

Four vie for three school board seats

Woman wants all students to get the best education

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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Abby Hissong says she wants to bring everything she's learned in the last four years as a school board member to the next four.

"My philosophy has always just been an interest in education," she said. "Our kids are our future, and I want to make sure that all of our kids get an education — and I like to be a part of that."

"The four years I've been on the board are something that is very valuable. I've learned a lot; I learn something new all the time. The connections I've made with other schools and learning from their experiences have helped me to be a better board member."

Mrs. Hissong works at Fredrickson Insurance and has two children in school, Gatlin, 13, and Alexis, 16. Her husband, Travis, is a veterinarian here.

"I think finance is an issue for a lot of (government) entities, including the school," she said while reflecting on the big issues the board could face. "It's one of the things that many schools will have to work with, and it's a challenge."

Mrs. Hissong said that more people should get involved with the schools and school board.

"I would encourage people to come listen," she said. "ask the board questions and be a part of the process. I went and listened for a year and half before I ran the first time. There's a lot of interesting information. It doesn't necessarily have to be that you have an issue that makes you show up; it's about learning about how it functions in the community."

"I know a lot of people don't have the time, but I want to change the impression that you can't come and ask questions and learn about it."

Mrs. Hissong said that her business experience has helped her while serving on the board, as did revitalizing the elementary school's parent-teacher association and helping get a Booster Club going at the high school.

"I have the desire to support the district, the kids and the teachers," she said. "I think having a vested interest in the area and the community and wanting to watch it succeed are some of my biggest strengths."

"I think we have a great community, so I look forward to seeing what the future holds for it."

Veteran sees hard times ahead with school finances

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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Veteran board member Dan Wasson says he sees hard times ahead for the school board, and after serving for 14 years, is seeking re-election so he can help keep things going.

"I know how to work with people," he said. "It's about give and take. But there are some tough times coming for schools, and they'll need an experienced member to get through it. I'm really pro-education, and I really hate to see educational programs cut. So I think if things go the way they're saying they're going to go, then I think we need to look outside of education — to the other activities that the school's involved in — before you start making cuts."

"I've been on the Goodland vocational college board as our local representative for 12 years," he added, "and I'm still on it. I farm and ranch, have been on the Conservation District board for two terms and the church board several times, so I know how to work with people."

And people — at least their numbers — are the one thing he'd like to see change.

"I wish we could have good enrollment," he said. "A hundred extra kids would be good. That would really help with funding and staffing. It's all about enrollment; when you have good enrollment, you have good need for staff."

Money and staff, he said, are two of the biggest subjects to tackle as a board member.

"Every year," he said, "we have negotiations with the teachers. Last year we went through changing our health-care plan, and that took a lot of discussion. Buildings are a never-ending problem, because we always have to spend a fair amount of money to keep them up. I think we've done a very good job of it; I'm really proud of our facilities. You need to keep at it, just like your home."

And when it comes to keeping at it, Mr. Wasson wants voters to know that's exactly what he does.

"I'm reliable," he said. "I think in my 14 years, I've missed one meeting, maybe two."

"I grew up here; this is my home. I've been here my whole life. I think it's a wonderful place to live, and I want to keep it that way."

Man wants to make sure tax dollars go as far as possible

Doug Brown says he wants to make sure that your tax dollars go as far as possible when it comes to the Oberlin schools.

He's been on the school board for four years. "I enjoy being on the board, because I think it's an important position," he said. "Making sure that education gets the most bang for its taxpayer buck is important."

And he knows about finance. Mr. Brown works at The Bank, has worked in business and graduated with a degree in accounting.

"The biggest aspect of (the school's finances) is how much the school district relies on state and federal funding," he said, "and how we have to conform to every little rule and regulation in order to keep getting the funding."

He said he feels diversity that counts when running something like a school district.

"The board, to me, is where everybody comes with their unique qualities," he said. "I don't think there's anything I want to change. Everyone has their own ideas, but that's what a board is supposed to be. They shouldn't rubber stamp everything that comes along."

Mr. Brown said he has been a board member for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. and for the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce in the past. He moved here 23 years ago, and he and his wife Patty have a daughter in fifth grade named Skyler.

He said that outside of finance, the topic that most concerns him is curriculum.

Newcomer running because he feels the job is important

David Blau said at first, he didn't think he would run for the school board this year, but when he heard there might not be enough people to fill the board, that changed.

"This will be the first time I've held a position in Oberlin if I win," he said. "At the time that I signed up, I heard there might be two running and there was an open spot, and I thought that it was too important a position to not run for."

Mr. Blau said that he has two daughters in junior high, a son in high school and a daughter who just graduated. His family is involved with athletic and music activities all the time.

As for having specific issues he wants to tackle, Mr. Blau said that he knows the budget is a big one, but that he doesn't have an agenda.

