

Chances slim of city entering school district

By **Connie Cone Sexton**
The Phoenix Gazette

To get representation for their taxation, do Sun City West residents want back into the Dysart Unified School District?

Not really, according to Sanford Goldstein, past president of the community's Property Owners and Residents Association.

Last year, when the Legislature imposed a school property tax on residents who live outside school district boundaries, a number of people in Sun City West cried "taxation without representation."

Dysart voters had dissociated Sun City West in 1981, taking away the retirees right to vote in the district.

A desire to have the community part with the district was mutual. Retirees wouldn't have to pay the district tax; future bond issues would have better chances of passing.

In 1981, voters in the retirement community helped rescind a \$27 million bond issue,

which had passed in a 1978 election.

Sun City West, which was formed in 1978, has been outside the district since 1981, and the issue of school tax died down.

Once again, however, school property taxes are being assessed to the residents. But this time, the money is going into the state general fund. That situation left many residents wanting to get their votes back.

It has been about 10 months since the Legislature voted in the new tax on the unorganized areas. Since then, local legislators and the retirees have been working to make the tax bite more equitable.

Goldstein said many of the residents don't shout the "no representation" issue any more, and just want the tax to be fair.

"If the district voters don't want us, if Dysart is saying there are things that happened when we were in the district, than I think there has to be more equity if any additional taxes are paid," he said.

And while the tax feud goes on, many Sun City West residents have said they want to keep up the community spirit between the retirees and the Dysart district.

Having Sun City West return to the Dysart fold has been talked about numerous times since 1981, according to Bill Jones, Dysart's superintendent.

But never on a very serious note, he said, adding, "There is no interaction now between the Dysart district and Sun City West."

The only way the community would return to the district would be through a mutual OK of all affected voters, he said.

Chances of that happening aren't likely, Sun City West residents and district officials believe.

Jones said in his judgment there should never have been an attempt to remove the residents from the district in the first place. Not if the retirees' "response had been such

that the schools could have survived with reasonableness in terms of being able to keep up with growth and keep up with staff pay. I don't think that issue would ever have emerged," he said.

"What happened was that the Sun City West residents became the majority on the board. And then there was the rescission (in 1980) of the bond issue that had previously been passed," the educator said.

Children's education is the responsibility of everyone, Jones said. "It is a privilege."

But he is quick to point out that many Sun City West residents do support the district through volunteer work. "We have an appreciation of the folks in Sun City and Sun City West. They been wonderful to the schools. Volunteers have given us thousands of dollars worth of time."

Some do "forget" they are outside the district and cheerfully hand Dysart a check for their taxes, Jones said.

'Sun City School Tax' Battle ends in taxpayers' favor

By **BRET McKEAND**
Sun Cities Independent

6/6-12/90

A two-year battle between the Sun Cities and the state of Arizona regarding the legality of the so-called Sun City School Tax has apparently come to an end.

The State of Arizona will not appeal a decision which ruled the 1988 version of the school tax unconstitutional and has agreed to refund more than \$10 million in taxes already collected.

Exactly how the refund will be distributed is expected to be determined this month and Sun Citizens may see their refund as early as July.

Last year, a Superior Court judge ruled the school tax -- which was first levied in 1988 against communities outside organized school districts -- unconstitutional and ordered the state to refund all taxes collected.

State officials had until May 25 to appeal the decision. According to Ken Larkin, president of the Sun City Taxpayers Association, no appeal has been filed.

"I was surprised they didn't appeal it," says Mr. Larkin.

"If they would have appealed the decision, it would have taken about two more years before a decision would have been reached.

"It would have cost us (SCTA) a whole lot more money," he adds.

Residents will most likely have the option of accepting a cash settlement from the state or using the refund as a tax "credit" toward future bills.

The matter, says Mr. Larkin, is now "completely over."

Mr. Larkin says the refund could amount to approximately \$50 per homeowner.

He says his organization will be working closely with state officials in developing a method to refund the money.

Residents will most likely have the option of accepting a cash settlement from the state or using the refund as a tax "credit" toward future tax bills.

