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4 Corners News & Views for Ohio's Cradle of Education

Common Sense Where Main Meets Wooster

Bowling Green, Ohio

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BG Loses 1.3% Of Students

More bad news for the Bowling Green Public Schools.

The annual October enrollment report to the Ohio Department of Education shows that **43 fewer students are attending classes than last year**, according to the district's EMIS department.

It represents a 1.3 percent decline to 3,148 students compared to 3,191 a year ago. This is a preliminary figure but it is unlikely to change much when it is finalized in March 2006 under new rules of reporting to the state.

Forty-three lost students amount to roughly two classrooms of students, two teachers and nearly a third of a small elementary building such as Milton Elementary.

South Main was closed last June and slated to become a non-profit art center. Milton probably is next on the school board's hit list and will represent the complete abandonment of the old Westwood district. If the \$43.2 million bond issue is passed Nov. 8, Ridge's closing likely will follow. That building probably will be sold to the land-hungry Bowling Green State University because of its proximity to campus.

The Bowling Green School District now has lost 464 students or a whopping 13 percent of its enrollment since the 1993-94 school year, when the count stood at 3,612.

This continues an unfortunate trend where the population of the community grows while the public school enrollment declines. **Meanwhile, Perrysburg to the north experiences both population growth and school enrollment growth.**

Perrysburg, because of its proximity to Toledo, faces even more competition than Bowling Green for public students from private, parochial and charter schools and from home schooling.

What is going on here?

The problem is that the BG school board and superintendent have become more interested in buildings and things than people. They have refused to address the problem of declining enrollment. It is more fun to advertise for and hire architects and engineers and plan to spend millions than to knock on the doors of families who send their children to non-public schools or are home schoolers and ask why.

We learned on Oct. 29 in an article inexplicably buried on page 15 of the *Sentinel-Tribune* that the superintendent and the school board apparently "punished" FFA teacher Mike Shertzer for leading one of the top FFA programs in the country by keeping the students from attending the national FFA convention on a technicality involving an arbitrary deadline. Rather than put a letter of reprimand in Shertzer's file (next to the hundreds of letters of praise doubtlessly there) and letting the students go to the convention, the superintendent and school board showed again that they care more about "things" than people. They should not be surprised to find the "no" vote on the bond issue in the rural precincts even higher than usual.

One of the reasons parents avoid public schools is because they consider them too secular and counter to parents' religious beliefs.

A way to address this would be to have a one-hour lunch hour where parents may direct their students to leave the public school grounds to attend a luncheon meeting where religious instruction and wholesome activities would be held.

What the BG school officials do not seem to realize is that families who send their children elsewhere are less likely to support the public schools at the ballot box. **If the trend continues, in a few years Bowling Green's proud tradition of usually supporting school tax issues at the polls may come to a tragic end.**

If voters turn down the 5.43-mill bond issue Nov. 8 – the one that will cost the typical homeowner an extra \$300 a year in real estate taxes – the BG school board and superintendent will have only themselves to blame.

-- John K. Hartman, publisher, *4 Corners News & Views*, John.Hartman@dacor.net

Enrollment Fell 10.3% Under McOmber

Republican Bob McOmber is running for BG councilman-at-large on the Nov. 8 ballot. He is billing himself as a fiscal conservative based on his service on the BG board of education. But like the current board McOmber's record suggests that he, too, is more interested in buildings and things than people.

What McOmber fails to mention is that the BG school district lost 10.3 percent of its enrollment during his six years on the board.

Enrollment stood at 3604 when he took office during the school year 1995-96 and had fallen to 3231
(Please Turn to page 2.)

when he left office in 2001-02. **In other words, while McOmber was persuading citizens to vote to raise taxes, several hundred students were escaping out the back door.** Apparently McOmber was unable to stem the tide of enrollment decline. Since he left the school board 4 years ago, the exodus of students has continued.

