

Vernon Township Board of Education
Thursday, April 30, 2009

President's Report

Endings and beginnings... It was reported in last Sunday's New Jersey Herald that Richard "Dick" Conway passed away at the ripe old age of 91. I didn't have the pleasure of knowing him, but what caught my eye were three things: He built Lake Conway on Vernon Mountain; he was a member of the Grange in Vernon; and he was a former member of this board of education. The Lake Conway neighborhood is a large and thriving part of our community, and while the Grange may be long gone, the board of education is alive and well and I have no doubt Dick Conway gave his heart and energies to the school district he loved and served in his time.

My association with Vernon's schools began thirty-four years ago this month when I was hired to become a history teacher in our brand new high school which opened that September. We had the eighth grade with us in the high school and as the faculty advisor I well remember one young lady who was a member of the Class of 1980. Totally dedicated to her studies and driven to reach her full potential she was one of our top scholars, but more importantly, she was a wonderful, well-rounded individual who was respected and liked by everyone. I was proud to be one of her teachers and even more so when she became a teacher and was hired to teach in Vernon's schools. Rosemary Gebhardt knows how highly I still regard her and tonight I couldn't be more proud, knowing she will be the next principal of Glen Meadow Middle School. We have also been aware of another 'rising star' among so many great teachers in our school system, and we are equally pleased to offer our congratulations to Kyle Arlington as the new vice principal of Glen Meadow. Like Tony Macerino, Dr. Carol Nelson is embarking on a well-deserved retirement but she leaves with the knowledge that we are very grateful for the outstanding leadership she has provided for the students and staff she served. I am sure Rosemary and Kyle will form a solid working relationship to continue her exemplary work.

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the contributions of two of our school board members, Joe Sweeney, who will be leaving us after twenty-one years of service, and Gaylon Powell, a member of the board for only four years but like me, a teacher who began with the opening of Vernon Township High School and unlike me, one who retired from our school district. Each contributing in his own unique way, Joe and Gaylon have both been outstanding board members, always exercising independent judgment and consistently putting the needs and interests of Vernon's students first.

I also wish to offer sincere congratulations and best wishes for success to our new superintendent of schools who is here with us tonight, Dr. John B. Alfieri. In a very short time our educational family and the community at large will understand and appreciate why we felt John was the obvious choice to take over Tony's responsibilities and chart a leadership path of his own. I am confident everyone will extend a warm welcome to him and his family and work with him as he guides Vernon's schools in new directions.

Tonight marks the end of my 20th year on the board of education and it is time I begin to wrap up loose ends. Now that Nancy, my bride of almost 39 years is retiring, I want to be able to travel and spend more time with her without the responsibilities of office, so I am announcing that I will not seek, nor will I accept another term as the president of this board of education. I do so, however, in the full knowledge that we have outstanding members on this board of education, some of whom have demonstrated their capabilities and competence to lead the school district in a good working relationship with our new superintendent of schools. I offer my sincere, heartfelt thanks to all my colleagues who have supported me, given me their advice and assistance, but most importantly, their friendship.

And that concludes my last President's Report!

Howard J. Whidden, Jr.