Residents who have sold their homes since the tax collected will be required to file a claim with the state in order to receive their refunds, says Mr. Larkin.

Mr. Larkin says some residents could begin receiving refunds as early as next month.

The state Legislature first

adopted the school tax in July, 1988.

The school tax was aimed at communities not included in organized school districts and, therefore, not paying school taxes.

Although the tax was collected from 22 communities in all, Sun City and Sun City West were the largest communities affected by the tax and the levy quickly became known as the "Sun City School Tax."

The Sun City Taxpayers Association, along with support from several other local organizations, immediately contested the matter through the courts.

The tax was eventually ruled unconstitutional because all funds collected were distributed into the state's general fund.

By that time, however, the state Legislature had already revised the school tax and had implemented a newer version, one which is still in effect today.

The court ruling and refund only apply to the original school tax and will not affect the present school tax.

In addition to the \$10 million collected from tax, the state will be required to refund more than \$2 million in interest.

Mr. Larkin says the state has also been ordered to pay all

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SCTA legal fees. He says the organization has spent more than \$132,000 on the school tax lawsuit.
Contributors supporting the SCTA efforts in fighting Senate Bill 1261 include the following:
• Members of SCTA and residents of Sun City
• Owners of Sun City shopping malls who matched dollar or dollar of merchants in each designated mall
• Recreation Centers of Sun City
• Country clubs of Sun City
• Retirement Community Association of Sun City
Sun City Town Meeting Association, Sun City West
• Property Owners Residents Association, Sun City West
• Residents of Sun City West who contributed through PORAs as a drop-off station
• Recreation Centers of Sun City West
• Retirement Community Association of Sun City West
• Residents and property owners as well as the group developing the area, and its major construction firm of Rio Verde
• Several condominium associations of Sun City

DYSART, WEST DISTRICTS MAY SPLIT

**'Marriage' May End
At Sun City West**

A story about the Dysart Unified School District and how it fared in 1980 can scarcely be written without mentioning Sun City West.

Decisions on programs for Dysart's 3,600 students almost inevitably hinged on a Dysart-Sun City West axis in 1980.

That situation could change soon.

The shotgun marriage could end as early as July 1981.

A **GROUP** of residents from outside the retirement community is exploring ways of enacting a no-fault divorce through a special election.

Meanwhile, the Sun City West dominated school board could decide the fate of a \$950,000 vocational-industrial arts building at the Jan. 20 board meeting — before any disassociation decision is made.

Sun City West, with about 60 percent of the voters and a high turnout rate, exercised its political muscle in the Dysart district throughout 1980.

• Two school board members from Sun City West, Gene Wilson and Jack Gierman, were appointed by county superintendent of schools Richard Harris. They replaced Mateo Alejandro and Elray Sampson of El Mirage, who resigned.

• In October, a \$27.55 million bond authorization was canceled by a vote of 2,703 to 88. About 8 of every 10 registered voters from the retirement community cast ballots, a reflection of their organizing power and commitment to severing ties with the district. Only 16 of the 2,589 retirement community voters favored keeping the authorization.

The cancellation culminated almost two years of planning by the Property Owners and Residents Association.

ONLY 202 voters outside Sun City West bothered to vote. They

avored canceling the authorization by a vote of 130 to 72.

The \$27.55 million bond authorization passed June 20, 1978, four months before Sun City West had any residents. District officials said they sought the authorization to protect the future of the district.

The school finance package passed by voters in June stipulated that any bond money not used within five years of passage expires automatically.

For this reason, Dysart officials said cancelling the authorization was a "moot" question.

Most Sun City West residents resented the way it was passed and thought it was unnecessary because about \$2.8 million remains from a 1973 bond authorization.

• In November, three Sun City West residents were elected to four-year terms on the five-member school board, in effect giving them control of the pursestrings. Gierman, Ingeletta Hawkins and Rose Ratner were swept into office.

