

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

January 31, 2013

Only positives, no negatives for magnets (North Little Rock Times)

Magnet schools within the school districts of Little Rock, North Little Rock and Pulaski County Special School District were on display Saturday at the McCain Mall in North Little Rock as their institutions tried to encourage the students of shoppers to enroll into their houses of learning.

Donna Creer, executive director of the Magnet Review Committee, said 16 schools were represented at this year's annual Magnet School Fair.

"We have held these probably for 16 or 17 years," Creer said.

The annual events usually have been held at the Park Plaza Mall in Little Rock but this year's school fair was held in North Little Rock.

"We try to come where people are rather than bring them to us," Creer said. "We like to go where there is a lot of high traffic."

Creer said the committee decided to hold its fair in North Little Rock because some of the students live on the north side of the river.

"This year we wanted to do outreach in North Little Rock and Pulaski County," Creer said. "We wanted to be closer to the parents in Jacksonville, Maumelle and North Little Rock. We wanted to be in their backyard."

Crystal Hill Elementary Teacher Cindy Casto said she and fellow teachers Sherri Keesee and Pamela Keith wanted to man their magnet school's booth because they wanted to show prospective students all the wonderful programs their school has to offer.

"We are very proud of our school," Casto said. "We have a very diverse student body."

The Magnet School Fair coincides with the magnet school early application period that started Jan. 28 and concludes on Friday, Feb. 8.

Creer said students from pre-K to 12 could enroll in a magnet school.

"You can enroll anytime, but if you enroll in the early enrollment period, you have the best chance and option if you enroll now," Creer said. "You can find out before Spring Break whether you are in."

Clinton Elementary Magnet School in Sherwood was also represented.

Clinton Technology Specialist Lynn Leidigh said the event provided the school a chance for prospective students to learn about her schools many programs, including in the area of technology.

The magnet school fair was held in both the main floor and food court areas of the Mall.

On the lower level, near the food court and stage, event sponsors, the Magnet Review Committee, its staff and volunteers, shared enrollment information and provided sample applications.

Students from different magnet schools performed on the McCain Mall's stage, with demonstrations including orchestras, choirs, drama, ROTC, and dance.

Creer said the fair provided potential magnet school parents, students and interested community members the chance to ask questions and get answers.

"They could ask questions and get answers from the folks who make magnets happen – magnet school principals, teachers, parents, students and district administrators," Creer said.

Crystal Hill teacher Pamela Keith said she was happy to participate at this year's fair because it was a way to raise awareness about the magnet school program. Keith said there is a chance that the magnet school program could be done away with and she wanted to do her part to bring more students into the magnet school system and promote Crystal Hill.

NLR hires Arkansan for schools (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The North Little Rock School Board on Wednesday unanimously selected Arkansas native and Texas educator Kelly E. Rodgers Jr. to be superintendent of the 9,000-student North Little Rock School District, effective July 1.

Rodgers, 56, a superintendent for more than 10 years in two Texas school systems, attended Wednesday's special School Board meeting and accepted a three-year contract that includes an annual salary of \$185,000.

"It's truly an honor to me to be selected for the North Little Rock School District, to lead it into the future," Rodgers told the board after the vote. "It's coming back home. We're excited about getting back and getting to know family and friends again."

Rodgers nodded toward the district's motto on the sign hanging behind the board members.

"You know our vision here is just like you have up here at the top," he said, "'Think World Class,' and that's what we are going to do - be leaders."

Rodgers has been superintendent of the 4, 250-student Terrell Independent School District, 25 miles east of Dallas, since 2007.

A graduate of Little Rock's Parkview High School and a music-education major at Henderson State University, he also served 5 1/2 years as superintendent in the 2,650-student Center, Texas, Independent School District.

North Little Rock board members, who interviewed five candidates over a two week period, met with Rodgers for about 45 minutes in executive session Wednesday before voting in public to approve a contract of employment.

“We’ve been great and now we can be even greater,” board member Dorothy “Dot” Williams said about the choice after noting that it was a “major task” for the board to select from among the five whom she said were all highly qualified.

Board members said they liked that Rodgers characterized himself as a “transformational” leader.

“Three years ago this district started the transformational change of our buildings and facilities,” board member Scott Miller said in reference to the planning for the district’s \$266 million construction and renovation program that should get under way later this year.

“I’m looking forward to the transformational change in the rest of this district,” he said about curriculum and instruction. “I truly believe we have a leader that can accomplish that.”

Board President Scott Teague said in an interview that he was sold on Rodgers’ high degree of community involvement and his “strong, structured leadership style.”

The board met in a closed session Monday to discuss the superintendent candidates but adjourned without taking any public votes on a selection.

“All is still well and on track,” Teague said about the search process Monday night, adding that board members wanted to do some additional, individual research.”

