a whole and the school is at the heart of the community," he concluded.

'Friend or foe' got candidate to thinking

Norman Morrow is running for a position on the St. Francis Board of Education, District 2, position 2.



Morrow

I'm running because someone asked me to run, Mr. Morrow said when asked why he was had entered the race. Friend or foe, it got me to thinking!

Our school system is one of the most important things we have in our community, he said. I think I can be a team worker to help insure that we keep good, community schools.

I would think it presumptuous to say I am the best person for the job, he said. I do feel qualified because I have been involved with higher education as a board member for 23 years and understand many of the challenges for education.

"I have been involved with our St. Francis schools for over 20 years as a parent and many more as a caring observer," he said. "I have learned how boards need to work to support and help create good policy."

"I see it important to work as a group to support good personnel and choose good personnel when

changes need to be made." His only specific agenda is trying to help maintain a good school in very difficult times!

Most of the changes he said he would like to see are more in the areas of wishes than reality. I would like to see us have more kids, and our state and county to have more money to spend on quality education. "I would also like to be tall and rich," he added.

In the future, he sees schools totally dependent on keeping a stable population and economy.

"I realize this goes against most projections for the demographics in rural areas," he said. "Yet, looking at the past and many great students who have come out of Cheyenne county schools, I will work to remain positive."

Mr. Morrow was born in Carlsbad, N.M., and spent his school years in New Mexico, Colorado and Kansas. His college years were spent in Nebraska and Texas.

He and his wife, Mary, of 45 years, moved to Cheyenne County about 40 years ago. They have four sons, three are married, and they have given them six grandchildren.

Mr. Morrow is a Christian minister and, out of necessity, has become a farmer and mechanic. "I enjoy a vocational ministry with people," he concluded.

Man involved with international schools

Jerry White is running for a seat on the St. Francis Board of Education, District 2, position 2.



White

Mr. White has been involved with several international schools including serving as chairman of the board at a private school.

"I believe that I will be able to bring this experience and other new skills to the school," he said. "Seeing that the children receive the best education is the core responsibility of the school board and the administration."

We all bring different skills to the table, Mr. White said, and the voters decide who they like best for the position.

"I will bring new ideas and will work to bring needed changes to the school district," he said. "I have no close family members employed at the school district thus eliminating any possible conflict of interest."

"I have children in grade school, junior high and high school so my concerns will be the entire school."

Transparency, he said, is very important for public boards and organizations. I will ensure that this continues.

Mr. White said he has no specific agenda, but there are several items that he would like placed on the agenda including:

- Virtual education/home school - I believe that virtual education is a valuable training tool used by itself or incorporated into the current curriculum. The school has the ability to offer different courses that can address special needs or interests of the students. This can allow college credit courses to be taken at a low cost to the school. There are also courses designed for students with special educational needs. Again, this is a high quality solution with a low cost. I admire parents and families that have the discipline and dedication to home school their children.

The downside is that they do not attend the "bricks and mortar" school. Thus the school does not receive funding for all the eligible students in the school district. There are several school districts in Kansas that use virtual schools allowing home schooled children to be enrolled in the school district. Home schooled students that are eligible to attend the school should be allowed to participate in school activities and any classes without conditions.

- Early retirement of staff - this can be a very emotional issue but it is an excellent management tool.

- Kansas is faced with a serious budget crisis, he pointed out.

"If you read the census report on rural Kansas or driven down most main streets in rural Kansas (I'm sure most of us parents have done this during fall and winter

Candidate runs for a second term

Dr. Mary Beth Miller is running unopposed for a second term on the St. Francis Board of Education, District 1, position 1.



Miller

She said she is running again because she is interested in maintaining a good school system in St. Francis.

"I have an interest and commitment to education," she said when asked why she thought she was the best person for the job.

She said she is willing to meet the challenges of a tight budget while maintaining the quality of education that is needed for our kids.

She doesn't have any changes she would like to see made.

"I think the administration

(sports), you will see a decline in population which has a direct impact on our schools and other public institutions," he said. "I was surprised that USD 297 does not have an early retirement program. It is not required by Kansas statute but those districts that have one are required to file annual budget reports."

The early retirement program allows the staff to make sound decisions about their own futures, it allows the school district to project future budgets and it allows for new teachers to come into the school district with new ideas and energy."

Mr. White said his family has recently undergone early retirement so he knows firsthand the concerns and fears that people will have.

There are several changes Mr. White would like to see. Changes include information technology (IT) embraced more at the school. I know we have the tools but we seem to lack the implantation of this. Information technology brings new and better ways of communication.

The school district lacks good communication. Often it is one-sided where there should be a dialog. Other times it is just inconsistent. I'm sure we have all received emails and phone calls that did not pertain to us and then when we were expecting ones that did pertain to us, we never received them. I want to point out, he said, that part of this failure rests with the parents; it is not only the school.

When the school sets the budget, it needs to be based on the needs of the students. Everything should be placed on the table. Sound and professional decisions should be made. Nothing should be sacred. Every employee, activity, etc. should be evaluated against the needs of the district.