Incumbents Don Overstreet and Margaret Baker ran against each other for a two-year position because they knew the Sun City West residents would win the four-year terms. Mrs. Baker, board president seeking her fourth term, was defeated, apparently for her strong statements against Sun City West influence.

• In May, PORA officials said they would seek disassociation. As the year progressed, they subtly switched their tactics. They now say any district reorganization move must be initiated outside the retirement community, but they wouldn't be adverse to such a move.

The two groups seem to be cooperating for now. Reorganization

Turn to • DYSART, NW-5

● DYSART SCHOOLS LINKED

(Concluded from NW-4)

election petitions will be circulated by a group of residents organized by present Dysart board president Margaret Baker and former PTA president Pat Yancy.

Ten percent of the district's registered voters (6,048 as of Nov. 28) must sign the petition. It would then be presented to the county superintendent, who would set an election date. This process could be completed as early as next February.

● With the move to reorganize the district, some observers are skeptical that the Sun City West members would approve construction of the vocational facility. This could be a source for a resumption of tension.

SUN CITY WEST residents are responsible for any bond indebtedness incurred while they are a part of the district.

A majority of voters from Sun City West and other parts of the district must approve a reorganization. The effective disassociation date being discussed is July 1, 1981.

Dysart residents currently pay the lowest local school tax rate in the state for a unified school district, according to the county superintendent of schools office.

● In December, the county Board

of Supervisors reversed an earlier stand and approved the sale of bonds for the vocational facility, originally approved by the school board Nov. 18.

The supervisors had blocked the sale Dec. 1 after protests from several Sun City West residents. The reasoning given was to extend the courtesy of making the decision to the school board that will assume office in January.

The change was prompted by complaints from Dysart officials and a decision by Deputy County Attorney Gene Neil that the supervisors had only a ministerial role in local school district bond sales, Supervisor Fred Koory said.

ADDITIONAL changes in the scope of the building may still be made. Original plans, drawn after a two-year citizens advisory committee report, called for a \$1.35 million project.

That was whittled down this school year after Sun City West members claimed existing space could be utilized. There are indications the three retirement community members taking their seats in January would like to see the building scaled down even further.

— MARK FLEMING

MOVE TO OUST WESTERS**School district plans remap**

By **CHERYL SWEET**
Staff Writer

Plans for Dysart Unified School District to disassociate itself from Sun City West have been brewing behind the scenes for quite some time.

Residents of Surprise, Waddell and El Mirage met recently to discuss the matter.

Outgoing school board president Margaret Baker said a subcommittee has been formed to decide on new district boundary lines that would exclude Sun City West.

THE GROUP is planning to initiate a petition for a special election, which requires signatures of 10 percent of district voters. The petition then will be submitted to the county school superintendent. The measure requires approval by a majority for passage.

Mrs. Baker said disassociation could occur as early as mid-February.

Although residents are beginning to actively pursue such action, Mrs. Baker said talk about the matter started about two years ago—when Sun City Westers took up residence.

RESIDENTS FEEL they have had little control over school affairs since

Westers moved into the area, she said.

"The parents felt in the beginning they wouldn't have a say-so with Sun City West in the area—they are not sympathetic and not interested in the children's needs.

"People here were scared that Sun City West was going to act the way they've been acting. But they didn't realize how much power they would have."

IF IT WEREN'T for the retirees, Mrs. Baker said the school would have \$27.5 million in bonds on the books and construction for a high school vocational facility would have been underway by now.

Westers led a successful drive to rescind the bond authorization in November and are protesting the construction of a vocational facility. They say they're in favor of vocational education, but against building a new facility before taking a closer look at existing buildings.

Many residents say these actions confirm their belief that Westers show greater concern for their tax dollars than for students.

THEY ALSO CONTEND the retirees ate action.

"If they don't want us in the district, I can't see us going ahead and staying in," Williams said.

But Mrs. Baker said school board members and Property Owners and Residents Association leaders have discussed the matter in the past and have privately said they favored pulling out of the district.

THESE PEOPLE have been talking about it for quite a while," she said.

