

# The Advertiser-News

Print Page

UPDATED: FEBRUARY 18, 2009

## Advertiser News > News

# Paintings will go back on school walls

PUBLISHED: FEBRUARY 18, 2009

At issue is whether the superintendent cares for tradition the same way faculty does, By Jessica Burns

Hamburg — Some people in Hamburg fear the superintendent wants to sell off the school district's store of artwork, but he says their fears are unjustified: He simply had it taken down while the walls are being painted.

Over the course of a 90-minute discussion on the subject at a recent school board meeting, it did come to light, however, that Steven Engravalle would like to raise money that way. It's just that he's not empowered to do that.

The situation was the highlight of the Feb. 11 school board meeting when open discussion of a letter to the Hamburg Board of Education attracted more than 20 teachers, faculty and borough residents — far more than expected, making it necessary to provide extra chairs.

The artwork adorning Hamburg school's walls, recognition awards hung in the school hallways and the landscaping on school property were all discussed during the public session. The art has been a part of the school for over 40 years, according to Carol Jaccodine, a school staff member.

Rumors circulating about Engravalle involve him talking about auctioning paintings that have been given to the school through fundraisers or direct donations.

"What hurts my feelings," Engravalle said, "is no one asked me, 'Where are the paintings?'"

And yet...

Engravalle did not deny he would choose to sell the artwork if the decision was up to him, but in order for school property to be removed, the Board of Education must first give its approval.

"I would like to see things auctioned off and use the money for an education foundation for kids. This is an institution for learning, not an art museum or an apple orchard. There are things we want to get, things we want to celebrate but we need to keep to the budget and make taxpayers happy by keeping the budget low."

While the letter discussed at the board meeting asked the board to ensure nothing would change in the school building, Engravalle said that wasn't necessarily the only way to go. There was talk of creating an art room upstairs for the paintings as a way to make room for bulletin boards that display children's work on the main



OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

level.

"The paintings in the front hall will be put back," he assured, "but I don't want to leave things as is. The reason the school was painted red and white was to celebrate school pride and that's the only paint we're going to buy forever."

Keep the charm

Specifically, the letter discussed the school interior, and fears that loss of the paintings and plaques would jeopardize the school's charm and inviting appearance.

The letter highlighted that the interior has been documented on television in the past and has been recognized by local historians. It suggested that removing paintings would compromise the school's character and strip the walls of sentiment.

"The letter did seem accusatory," Engravalle said. "The biggest thing I'm trying to get across is contact me, call me or e-mail me first. The letter says I need to address rumors. I can't nor will I. That's crazy."

Communication is key

This discussion brought out the fact that the chief school administrator and the staff need to better communicate.

"We were trying to be respectful and we have issues of lack of communication at our school," commented Kim vonEssen, co-president of the Hamburg Education Association. "We need to get through this together."

Both sides agreed.

"I'm saying this in front of everybody, ask for clarification," Engravalle stressed.

Honoring teachers, trees

Conversation led to discussion about the lack of recognition given to teachers who have been at the school for a lengthy period of time and Engravalle asked them to let him know when their 25-year anniversaries approach.

There was also discussion about the removal of trees that had been dedicated to various organizations and former teachers during the formerly annual Arbor Day celebration. A red oak tree had been removed along with a few crab apple trees. In the past a new tree had been planted every year.

According to Engravalle, the oak needed to be cut down because of a new handicap-accessible playground.

"We have kids who put things like acorns in their mouths; we had kids eating crab apples," Engravalle said. "The question came up, 'Did we leave the tree or have playground?'"

The discussion also gathered steam over the subject of whether the superintendent cares at all for Hamburg tradition.

The superintendent said that many considerations go into each decision. "As far as the Arbor Day celebration, I thought people were tired of events, but I was wrong, I should have taken a poll of the staff, by the show in here," Engravalle said. "We need to form committees."

The issues will be discussed at the next building and grounds meeting.