Teague on Wednesday elaborated about the Monday night executive session.

“We had an indication of a direction,” Teague said of the earlier session, “and so I reached out to Mr. Rodgers after the meeting and we talked a little bit and I talked to him a little more on Tuesday. He looked at his schedule as to when he might be able to come back and visit with us again. Tonight was the night that worked into his schedule.”

Asked if a job offer was made to Rodgers in those phone conversations, Teague said “No, we made it back there [in the closed session]tonight.”

The Arkansas Freedom of Information Act states that “no resolution, ordinance, rule, contract, regulation, or motion considered or arrived at in executive session will be legal unless, following the executive session, the public body reconvenes in public session and presents and votes on the resolution, ordinance, rule, contract, regulation or motion.”

Rodgers said in an interview that he drove to North Little Rock earlier Wednesday after Teague asked to clear up some matters.

“I felt like it was going well at that point,” Rodgers said, adding that he and his wife will remain in the area the rest of this week and will attend the North Little Rock High School basketball game Friday night.

“I’m honored to be selected,” Rodgers said about leading the North Little Rock district, which has a budget that projects expenditures of \$99.5 million this year and reserves of \$12.8 million. The district is in the process of reducing its 21 campuses to 13 as part of the rebuilding plan.

Rodgers praised the School Board for its unity and its vision for facilities and for instruction.

He said he has drafted an entry plan detailing what he wants to accomplish for the district in his first 100 days on the job. Key to that plan, he said, will be his efforts to meet with and build relationships with community and business members.

During Rodgers' tenure in Terrell he led the district, which has a \$42 million budget, in curriculum and staffing audits that resulted in adjustments in both, and in the construction of a career and technical-education center on the district's high school campus. The center, which required voter approval for its funding, features manufacturing, engineering and other programs that support industry and business in the area.

More recently Terrell High School received a state designation as a Texas-Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Academy that will support more project-based learning. Rodgers has said that he would like the emphasis on project-based learning and STEM subjects to expand into Terrell's middle and elementary school grades within the next five years.

A member of Rodgers' administrative team in Terrell said in an interview last week that Rodgers has guided into the 21st century a district that had on his arrival in 2007 very little technology and relied heavily on teacher lectures for instruction.

Terrell Assistant Superintendent Darla Pollard said Rodgers has worked to make education relevant for students.

She also said the saxophonist and former band director in the Texarkana, Texas, school system is known to occasionally surprise faculty and staff members with a rendition of "Happy Birthday."

Rodgers is a former president of the Terrell Chamber of Commerce.

In addition to a degree in music education from Henderson, Rodgers has a master's degree in educational administration from East Texas State University and has done additional postgraduate studies.

After his first job in Texarkana, Rogers taught two years in Pleasant Grove, Texas, before becoming an assistant principal in 1988 and principal in 1990 in that district. In 1997 he became assistant superintendent in DeKalb, Texas, where his responsibilities included helping to rebuild elementary and high school campuses that were struck by a tornado in 1999. His first superintendent's job in 2002 was in the Center, Texas, system.

Rodgers and his wife Gail, a retired teacher, have three adult sons. Rodgers' mother, his sister and other family members live in Arkansas.

The board was assisted in the search by the McPherson & Jacobson executive recruiting company of Omaha, Neb.

Other candidates interviewed by the board were Bobby Acklin, the North Little Rock district's assistant superintendent for desegregation; Rhonda Dickey, the district's director of secondary education; Larry Smith, superintendent of the White Hall School District; and Belinda Shook, superintendent of the Beebe School District.

Harper honors members of school board (Advanced –Monticellonian)

Monticello Superintendent Bobby Harper recognized the members of the school board during the regular monthly meeting Tuesday night.

Harper explained that January has been proclaimed school board appreciation month by Gov. Mike Beebe.

"They (board members) don't a lot of credit and they don't want it," Harper told the audience. "I couldn't find a better group of people that I enjoy working with more than I do with these gentlemen."

Harper introduced the Madrigals to entertain the board.

"We are so blessed to have students that are passionate about what why do," Harper said. "They go out into other communities and represent our school to the best of their abilities."

The Madrigals sang two selections under the instruction of Bennie Vincent.

"The first selection is "Lord, I know I've Been Changed"," Vincent told the board. "This is one of the pieces from all-region choir."

The Madrigals also sang "Why We Sing" for the board.

The Monticello School Board members are Hani Hashem, president; Keith Wells, vice president; Curt Preston, member; Michael Fakouri, member; and Lee Busby, member.

In other business, the board held an expulsion hearing for a high school student. The hearing was closed, and therefore, private. After a short deliberation period, the board announced their decision to uphold the expulsion. The vote was unanimous that the student should be expelled for the remainder of the school year.