"PORA has changed their tactics because the press was making them look bad by wanting to get out of the district."

Mrs. Baker said PORA's purpose is

are unfamiliar with students' problems and educational needs. Westers are viewed by many as outsiders who can't relate to the minority groups in the schools.

Robert Williams, chairman of the Sun City West Dysart School Affairs Committee, said that although a gap does exist between Westers and other residents, this has little bearing on their concern and capability in the school system.

"I really think it's a state of mind. Almost all the people here (in Sun City West) have had children and they've been on school boards and parent and teacher associations.

"I THINK WE probably know more than they like to admit," he added.

Williams also said there are two different groups within the communities—Hispanics and ranchers—yet nobody is making an issue out of that.

"We've upset a little rural district, but we're all for education," he said.

WILLIAMS SAID Westers have no plans for pulling out of the district, but they will go along with such plans if residents of the two communities initi-

outside of Sun City West. She said Westers are trying to upset the other district residents, so they will be the ones to initiate the disassociation.

LARRY CROSS, PORA treasurer and Loise Copes, PORA first vice president, say PORA directors have not taken a position on the disassociation.

"It they feel they want to petition to get us out of the district, then we'd have to bring it up at a PORA meeting," said Cross.

"But the school district would be smarter to not disassociate because they have a bigger tax base with us in," he added.

Newly elected Sun City West board members Ingelletta Hawkins and Rose

6A NEWS-SUN Monday, November 3, 1980

DISASSOCIATION FAVORED**Baker frets over SCW participation**By **CHERYL SWEET**
Staff Writer

The idea of Sun City Westers sitting on the Dysart School Board has caused concern in the district.

Some parents and school officials feel the schools may be better off if Sun City West pulled out of the district, says board president Margaret Baker.

And although no definite plans have been formulated, there has been talk about initiating a move to disassociate the community from the school district.

"I think it would be better if we excluded them," said Mrs. Baker.

Sun City West comprises well over half of the registered voters in the Dysart Unified School district.

Three Westers are running for four board seats in Tuesday's election. Also competing are incumbents Mrs. Baker, Don Overstreet, and Maria Resendes.

MRS. BAKER, who says Westers have the election in the bag, is

worried about a Sun City West-controlled board.

She says she is not convinced Westers' primary concern are the students in the district. "I think they ran for the board because Property Owners and Residents Association asked them to."

She says a lack of effort to become informed with the district's problems and unfamiliarity with the overwhelming Mexican-American population, are some things that have caused her concern.

"What is so frustrating is that here we have people who have moved into the district two years ago—who don't know our children, parents or the rest of the taxpayers in the district. They're coming in and completely controlling our decisions."

AND WHILE Mrs. Baker says many parents are also worried over a Wester-dominated board, this concern has turned to a feeling of powerless frustration.

Only one parent in the district with school children, besides Overstreet and Mrs. Baker, has de-

ecided to try her odds for the board.

More parents decided not to run "because people just feel like Sun City West will win. We can see they have the superior numbers."

Mrs. Baker said she is surprised Westers have not taken more steps to better inform themselves on the issues. She said Westers have access to almost everything board members do, but have not made use of the information.

"I'M VERY concerned with the attitudes they bring to the decision-making process."

Packets containing board agenda information, staff recommendations and other data are available to the public prior to board meetings, she said.

Because they have often failed to inform themselves before speaking, some Westers have made criticisms or recommendations on policies that have already been implemented, Mrs. Baker said.

"When they know they're going to be elected

to make decisions, I would think they would be getting all the material they could to study," she pointed out.

A MAJOR point of frustration facing district officials and parents, is the recent postponement of approval for a vocational facility on the Dysart campus.

"The situation for the vocational facility is upsetting."

Mrs. Baker said plans for the facility on the campus were initially discussed in 1973. And if it weren't for Westers, plans for construction probably would have already been approved, she said.

Money for the facility was to come from the sale of \$1.35 million in general obligation bonds. The funds, if approved, would be available from a \$2.8 million bond authorization approved in 1973.

