

Money matters, staffing occupy school board

By David Carkhuff
Editor

CANYON CITY — Lauding the accomplishments of local educators while acknowledging the strains of tight budgets on staffs, the school board of Grant School District No. 3 signed off for the spring.

The board saluted retirees and approved its 2003-2004 budget in a bittersweet meeting on June 11. The board will recess from regular meetings until Aug. 20. However, behind the scenes, trustees will trace the progress of the Oregon Legislature, which dictates the amount of money that school districts can spend.

On the bright side, trustees toasted the successes of local schools. Cited accomplishments include:

Districtwide — Protecting programs and jobs against budget cuts; developing a balanced \$8 million budget; merging Blue Mountain Junior High and Mt. Vernon Middle School with realignment of grades; garnering grant money to build a new shower and locker room at MVMS; hiring Dennis Flippence to replace Harvey Bliss as transportation and maintenance supervisor; leasing space at BMJH to Head Start and Union/Baker Home School Program; and distributing Oregon School Boards Association insurance money to employees.

Grant Union High School — Renovating interior bleachers; repairing a main water line; developing way to offer the Certificate of Initial Mastery in music and the arts; making the transition from Class 3A to Class 2A in athletics; welcoming Bryce Meyer as the new vocational-agricultural instructor; raising \$11,000 and installing an irrigation system for the practice field; transferring five acres of water right to a well to cut down on residential water use; winning a \$30,000 grant to resurface the track; focusing on technology upgrades; garnering COPS training for school resource officer Todd McKinley and assistant principal Kris Beal; and hosting a variety of programs and assemblies such as the student-organized “don’t drink and drive” dramatization.

Humbolt Elementary — Installing new safety fencing for the bus land and handicapped-accessible doors; implementing the expanded kindergarten through fifth grade schedule; installing a library and computer lab into a modular building; winning the state rating of exceptional for the second consecutive year; excelling on second- and fourth-grade reading and math tests; implementing a new math program for grades three through five; gathering agency and organizational experts to help children who face challenges; landscaping the building through the donated labor and funds of teachers and parents; and sending the Little Singers children’s choir to a singing festival for the first time.

Mt. Vernon Middle School — Absorbing students from BMJH; adding modular classrooms for science and music and beginning construction of the new locker rooms; adding an awning and chain link fence; converting rooms for computer lab use; replacing bleachers; and installing a new scoreboard for the football field.

Seneca School — Implementing a new science program for grades three through eight; excelling on the Oregon Plus tests for math and reading; starting Words of Wisdom character education program; garnering Ford Family Foundation grant to fund Artist-in-Residence; working on history project with model-building, oral history and mapmaking; and working with Seneca School Foundation to develop the first Seneca Loggers Scholarship.

In budget matters:

• The school board adopted an \$8 million budget, which includes \$6.5 million of anticipated general fund spending, for fiscal year 2003-2004.

District superintendent Newell Cleaver said in an interview that administrators, classified support



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Grant School District No. 3 retirees received a grateful sendoff at the June 11 school board meeting. Teachers who retired and their years of service at Grant Union High School, Humbolt Elementary School and Mt. Vernon Middle School include (from left) Grant Union High School history instructor Chris Labhart (25 years); Duane McKern (25 years); Vera Shoberg (23 years); Colleen Batty (30 years); and Darlene Muzzy (17 years). Labhart and language arts teacher Patti Thissell were approved for rehire following their retirement.



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Retirees included bus drivers Edna May Sheets, a 29-year veteran; Nancy Chase, a 14-year veteran; and Dennis Dilley, an eight-year employee. Above, transportation and maintenance supervisor Dennis Flippence commends the drivers while board member Joanne Keerins and district superintendent Newell Cleaver hold the plaques.

staff and teachers will not receive pay raises based on the budget. However, negotiations with the classified (support) and certified (teaching) employees have not concluded.