Hashem told the parents the decision was not an easy one. However, the board had to consider what was best for the entire student body, not just one student. He also encouraged the parents to seek out alternative education such as a boot camp setting and offered to assist the parents with that process.

Harper announced the district received a \$100,000 EAST Core Grant. The grant will enable project-based learning in other parts of the curriculum, and will tie into the commitment to bring more Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education to the high school. The board voted to allow preparations to begin now for the implementation of EAST Core. Harper said there will be some minor superficial work that will need to be completed by the start of the new school year to make room for the technology that will be used in the classes.

The board discussed the safety plan. Harper said he wanted the board to consider buying

- 100 push-button locks at \$148 each for the elementary and intermediate schools.
- 100 new door locks at \$160 each for the high school.
- 40 new doorstops at \$25 each for the middle school since the school has new door locks already in place.
- new outer doors for the City Park building because they have not been replaced since the 1960s and do not properly close.

"It leaves us with an unsafe situation," Harper said.

Preston questioned the amount for each lock.

"I know there's a difference between a commercial grade lock and a residential lock, but it shouldn't be \$100 difference," Preston said.

Harper said the price of the locks are from Steve Piggot and include installation. The board asked to get other quotes for the locks uninstalled in an attempt to save money.

Wells asked about the back doors of the high school. He said the back doors should be locked so everyone would have to enter in the front doors closest to the office.

Several board members echoed that sentiment.

"I don't think it would be smart to spend \$16,000 on door locks when you can just walk in the back door," Fakouri said.

Harper said it would be tough to lock all the doors because of students coming and going to different classes outside the main building.

Fakouri acknowledged that fact, but said the board needs to explore all avenues of safety so they should look at some way of locking those back doors in an effort to keep the students as safe as possible.

"If we are going to do this, we need to do it," Preston said.

"Let's look into all of it," Fakouri said following Preston's comment.

Arkansas teachers to take 20 percent stake in new steel mill (Arkansas Times Blog)

The agenda for Monday's meeting of the board of the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System reveals one of the investors in the \$1.1 billion Big River steel mill proposed yesterday for Mississippi County.

ATRS would invest \$60 million upfront for a 20 percent equity stake in the venture. (That's a lot of money, but only about a half percent of some \$12 billion in assets/)

More to come on this. George Hopkins, director of the System, tells me in a brief phone call that the system expects a 40 percent return on its investment after a 3.5-year startup period. About 30 percent will be in cash flow, the rest in the markup of the asset because sale of the equity in a profitable mill could be expected to bring far more than the system's initial investment. Even if the return was half that amount, it would be good for the state, Hopkins said. Hopkins added that, under terms of its agreement with Big River, the retirement system could have a similar stake in future expansion or new locations.

He said the teachers had been working with developers of the mill plan, led by John Correnti, for six months and only recently had talked with state officials about their own decision to back \$125 million in state bonds to provide \$75 million in direct help and a \$50 million loan to the project. Further details on the investment are to be presented at a Senate committee of the whole meeting Monday afternoon. The Teacher Retirement System board moved up its meeting to consider the investment before that session. Legislative approval is required for a state bond issue under the super project amendment in the Arkansas Constitution.

Who are other contributors to the \$250 million in private capital that must be in hand (along with the remaining lending commitments) before the state bonds are sold and any proceeds paid into the enterprise?

Grant Tennille, director of the Arkansas Economic Development Department, said he couldn't comment at this point on that.

A spokesman for Correnti said that information should be available eventually, but confidentiality agreements precluded his saying anything today. He indicated they'd be familiar corporate names who shared enthusiasm about the project.

Will Correnti's project in Arkansas come to fruition where it flopped recently in Mississippi? Arkansas officials are optimistic. This Mississippi news article isn't so glowing.

FYI: The state commitment goes beyond the \$125 million backed by general revenues and the \$60 million in public money channeled through the teacher retirement system. Also, it promises: A refund on sales tax for materials and machinery; a 4 percent income tax credit on new payroll for five years; \$10 million for job training; an extended income tax credit (14 years instead of three) for recycling equipment, and a sales tax exemption on utilities.

Little Rock Police: Middle School Security Guard Accused in Sexual Assault of Student (KARK-Channel 4)

The Little Rock Police Department has arrested a Horace Mann Middle School security guard accused of sexually assaulting a student.

Robert Myles, 39, of Little Rock, is accused of inappropriately touching a 14-year-old boy "by placing his hand inside the front of" the teen's pants, according to the incident report.

The report was filed on Monday and Myles was arrested on Tuesday morning. He was booked into the Pulaski County Jail with a \$20,000 bond and was released a short time later.

Police say Myles had been sending text messages to the student before the incident. On Myles' arrest affidavit, police noted that a no contact order was requested.

Myles is charged with two counts of sexual assault.

He's expected to appear in court next week.