HOWEVER, Wester board members recommended further study of existing facilities at a recent board meeting before approving construction of a new building.

Yet Mrs. Baker main-

tains the facility, which has already been given much consideration by school officials, is a necessity. And many people in the district object to Westers' input on plans that have been in the making for years.

"(Westers) want to be sure that any bond money spent is spent according to how they want it."

ANOTHER area Mrs. Baker expresses concern over is the lack of empathy Sun City Westers have with Hispanics in the district.

The Mexican-Americans, which Mrs. Baker says make up about 60 percent of the district's population, have particular problems she says Westers are not familiar with.

Mrs. Baker said parents have expressed concern over a Sun City West controlled-board. "The majority feeling here is negative."

Mrs. Baker says a top priority should be concentrating on improving students' self image, which is necessary to improve academic skills. This will re-

sult, she said, to a low drop-out rate, she said.

TUESDAY'S election offers few surprises for Westers. With the majority of registered voters residing in Sun City West Mrs. Baker says it is unlikely they will not support their three candidates.

Yet what happens after the election is another story—one which Mrs. Baker said could run a lot more smoothly if cooperation on the new board exists.

"I think its in the best interest for us to work together."

10/15/80

NEWS-SUN

Voters kill bond OK

Sun City Westers Tuesday voted overwhelmingly to rescind a \$27.5 million bond authorization for Dysart Unified School District.

The vote was 2,537 to 16.

The total vote, including Surprise, El Mirage, and Luke Air Force Base, was 2,703 to 88.

Robert Williams, chairman of the school affairs committee of Property Owners and Residents Association, estimated a 74 percent voter turnout of registered voters in Sun City West.

The election stemmed from a bond authorization for the district approved in June 1978. At that time, Sun City West residents had not moved into the district.

PORA collected 1,500 signatures in June to place the issue on the ballot.

Dysart still has \$2.8 million from a bond proposal approved in 1973. This is enough money for any building projects that the district would have this year, said Margaret Baker, Dysart school board president.

If the district grew, she said, the board could approve a smaller bond issue.

SCWesters plan strategy for 1980 school board vote

By RICHARD MOORE
Staff Writer

An increase in the number of registered voters in Sun City West is expected to have a tremendous effect on the Dysart Unified School District board election next year.

Three board seats will be filled in November.

One of the criticisms by Westers is that while their property taxes currently subsidize over 60 percent of the district's operational costs, (a figure Gene Wilson, outgoing president of the Property Owners and Residents Association, says will climb to 80 percent in 1980), there is no Sun City West representation on the school board.

Although most current PORA members have not openly suggested an attempt to withdraw completely from any financial responsibility to the school district, some candidates who ran in Monday's PORA election indicated this would be a priority they would work toward if elected.

"The district operated for quite a number of years before Sun City West came along," said Wayne Smith, district superintendent. "Our contacts in Sun City West have, however, for the most part, been positive."

Wilson said one of the main reasons he decided not to seek re-election to PORA was because he intends to work toward establishing Sun City West representation on the Dysart school board.

Although he has not announced his own candidacy for a board seat in November, he admits that he will run if the people of the Sun City West want him to.

Don Overstreet, who was appointed to fill the board vacancy created last February when Surprise Mayor George Cumbie resigned, says he believes he has a good chance of being elected.

Overstreet, a resident of Waddell, said his voting record on the board has not been against the interests of Sun City West.

Mrs. Margaret Baker, who has

served on the board for seven years, is less optimistic.

"I'm leaning toward running for another term, but I don't feel I have a chance if the majority of voters are from Sun City West," the Peoria resident said.

Mrs. Baker, who received 97 percent of the vote in the last election, said she doesn't feel that should the next school board be controlled by Sun City West residents, the results necessarily would be negative.

"I'm very optimistic that they would respond to the educational needs of the children," she said.

Elray Sampson of El Mirage also will be up for re-election. Sampson, who was not available for comment, has been criticized by several different groups in the school district.

