

School Board candidates answer questions

SCHOOL, from Page 1

still need every teacher we currently have to educate the students we have, and keep our teacher-student ratio low. It will be a challenge.

4. Why are you running and is there something specific you want to do?

I am running for school board because I feel it is important to give back to my community. I have three school-age children and I know they can get as good of an education in Goodland as they can anywhere. I certainly feel like I did. I would like to try to ensure that our local kids have the ability to experience whatever may interest them. Whether it is athletics or the arts - the opportunities should be many and equal. We must keep our standards high across the board, not only for our kids, but for our educators as well. We are so fortunate to live in a caring community where our students are not given a traditional education, but they are surrounded by good people who care about how their day is going. I sat on the community task force in 2008 and was made aware of the challenges that our district would be facing. While the declining population was disheartening, I have never thought it was a reason for us to stop improving ourselves or wanting the very best, top notch education for our kids, facilities included. I want Goodland kids to be proud of their school, excited about their school day, and they should graduate confident in the education they receive while they are here. When they leave Goodland, they should feel prepared for whatever it is that they choose to do. Hopefully, they will consider coming back home to raise their kids here as I did. It was one of the best things I ever did.

Gennifer House

1. Tell me about your family. Where do you work? Are you originally from Goodland?

I was born and raised in Goodland. I am a 1987 Graduate of Goodland High School and a 1992 Graduate of the University of Kansas with a B.S. in journalism. I have been employed by First National Bank for the last 10 years and currently serve as vice president of electronic banking.

I have two children in the school system: one in 7th grade that attends Grant Jr. High, and a freshman that attends Goodland High School. My late husband, Andrew House, was a 1984 graduate of Goodland High School and a board member of USD 352 at his death.

2. Do you support the bond issue coming up in the general election on April 5? If yes, why and if no, why?

I am in full support of the bond issue. Funding the bond will allow U.S.D. 352 to update their facilities and move from the current four operational school buildings to two operational school buildings. The savings of this could be approximately \$450,000 a year. With the guaranteed 5.4 million dollar Qualified School Construction Bond offered by the State of Kansas at zero percent interest, to go towards the 14.9 million dollar project, the funding will never be any cheaper than it is today.

3. If the bond fails what are your ideas for

the district's declining enrollment, number of buildings and diminishing state aid?

If the bond fails on April 5th, the district could possibly increase taxes to pay for the upkeep and repair of the five school buildings that currently exist. There are three areas where items could be cut: facilities, programs and personnel. Each area would need to be reviewed to see where to begin to cut items.

4. Why are you running and is there something specific you want to do?

As a life-long resident, I believe in our community. I would like to see our community move forward and be progressive in dealing with our school system.

Teresa Sieck

1. Tell me about your family. Where do you work? Are you originally from Goodland?

My name is Teresa Sieck. I have lived in Goodland for 18 years. I am married to Mike Sieck and we have four children. The oldest is Parker aka Will and he is a junior at Goodland High School. Our twins, Peyton and Powell, are in the fifth grade at Central and our only daughter, Peri, is in the fourth grade at Central. I am originally from Julesburg, Colo. I attended elementary school, junior high, and high school in the Julesburg public school system. After Graduation, I went to Midland Lutheran College and graduated cum laude with a B.A. in physical education with a minor in biology and a coaching endorsement. Midland has just experienced a name change to Midland University. Currently I work part-time at the Goodland Learning Center.

2. Do you support the bond issue coming up in the general election on April 5? If yes, why and if no, why?

Regarding the school bond issue, I am running a campaign for a seat on the school board and that means that I am committed to the school district for the next four years. My campaign does not rely on getting the bond passed or getting it to fail. I would like to say that I am uncomfortable disclosing what my vote will be. I have said from the beginning that at this point I can do nothing more or nothing less than any voter from Sherman County. We all have the right to close the curtain and vote our conscience. I will tell you that if the bond fails I am up to the challenge of rolling up my sleeves and looking for a better plan. If the bond passes I will do everything in my power to support it and see that it is done properly. The decision for the current bond issue will be made on April 5th. The results of the school board election will last for the next four years.

3. If the bond fails what are your ideas for the district's declining enrollment, number of buildings and diminishing state aid?

This particular bond issue does not address our school district's declining enrollment nor does it address the diminishing state aid. It does address the number of schools our district operates. I am very much in favor of consolidating buildings. If the bond issue fails, I want to study different options and come up with a fiscally responsible plan. Our school district has made some fine building improvements over the years that I have lived in Goodland. We re-

modeled a good portion of the high school, built a junior high gym and a weight room. These improvements were all completed without a bond issue. I would like the school board to pursue some options that could be done without having to pass a bond issue. I am disappointed in our district's declining enrollment. We have a city commission and a county commission that are well versed in attracting business to Goodland, which in turn will bring much needed jobs to the county. When these things happen I believe we will see an increase in enrollment. This scenario will be a win win situation for our community. As for the diminishing state aid, the school district will have to tighten its belt and learn to live within its means. Tough decisions will have to be made and I am up to the challenge.