Interestingly, McOmber's campaign treasurer is none other than 10-year school board member Paul Windisch. **This raises the specter of the possibility of an unholy alliance between the school board and City Hall** over the demise of the junior high school, if the bond issues passes, and the proposed new City Hall. Did I mention how the proposed library parking lot fits in this scheme?

The best way to nip this possibility in the bud is to pass on voting for McOmber for City Council.

Larry Sorrells, the Democratic candidate, has impeccable credentials though his fidelity to Democratic Party values has yet to be tested.

Stan Bortel, the other Republican candidate, is a bit more conservative than I would like and was instrumental in the city putting \$4 million in the Community Center that is going to be a cash drain (see below), but he is very independent and will not be pushed around by the powers that be. Bortel is not a card-carrying member of the Establishment like McOmber and would be the preferred alternative after Sorrells. Remember, you can vote for two.

Speculation is running rampant that McOmber is being groomed by the Establishment to run for mayor in 2007 when John Quinn presumably steps down. Bortel also has an interest in running for mayor, sources say.

If one Republican wins and one loses, the winner becomes the odds-on favorite to be BG's next mayor. Keep that in mind at the polls. Or just vote for Sorrells. You don't have to vote for two.

Community Center Drains Cash

At least the BG School Board goes to the voters when it wants to spend millions on new facilities.

The Bowling Green City Council forgot to submit the matter of putting \$4 million into the Community Center to the voters.

Oh, it held some public hearings but there is nothing like asking the body politic if it wants to pony up some cash for its share of a big new building.

And the council and the mayor forgot to figure into the equation the impact of the BGSU Rec Center and the university's myriad of athletic facilities.

And they forgot to take into consideration that private and non-profit fitness facilities would not take this incursion of government into their domain lying down.

City Hall just wrote a check for \$4 million and away we go.

If you think about it, \$4 million is pin money at City Hall. \$6 million for downtown renovation. \$6 million for the new East Wooster Street boulevard that was supposed to make it easier for folks to get downtown but instead spurred development east of I-75, and \$200,000 to finish the job early.

\$200,000 went to buy the new city employees' parking lot on West Wooster that should have been used to relieve library parking pressure but that would have spoiled the fun of neighborhood demolition.

Round numbers, the city is on the hook for \$200,000 a year for 20 years plus interest, plus maintenance and repair costs, plus operating costs, plus personnel costs and **(some welfare for the *Sentinel-Tribune*)** big money for advertising to try to interest an apathetic public in the unneeded facility.

All one has to do is drive past the center to see the absence of cars parked in front of the city's portion of the building. The *Sentinel-Tribune* recently carried a story detailing efforts to promote the facility and hinting at budget shortfalls.

It is a shame that City Hall thinks so little of the public it purports to represent that it would not take a \$4 million project to the voters for approval.

But then this is the community where BG stands for: **Beware Government**

4 Corners News & Views You Read It Here First Tip Of The Month: The next editor of the *Sentinel-Tribune* will insert "Bowling Green native, BGHS graduate and former BGSU trustee" into all Associated Press stories about Tom Noe because any first year journalism student will tell you to always emphasize the local angle.

Coming Soon To 4 Corners: Noe and BGSU. What The Heck Was Going On?

4 Corners News & Views of Bowling Green was founded June 1, 2005 by John K. Hartman, its publisher. Its purpose is to provide additional news and points-of-view to citizens of Bowling Green in the belief that thorough awareness of and discussion of issues makes for a better community. It will be available free at various drop-off points in Bowling Green or by email by sending your email address and request to John.Hartman@dacor.net. Patrons may support 4 Corners News & Views for \$10 per issue. Ads may be purchased for \$20 per issue. Comments and submissions are welcome. Contact information:

John.Hartman@dacor.net ; 419-352-8180; 1400 Wren Road, BG, OH 43402. Read back issues at www.LiberalBG.org
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