

SAN MARCOS: School board candidates seek to maintain high district standards

By **GARY WARTH - Staff Writer** | Friday, October 17, 2008 5:11 PM PDT ∞

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SAN MARCOS --- With only one of three board members seeking re-election as their terms end, the San Marcos Unified School District's board of trustees is guaranteed to have a new look during the next four years.

But that does not necessarily mean the board will have a new direction. All four candidates in the race have good things to say about the district and stress that they are running to ensure its standards are kept high.

Incumbent David Horacek, elected to the board four years ago, is seeking re-election. Fellow board members Mary Borevitz, who has served on the board since 1991, and Pam Bancells, who has served since 1996, are not seeking re-election.

Jay Petrek, Carlos Ulloa and Randy Walton also are seeking a four-year seat to the school board.

Petrek, an Escondido city planner for 20 years, is a former board member but was never elected. The school board in 2002 appointed Petrek to serve the remaining two years of former trustee Mike Preston's terms after Preston resigned to serve on the San Marcos City Council.

Petrek ran for re-election in 2004 but lost to Horacek. This is his first run for the school board since then.

Borevitz, Bancells and the San Marcos Educators Association teachers union have endorsed Petrek and Walton.

Horacek is endorsed by state Sen. Mark Wyland, state Assemblyman Martin Garick, Preston, Bancells, district Superintendent Kevin Holt and the San Diego Republican Party.

Horacek, part owner of Enterprise Satellite Solutions, said he ran for the board four years ago after being inspired to help improve the district's image.

"We were looking to buy a house, and many people we spoke to in real estate were trying to discourage us from buying a home in San Marcos because of the school district," he said.

Horacek said he ignored the talk and moved into San Elijo Hills. He and his wife have a kindergartener and third-grader in San Elijo Hills Elementary.

"I think that we've seen some great success over the past four years and I believe that has a lot to do with the board, and I'd like to continue to be part of that success over the next four years," he said about running for re-election.

Horacek, who said he did not seek the endorsement of the teachers union because he believes it would be a conflict of interest, said if re-elected he will keep an eye on the budget while making sure all district employees are fairly compensated. He also said he would continue to stress academic accomplishments, which he noted have paid off with San Marcos students showing the greatest increase in standardized test scores in North County.

Petrek fell just more than 100 votes short of Horacek when he last ran for the school board four years ago.

"Education is a passion of mine," Petrek said about running again this year. "I have been involved in the San Marcos School District since my children were in kindergarten."

One of Petrek's children recently graduated from high school and his other children, 15 and 17, are in San Marcos High School.

"I have the benefit of having children who have grown up in the district, so I'm familiar with the curriculum, the teaching style of the district and the nuances that go through testing at all the grade levels," he said.

Petrek said San Marcos faces the challenge of being the fastest-growing district in the county, which he said requires qualified people on the board. With many district buildings showing their age, Petrek said he would support a bond issue for facility improvements. He also said he would fight to get money for unfunded but mandated programs.

Walton, an attorney and father of two children in the district, is a founding board member of the Valley of Discovery Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization that raises assists San Marcos and Mission Hills high schools in raising money for campus programs.

"I'm happy with the academic achievements of the district," said Walton, who plans to personally visit each school principal before the election. "There are just some great, great things happening out there I want to continue."

Walton has a child at San Elijo Elementary School and another at San Elijo Middle School. This is his first attempt at running for public office, although he was involved in fighting a planned second Wal-Mart in San Marcos.

Walton played an important role with linking the district with a multimillion-dollar benefactor. As he explained, a friend who also is an attorney was representing the Leichtag Family Foundation, a nonprofit group formed by a Rancho Santa Fe couple. Their daughter, Joli Ann Leichtag, was a teacher who was dying of cancer, and the couple wanted their money to go toward education.

The school district had asked the Valley of Discovery Education Foundation for help in funding the tuition-assistance component of its Partnerships Advancing College Education program, and Walton brought the Leichtag Foundation and the district together, leading to a \$6 million contribution to the program. The district has named its new school after Joli Ann Leichtag in honor of the gift.

Walton said the program remains near and dear to him, and he wants to be on the school board to help oversee its funding.

Ulloa, who has no children in the district, is the director of curriculum and instruction for the San Ysidro School District.

A Carlsbad resident living within the San Marcos district, Ulloa ran for the school board two years ago.

"The reason I'm running is to use my 20 years of experience in education to improve the quality of education for all students," he said, adding that he thinks the district is on the right track. "A huge achievement gap exists with Latinos and whites and with Asians and whites. I want to narrow the achievement gap for all students."

Ulloa earned a master's degree in education from Harvard University in 1998 and was the principal of Castle Park Elementary School in Chula Vista for three years. He grew up in Escondido.

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