4. Why are you running and is there something specific you want to do?

I am running for school board because I have always had a passion for learning and I want to share that. I have no one specific agenda; however, I would like our school district to excel in academics, and in extra and co-curricular activities. In visiting with a few past school board members; each of them gave me the same one piece of advice...don't think you can change anything right away, it takes patience and time and even then change might not happen.

Diane Stiles

1. Tell me about your family. Where do you work? Are you originally from Goodland?

My husband, Asa, one-year-old son, Henry, and I moved to Goodland in September 2010 from Norton. My family is originally from Lenora and Asa's family is originally from Hanston. We are thankful for the warm welcome we received from Sherman County, and we are proud to be a part of such a progressive community. I work at Northwest Tech as the assistant vice president of student affairs. My husband Asa is a road deputy for the Sherman County Sheriff's department. I previously worked as the director of Norton City/County Economic Development.

I graduated with a degree in political science from Fort Hays State University and I have been very involved with the Center for Civic Education since high school. My academic knowledge of government and education couples with my experience in education and economic development prepares me to provide valuable input as the school board and community works toward solutions to the pressing issues facing us today.

Being new to the community, I am able to approach issues from a fresh perspective without preconceived biases. This is essential when the board is facing difficult budget decisions.

2. Do you support the bond issue coming up in the general election on April 5? If yes, why and if no, why?

This is very important issue for the school and the community. However, the fate of the current proposal will be determined before the new school members take office. If elected, I want to do my best to unify the board rather than further the divide;

therefore, I prefer to keep my personal vote private. No matter the outcome, it is essential that we have a unified board going forward.

If the bond issue passes, my knowledge of public finance and experience overseeing public construction projects on a smaller scale will be beneficial. I secured a number of grants for community projects as an economic development director, including grants to rehabilitate a historic downtown home, a former gas station and a large downtown building. This knowledge will be helpful in researching alternative uses for closed buildings.

If the bond issue falls, the same experience will guide my contribution to the school board in finding an alternative solution to the facilities concerns.

3. If the bond fails what are your ideas for the district's declining enrollment, number of buildings and diminishing state aid?

If the bond proposal does not pass, it is clear that we must continue this conversation as a community. As I understand, the school board researched facilities solutions thoroughly and considered several options before approving this proposal. The new board would need to start by reviewing the previous research and continue to solicit community input to decide upon a new course of action.

The advantage the new board will have is that the community is extremely engaged in the facilities project. The meetings and conversation on both sides of the issue will produce great dividends. The public awareness and depth of knowledge about the challenges facing the school district is impressive and provides a platform for moving forward either way.

Diminishing state aid is a challenge that will face the school board regardless of the outcome of the bond election. The board will face difficult decisions on how to reduce expenditures. If elected, I will approach these issues without bias.

I don't believe that declining enrollment is inevitable. The one aspect of Sherman County that impresses me the most is the willingness of public and private entities to work together for the betterment of the community. One of the greatest opportunities we have is with community-wide technology initiative centered on the iPad. Few rural communities have strong relationships with prominent technology corporations such as Apple and development companies in Silicon Valley. The Unified School District can play an important role in the success of this project.

4. Why are you running and is there something specific you want to do?

The reason I am running for the school board is because of my personal commitment to public service and my desire to provide the best possible education to our children.

Education is the foundation of the community and I want the best for every child in Sherman County, including Henry when he enters the school district in four short years. Although I understand the need to address the school facilities, I am also passionate about supporting our teachers in their quest to improve test scores of our student. We

have outstanding teachers in the district. We need to find innovation ways that the community can contribute to the educational process and help all students in our district succeed.

Chuck Wilkens

1. Tell me about your family. Where do you work? Are you originally from Goodland?

I moved to Goodland from Benkelman, Neb. I started eighth grade at Grant Jr. High in 1970. I graduated in 1975, married a local gal, Alicia Deeds in 1983, and have three sons. Drew graduated in 2005, Grant graduated 2008 and Brock will graduate this year, 2011. Currently we own and operate Wilkens Truck & Trailer Inc., selling used trucks and trailers, since 1998. I'm currently finishing my first term on the Board of Education.

2. Do you support the bond issue coming up in the general election on April 5? If yes, why and if no, why?

Absolutely, I support the current bond issue. Mrs. Angelos brought the issue of declining student population and budget issues to the board 3 1/2 years ago. With the district student population going from over 2,000 students in 1972 to 869 students today, it was fairly easy to see that our need and affordability for 5 buildings had changed. We have a tremendous opportunity for our community and the district in front of us. We have the opportunity to improve our district and reduce our overhead. We also have a huge opportunity to reduce the cost of the project with the near interest free money on \$5,400,000, which saves our tax payers \$3,300,000 over 20 years and the 15% state aid on the project, which saves \$3,200,000, for a combined \$6,500,000. Both of these saving benefits will go away if we do not pass this bond on April 5th.

