

Isken says he won't accept post

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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Candidate plans to decline seat if elected, citing conflict with wife's CG-B job

What started out as a four-way race for three at-large seats on the Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board has turned into a none race.

Although his name will be on the April 3 ballot, Michael Isken of Cedar Grove said he's decided not to seek the seat and will decline the position if elected.

Isken, who is the chief financial officer and human resources manager for Piggly Wiggly, cited a possible conflict of interest because his wife Sherry works in the district office with payroll and human resources.

"When I filed my papers, she worked in the middle-school office, but since then she's transferred to the district office," Isken said. "Some people thought there was a conflict of interest.

"I was doing this to help the community. If it's going to turn into an issue, I'll drop out. To me, it's more important not to disrupt my wife's job. She loves her job."

Isken said he knew he would have to abstain from voting on salary issues that affected his wife, but was surprised to learn he would have to abstain from the entire budget and employee contracts.

After conferring with the district's attorney, Supt. Steve Shaw informed Mrs. Isken of the conflicts.

"With some of the issues they were having with a business manager, I felt I could help with that and with all the changes in the state law affecting benefits," Isken said. "If there is a perceived conflict, then fine. I'm not into causing turmoil."

If Isken is elected and declines the position, the School Board will appoint someone to fill the seat until the next election, said School Board President Jim Lautenschlaeger, who is seeking re-election.

The three seats will not automatically go to the other three candidates, although one of them could be appointed, he said.

In addition to Lautenschlaeger and Isken, other candidates for the three-year, at-large seats are incumbent Jeff Thiel and newcomer Todd Bucher, both of Belgium.

Board member Julie Reichle decided not to seek re-election.

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Running unopposed for the Ozaukee County seat is incumbent Gina Sotelo of Belgium. She was appointed to the board in August.

Lautenschlaeger has been board president for two years and served on the board since 2008.

A former physical education teacher, he is an at-home dad for his four children, who are in first through sixth grade at Cedar Grove-Belgium elementary and middle schools, and owner of Rocket Recreation, which provides youth activities for Belgium and Cedar Grove.

"There's a lot we've gone through the last couple of years and there are some leftover jobs I want to attend to," Lautenschlaeger said.

"With (state law) Act 10, loss of collective bargaining and the recall election, there is a lot to do. We'll also be looking for a replacement for our superintendent if he retires in the next couple of years and long-range-planning."

Thiel was on the board since 2000 to 2010 when he lost an election, then elected last year for a one-year term. He is also been a Village of Belgium trustee for 11 years and a member of the Plan Commission for two years.

He is a 1979 graduate of Ozaukee High School and a 1982 graduate of MATC.

Thiel said safety has to be the top priority, referring to a recent concern about a confrontational parent. The board plans to change the entrances at the elementary and high schools to be similar to the middle school, where everyone must first go to the office.

Thiel said the schools are operating well, noting he's been on the board through three superintendents.

"Each has different philosophies," he said. "It's the same with the Village Board."

Thiel is unopposed for re-election as a village trustee.

This is Bucher's first bid for public office, but he's been spending a lot of time at the schools as a volunteer basketball coach for his younger children's middle-school teams. He has three children, a sophomore, eighth-grader and sixth-grader in district schools.

"I like being involved in the schools. When it (a board seat) became open, I thought, 'I should volunteer for the job for my kids' education. I want to make sure they're getting the best education they can get," he said.

Bucher said he likes what the board has done and how the schools are operating, but wants more technology in classrooms.

"I want to make sure we grow in the right way. I'm a big fan of technology and teaching the

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kids what they will need when they get into the job world," he said.

Bucher is a transportation analyst for Roadrunner Transportations Systems, a large trucking firm. He graduated from Shorewood High School and attended Milwaukee Area Technical College.

Sotelo, an administrative assistant for Mequon-Thiensville Chamber of Commerce, is married and has three children in district schools.

She is an active PTO member and former assistant high-school cross-country coach.

"I really like the work the group is doing as far as making sure all the changes are happening with the government," Sotelo said.

"We're making sure the administration is following up and getting the right training for teachers in trying to bridge the gap from the old state standards to the new core common standards. It's a very exciting time to be on the board."