"I'm pretty open," he said, "and I think people know what I'm about."

"I have family involved, and a little background being familiar with how the meeting process works. As an engineer, I go to City Council meetings and I'm familiar with how decisions need to be made and how feedback from both sides needs to be listened to. That's my hope — to make responsible decisions for both sides of the group."

"I just want people to vote for who they think the best candidate is. I just saw a vacant seat, and that shouldn't happen with the school board."

Three run for Dresden City Council

Roads, budget are issues

Jacque Douglas is seeking re-election to the Dresden City Council after serving for six years.

"I think everybody pretty much knows me from living here," she said with a chuckle. The biggest issues facing Dresden these days, she said, are the gravel roads and the budget. She says she's seen the council deal with a lot since she joined the team.

"We just try to stay within the budget and do programs we can afford," she said. "We put in a well up here for the fire department to fill their underground tank, so if they need water they can fill their tanker. We've finally got high-speed Internet to Dresden, which has been a long time coming."

The challenges of running a small town can be rough, she said, but it's nothing that she's

not up to.

"This is a small community and we all try to get along," she said. "Sometimes that doesn't always happen, but we try to work through it."

"I'm a hard worker. If there's something that needs to be done, we try to get it done, and try to come up with good suggestions."

Ms. Douglas said she's single and has no children. She moved here about 13 years ago and works as the postmaster relief at the Jennings Post Office.

"I just liked western Kansas," she said of her move. "There are wide-open spaces and less people. The scenery is really nice, and you never know when you'll see wild animals like jack rabbits."

As for the future, Ms. Douglas says she has high hopes.

"It would be nice if maybe we got some new buildings in town," she reflected. "Dresden used to be kind of a large town. It was the biggest town between Norton and Colby for a long time, but when the railroad moved out, it dwindled down. It would be nice if we could bring a business into town that would benefit us, that would employ some people."

"The major problem facing Dresden is a diminishing population, and we're not getting any younger. The tax base has dropped and there's less money to maintain the town the way some people think that it should be maintained, but we do what we can with the money we have."

"I feel as long as there are people that care enough about the town, then Dresden will survive."

Man wants to keep seat

Don Ritter has been serving on the Dresden City Council for 16 years now, and he's prepared to add four more.

"If they keep voting for me," he said, "I'll keep doing it."

And it's an important post to hold on to, he said, because with a dwindling number of residents, the city risks losing its local control.

"The council is here to help the residents with their problems and concerns," he said, "and to keep our local government operating. And if we can't keep enough people on the council, then the city will lose control of basic operations and finances."

Mr. Ritter said that all the same, the council operates pretty smoothly.

"The biggest problems (we

have here) are the aging population and keeping our government running here," he said, "so the county doesn't take over our finances and control of our streets and stuff."

"My perspective on how it should be run is what I bring to the table. I'm a farmer, and since we're such a rural community ... Our city has dirt streets, and we sometimes have issues with traffic and dirt, for example. Sometimes people don't understand farmers can run a hectic schedule. Sometimes people drive a little fast, and it creates a little dirt in the town."

"I'd like to see our city keep going. As the population ages, we have fewer residents and we need people to step up for the council ... We're limited on

our housing. There's really not much room for expansion unless someone wanted a lot to build a new home."

Despite complaints over the roads and worries about population, Mr. Ritter said, he's ready and willing to keep on working for Dresden.

"I'm here, I live in the city and I've volunteered to do what I can to help anybody that needs help," he said.

Candidate says he'll take the heat by remaining on council

Farmer Keith Muirhead says he's served the Dresden City Council off and on for 60 years, and the passage of time doesn't seem to have softened him up at all.

"The last council meeting," he said, "why, we had somebody outside the city give the clerk a really hard time about the way we were running the city, and in my

way, I invited him to quit getting on Lillian (Sulzman, the clerk) and get on the council. We're the ones that make the rules, get on us, and start with me."

Mr. Muirhead said that his experience is his strongest suite, and he's not the type to sweep a problem under the rug.

"Our biggest issue is staying within our

budget," he said, "and not overspending it. We have pretty good streets, but they need gravel, and you got to have the money. I'm sure we'll buy some when we get to the position to afford it. We had some money in the highway fund, and never before would they let us spend any on the streets from there, but that's changed now, so we have a

few thousand we can invest in gravel."

Mr. Muirhead said that the council itself is in good working order, and that the main things the five members focus on have to do with paying bills, keeping the street lights on and other regular issues like that. As for the future, he said, he keeps a level head.

"We'd like to have some high rises in Dresden," he said, "but then we know that ain't going to be happening. The elevator and the filling station are the only businesses here; it's just a residential area. There's not much you can do but try to keep everyone happy."

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