Menomonie school board election previewed

By Pamela Powers
Menomonie News Bureau

MENOMONIE — The six candidates vying for four Menomonie school board positions will, if elected, face challenges of maintaining staff, programs and aging buildings amid budget difficulties.

Incumbent board members Alan Block, Colleen Davis and Brian Kieffer are joined by newcomers Julie McFadden, Glenda Huber and Tanya Husby in the race.

Three positions are three-year terms. The fourth, open because Randy Knaack is not seeking re-election, is for one year. All school board seats are at-large positions.

Whoever is elected to the board may be asked to decide whether to seek a referendum to help offset the district's budget difficulties. District officials are discussing a possible referendum for building and technology upgrades.

While paying higher taxes via a referendum to support local government isn't an easy sell to district residents, Block encouraged people to think of property taxes as an investment in schools.

"Good schools attract residents," he said, adding he favors a future referendum, although the amount has yet to be determined. "There is no doubt the price of everything has gone up and the price of education has gone up too. We're going to have to pay for it."

McFadden said a future referendum likely will be needed to repair outdated buildings. Technology may be a part of a referendum as well, but not all aspects of technology are workable in schools, she said.

"There are things that work and things that don't with technology in education," said McFadden, who works with technology as part of her job at Chippewa Valley Technical College.

Davis said the board needs to maintain buildings but also must be responsible to taxpayers, children and staff.
"We want the best place for children to learn," Davis said. "We want our buildings to be community centers."

Not all board candidates support a referendum. Huber said she would only go to referendum as a last option if the district's finances become too dire. If the board does support a referendum, district officials must provide residents with timely information about the measure, she said.

Husby was also reluctant to support a referendum, saying while school buildings definitely need improvements, other district spending may be a higher priority.

Kieffer said he opposes a referendum.

"We should do what we can without a referendum," he said. "We need to make sure what we are asking for is absolutely needed. Once you go to referendum, you can't go back later and ask for more money."

To help balance the budget, McFadden said the district needs to look for alternative funding sources and involve parents to a greater degree in schools. The district must focus on preparing students to be creative problem solvers, she said.

Implementing energy-saving measures would reduce costs, Husby said, as would joining other districts to buy supplies in bulk. Accelerating graduation for qualified students and reducing standardized testing also could save money, she said, noting she is willing to question district administrators and other staff.

Huber said her new perspective would help the board work through issues. She has experience working on school-related issues, having been a member of the Oaklawn Elementary School parent-teacher organization for the past four years.

"I decided I wanted to step up and try to make a difference," she said.

Block credited his experience as a teacher with providing him with the necessary background to be a board member. He has written six books and numerous articles about education and school curriculum.

Kieffer, who was appointed a year ago to finish the unexpired term of former board member Bud Karis, said he became involved in the board because he wants to be involved in his children's education. He previously was a member of a school board in Iowa.
"I am a parent, and I am engaged in my children's education," he said.

Davis said her open-minded approach to issues serve her well as a board member.

"I've learned over the last six years we need to make decisions in the best interest of all stakeholders," she said.

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Alan Block

Age: 64.

Address: E4523 Highway D, Menomonie.

Education: Bachelor's degree in English, Roanoke College; master's degree in English, Hofstra University; doctoral degree in English, St. John's, University, Collegeville, Minn.

Occupation: Professor of education, UW-Stout.

Political experience: Menomonie school board.

Family: Married, two children.

Website: None.

Colleen Davis

Age: 40.

Address: 1220 Tainter St. Menomonie.

Education: Bachelor's degree in human development and family studies, UW-Stout; bachelor's degree at Cardinal Stitch University.

Occupation: Testing coordinator/office manager at the Counseling Center, UW-Stout. Direct support professional at Lutheran Social Services.
Glenda Huber

Age: 32.

Address: E5637 690th Ave., Menomonie.

Education: Medical assistant degree, Globe University in Eau Claire.

Occupation: Chiropractic assistant.

Political experience: None.

Family: Married, two children.

Website: None.

Tanya Husby

Age: 38.

Address: 521 13th St.

Education: Bachelor's degree in business, Eastern Illinois University; Wisconsin teacher certificate holder for grades six-12 in business and English education.

Occupation: Part-time employee for United Way of Dunn County.

Political experience: None.

Family: Married, three children.

Website: on.fb.me/H5aZSe.
**Brian Kieffer**

Age: 45.

Address: 703 North Court, Menomonie.

Education: Bachelor's degree in engineering, Iowa State University.

Occupation: Plant manager of Big River Resources in Boyceville.

Political experience: Oskaloosa school board member, Oskaloosa, Iowa. Appointed to fill Bud Karis' open position in February 2011.

Family: Married, three children.

Website: None.

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**Julie McFadden**

Age: 46.

Address: 1012 Ballentine Road, Menomonie.

Education: Bachelor's degree in liberal arts, University of Minnesota; master's degree in information technology at Cappella University.

Occupation: Senior systems administrator, Chippewa Valley Technical College.

Political experience: None.

Family: Married, three children.

Website: on.fb.me/GTxsYr.