Mr. White sees that the consolidation of schools could be in the future. Again, an emotional issue, he said.

"Consolidation can be complete, or just a consolidation of resources," he said "It is better for us to decide this issue than to have the state do it for us. Our enrollment is declining, we need to make decisions that help our kids even if we do not like the decisions."

"Of all the schools that I have been involved in, USD 297 is the only school that has a declining enrollment. The other schools were faced with building new classrooms, expanding the school and building new schools. It is exciting to see a new addition or a new school being built if it is needed and affordable."

Mr. White as born in Wray and raised in Haigler. He came to St. Francis to school when he was a sophomore and continued through his senior year.

Mr. White and his wife, Jacky, have four children, Matthew, Zachary, Aaron and Sophie. "I will have kids in school for the next 14 years," he said.

is doing an excellent job and I would like to make sure the community supports them," she said.

In the future, Dr. Miller believes there is going to be some difficult challenges ahead. The communities that are committed to supporting the services we need will be the ones that succeed in the difficult times.

Dr. Miller was born and raised in Brule, Neb. She and her husband, Terry, came to St. Francis 12 years ago where she is a physician at the Cheyenne County Hospital. They have three children, Sheryl, Sara and Marvin.

Serving on school board is important

Mila Bandel is running unopposed for a seat on the St. Francis Board of Education, District 3, position 3.



Bandel

"I feel the local board of education has one of the most important responsibilities in our society," she said.

By serving on the board, she feels that she will be helping plan the education of the students in the community. The board's decisions, she said, affect the lives of students and their parents, the livelihoods of those employed in the school district and the economic well being of the community.

I feel an effective board member should exhibit a strong commitment to working with others on the board, she said. They need to be working toward the common goal of providing the best possible education for the students and assuring the students an opportunity for a successful future.

"The essential attributes to being a good board member for me would be: keeping the students first; focusing on important issues; obtain the facts and get the information necessary to make good solid decisions," she said.

The education of students is an extremely important issue for any community, Mrs. Bandel said. People have strong beliefs about what should or should not occur in the schools.

"Dealing with these challenges, as well as limited resources/budgets, and ever-higher expectations requires patience and a strong commitment to the education of the students in our community," she said.

As a new board member, she said, I would be open minded to explore all possibilities to help keep the school district as successful as it has been and strive to make it more successful for all the students, staff and for the community.

Schools, she said, will face even harder choices after losing more state aid each year, making school districts even harder to continue to survive.

"I think the first step toward addressing the state's school

finance situation is to truly recognize the inequities in the system," she said. "On one hand, they are requiring schools to implement state mandates, programs, etc., but they fail to provide additional resources to ensure success of that particular program or mandate."

She feels strongly that the State Board of Education and legislation truly needs to take a long, hard look at the requirements being imposed on school districts in Kansas and especially small rural districts and make sure they are matching funds to meet district needs.

Student achievement is a common goal that we should all be striving for, she said. Our community wants to see students graduate and go on to become productive citizens in society.

Our job as school board members is to ensure that the decisions we make are student-focused. If we do so, the rewards of our labor coincide with student success and our community can survive.

"I realize serving as a school board member demands time, energy and a willingness to listen," Mrs. Bandel said. "I feel giving back to the community, influencing the lives of children in a positive manner, and carrying out an essential responsibility can be one of the high points of any person's life."

Mrs. Bandel was born and raised in Fort Scott, graduating from Fort Scott High School. She continued her education at Fort Scott Community College, serving on the President's Ambassador's Organization, Student Senate, a member of the Livestock Judging Team and Lady Greyhound Softball Team. She transferred to Kansas State University to receive a bachelor's degree in human ecology and started a career in extension. She came to Cheyenne County in 1994 as the extension home economist for K-State Research and Extension. In 2004, she returned to school to obtain a nursing degree and is currently a registered nurse serving as the Cheyenne County Public Health Nurse.

Mrs. Bandel and her husband, Matt, a farmer/rancher and crop adjuster, have two daughters, Kyla, an eighth grader, and Karley, a third grader.

Candidate has 9 years of experience

"I want our schools to stay open for our children, grandchildren and for our community," said Sherry Weeks. Mrs. Weeks has served 9 years as member-at-large on the St. Francis Board of Education, filling the position after Daryl Loyd retired. "I care about our schools!"



Weeks

Mrs. Weeks said she has no specific agenda other than she wants the schools open, offering the best curriculum to benefit the children.

"I would like to see better funding for the schools," she said. "I think we have a good system and the administration and teachers are doing a good job."

For the next few years, she thinks it will be tough for schools to make ends meet. Hopefully, she said, the way of funding will change.

Mrs. Weeks has lived in St. Francis most of her life. She and her husband, Dale, have five children and 10 grandchildren. Four of the grandchildren, she said, are going to the St. Francis schools.

Mrs. Weeks works in the business office of the Cheyenne County Hospital.

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