3. If the bond fails what are your ideas for the district's declining enrollment, number of buildings and diminishing state aid?

Only the growth of our community will fix the declining issue. All rural America communities have the same issue. The good news is that the numbers indicate that we maybe at or near the bottom. Goodland has several very good things in the works right now that could bring additional employment, which should bring in additional students, or at the least, help or stop decline.

As for the number of buildings, we have an excellent Superintendent, Mrs. Angelos working for us. She knows our students educational needs, our staff, and our districts better than anyone. She will have several options that she will have weighed out that will balance a very difficult situation, striving for excellence in the classroom and a balanced budget. As a board member, I work with the superintendent and other board members for this type of solution for our district.

4. Why are you running and is there something specific you want to do?

I have a friend that is on the Board of Education for another district, advised me to run for at least two terms. I believe that it is important to have continuity from one board to another and I am the only one running again.

Consultant says county needs to change fire house locations

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make the ultimate decisions."

One area he mentioned was providing "jaws" coverage at the Brewster and Kanorado stations.

"You have good coverage in the central part, but not on either end," he said. "This issue needs to be addressed. There is a liability reason for this and it does not take a huge amount of money to get the jaws, and ISO gives you credit for the jaws and the training.

"It could be a matter of service if someone has to wait for a jaws to arrive at either end of the county."

He started with a map showing the current service areas in Sherman County with five mile circles around Kanorado stretching into Colorado and around Brewster with most of the circle in Thomas County. Around Goodland he had two circles that almost matched because of the Goodland Rural department and the City fire department.

He said the rural fire departments are mostly designed to handle the large areas of brush fires, but the ISO does not count these. He said the county has three rural fire departments and one city. All have good volunteers, and said that 70 percent

of all fire departments in the country are volunteer departments.

"All fire departments are desiring to improve ISO rates," he said. "Currently ISO rates are extremely limited by distances between stations and the coverage area."

He said both Brewster and Kanorado are on the edge of the service area, and cover areas outside Sherman County. He said both communities and some surrounding homes could benefit from lower ISO rates. He said these stations would need different equipment and additional personnel. He recommended purchasing a Class A truck for each to be used on rural structure fires and would qualify under ISO ratings. He said this type of truck could be a used one and not have to be real expensive.

Most city fire departments have a Class A truck for structure fires in the town, but would endanger the city ISO rating if the truck were used out of town on a regular basis. That is why he recommends each station have a Class A truck.

Turning to the Goodland and Sherman rural he said there were two almost identical stations. He said this is true duplication being created with two management layers within

one-half miles of each other.

He said the airport station is under a special class and does not figure into the ISO ratings.

"There is a duplication of services," he said. "I do not know what you need to do or want to do. Neither one can change the ISO rating no matter what you spend in the city and the surrounding area."

He said the duplication could be handled and could save the city and county residents tax dollars. He said countywide all fire departments need to use a consolidated response approach and each should be equipped equally. All volunteer firefighters need to receive the same training, and all fire engines should be fully equipped for structure fire response.

"The trucks save money on insurance costs by being in place," he said, "even if it is not being used that often."

He said Sherman County has areas of poor station placement, and suggested the county could benefit from a change in the fire delivery strategy. He said the people could get lower ISO and could be able to roll back taxes and offer support for the local community.

He showed a map with recom-

mendations for a sub-station located at Ruleton, Edson and possibly one sub-station north of the city and south. He said these could each then qualify for lower ISO ratings with the location of a Class A truck. He said he would not recommend building a new county fire station in Goodland, but rather moving it away and having the city cover the rural fires within the five mile radius.

He said the departments have the number of volunteers to help make this work.

He said the ISO test can be tricky, and currently some business areas east of town and west of town are not getting the better rates.

As for the city to improve the ISO rating he recommended purchase of a ladder truck.

City Manager Doug Gerber said Fire Chief Brian James has been asking for one but the cost is about \$300,000 and he did not see the cost benefit.

Starling said the ladder truck is a requirement of ISO, and said he found a used one on line for about \$17,000, and expects it will go for about \$35,000. He said it is a good way to start and it would let the city get a better ISO rate.

"This is not a truck you will need very often," he said, "but when you do it is real great to have it."

Mayor Josh Dechant asked about the 20 year requirement.

Starling said ISO does not have that requirement the fire service association has that recommendation.

He said the sub-stations could be moved to expand the coverage area where it might overlap with the city coverage.

After the presentation several people said they felt the information was eye opening.

Starling said it has been along time since Sherman County and Goodland have looked at the overall fire delivery package.

"I don't see any big gotcha for you as far as expense," he said. "You have good people and need to make some changes, but you are in good shape."

Rural fireman Chris Bauman said he felt it was the opinion of one consultant, and that another consultant might have a totally different take. He said Starling's idea was interesting if your main concern is reducing

the ISO ratings to lower homeowner insurance costs.

Gerber said he wanted to see the math on the savings the changes might be.

James said the city commission will have to look at things if they want to cover the five miles radius around the city.

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