The school board budgeted a 10 percent increase on the cap for insurance to classified and certified employees, Cleaver said. However, on the other side of the table, classified employees have warned the school board that their insurance costs have exceeded increases in their wages. In May, spokesperson Chris McKinley told the board that the average annual income of classified employees is about \$15,000, while the average tuition for health insurance accounts for 11.68 percent of a classified employee’s income.

A fraction of classified employees, about one twelfth, will receive a “step” increase, meaning a pay increase for years of service, Cleaver said. About half of the teaching staff will move a step up the pay scale, he estimated.

Cleaver said he received a pay freeze with the other staff. His base salary of \$102,616 is determined by a yearly negotiation with the school

board. On June 11, the board approved his contract for 2003-2004.

The average school superintendent’s salary in Oregon is \$97,000, Cleaver said. With 28 years in education and 17 years as a superintendent, however, Cleaver said he also ranks near the top for years of experience. District deputy clerk Sherry Rose earns \$41,616; accounts payable/payroll/technology clerk Karla Averett makes \$32,000, according to district figures.

• Trustees voted on resolutions, many of them housekeeping measures, to shift incoming revenue to next year’s budget. Those included a resolution to receive rent money from Union/Baker Home School Program for next year’s budget; a resolution to receive and budget money from Cycle Oregon for high school track repairs; and resolutions authorizing the use of \$33,000 from a contingency fund to pay for renovation of the high school bleachers, approval to spend cafeteria funds, and transfers for busing, modular buildings and other uses.

• Jackson Oil was awarded low bid for delivery of diesel fuel for heating and buses. Out of 11 bids for various sites, Jackson Oil underbid McDaniel Oil in 10 of them. Rates ranged from 91 cents per gallon for diesel No. 2 at the high school (McDaniel bid 93 cents per gallon) to 99.87 cents per gallon for unleaded fuel at a cardlock station (McDaniel bid \$1.017 per gallon). McDaniel outbid Jackson on bulk tank fuel at Seneca (\$1.001 per gallon versus \$1.006 per gallon), but the school district decided to halt use of that tank, Cleaver said.

Staffing changes approved by the school board included:

Resignations — Head girls’ basketball and volleyball coach Adam Barrett; assistant girls’ basketball and assistant baseball coach Doug Sharp; assistant wrestling coach Randy Hennen; and custodian Gordon Paladijczuk.

Retirements — Grant Union High School his-



Seneca School head teacher Adele Cerny announced the school’s recognition by OSSA for outstanding performance in history achievement.



Humbolt Elementary School principal Mark Burrows shows a plaque recognizing the school’s staff for its outstanding performance. The Oregon Small Schools Association Presented an Award of Excellence to the school.

tory teacher Chris Labhart; Mt. Vernon Middle School language arts teacher Patti Thissell (both return as rehired teachers absent Public Employees Retirement System obligations from the employee or the district).

New hires — GUHS head boys’ basketball coach Brad Smith; GUHS head girls’ basketball coach Mike Somnis (Somnis is a transplant from La Grande who coached boys’ junior varsity basketball the last two years at La Grande High and last year coached boys’ and girls’ track at Elgin); and bus drivers Julie Larson and Lee Teague.

Approved coaching recommendations — GUHS head football coach Monty Nash, with assistant coaches Flippence, DeAnna Nash and Tom Salvino; GUHS head soccer coach Ken Purnell with assistant coaches on job share Kevin Purnell, Tye Parsons and William Joseph; GUHS head wrestling coach Dave Naibert; and GUHS head dance coach Shannon Woodcock. Head volleyball coach at GUHS remained undecided last week. School board members Steve Courtney and Dr. Bob Holland stipulated that they were not voting due to personal relations or participation with the coaches. Courtney is a candidate for assistant boys’ basketball coach; Holland is the stepson to wrestling coach Naibert.



Humbolt Elementary School teaching assistant Denise Tschida wields her plaque.