One of the concerns expressed by some current board members, as well as school officials and residents in the district, is his high absenteeism rate. Sampson's job reportedly takes him out of the area for long periods and some say this has been detrimental.

Whatever the case, one thing is certain: Sun City West residents will control the majority vote in next year's election and many officials from the Dysart school district expect that any candidates supported by PORA probably will be elected.

"I don't know what the outcome will be," said board member Sam Openshaw of Waddell. "It appears they will have overwhelming voter strength and they seem to be pretty well united. However, sometimes elections can fool you!"

Sun City West seeks to block school bonding

SUN CITY WEST — The Property Owners and Residents Association has obtained enough signatures to place on the November ballot the question of rescinding Dysart Unified School District's \$27.5 million bond authorization.

The organization collected more than 1,500 signatures on its petitions. Only 500 signatures were required.

"The community got behind the move to rescind the authorization and filled out the petitions," said association member Robert Williams.

The association was to present the petitions to the Dysart School Board on Monday. The petitions will be sent to Richard Harris, Maricopa County school superintendent, before the issue is placed on the ballot.

Residents oppose the bond authorization on the grounds that it was approved in June 1978 — before anyone was living in Sun City West.

Sun City West residents did not have a chance to voice their opinions concerning the authorization, said association member Gene Wilson.

"We do not like taxation without representation," he said.

The group also contends the district does not need the funds.

Although the schools were designed to hold 4,400 students, enrollment has declined from 3,800 five years ago to about 3,500.

If the bond is rescinded, however, Dysart would have only the \$2.8 million remaining from a bond authorization approved in 1973.

The organization began collecting signatures about a month ago. On May 19 the group had collected only 500 signatures.

"If you just get the minimum signatures required, you always wonder if the public is really behind the move so we wanted to get some extra signatures," Williams said.

"Although we only needed 500 signatures, the additional ... signatures put an exclamation point on the petitions, telling the district officials we want the authorization rescinded," he said.

Even though the board has resisted the bond revocation, Board President Margaret Baker said there are not enough voters in the district living outside Sun City West to oppose the move.

Fifty-six percent of the district's registered voters live in Sun City West, so the retirees could easily rescind the authorization, she said.

Of the 3,618 registered voters in the district, 2,043 live in Sun City West, according to the Maricopa County Elections Department.

SC West, Dysart school considering separate ways

By Bob Fell
News Editor

Officials of Dysart School District and the Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association are considering going their separate ways.

Meetings are being held to discuss the feasibility of holding an election on the issue of Sun City West withdrawing from Dysart School District and becoming an unorganized district

similar to Sun City and Youngtown.

Several years ago, Sun City separated from the Peoria School District and residents in the unorganized district pay school taxes of \$2.19, including \$1.25 for state, 50 cents for county and 44 cents for Peoria unorganized district bonds.

In a letter to school board members, Margaret T. Baker, chairman, calls attention to court decisions in

other states which have ruled that reliance on the local property tax to finance education is unconstitutional because it results in too many inequities.

Presently before the Arizona Legislature is a school financing bill that would decrease reliance on the property tax to finance education. That bill, however, did not receive the two-thirds majority in the Senate required for an emergency measure.

Without emergency clause, the bill would not become effective until next year.

Effect of the bill would be to increase the tax rate and erase bond authorization from the books in five years, according to Mrs. Baker.

She also notes that in 1978 the tax rate in the district was \$8.26. In 1979, it was \$4.26 (because of the development of Sun City West

within the district and increasing the total assessed value). The 1980 projected tax, if Sun City West remains in the district, is estimated at \$2.13.

But with the proposed legislation, the 1980 tax rate will be approximately \$6.55 in the Dysart District.

PORA officials had been considering a move to rescind the 1978 \$27 million bond issue and campaign to elect three members to the five-member board of education.

However, second thoughts are being considered when Sun City West taxpayers are faced with an estimated \$6.55 in school taxes, compared with about \$2.67 as an unorganized school district.

On the other side, there is the "power" consideration with a majority of the board from Sun City West. Parents and long-time residents of the original Dysart School District would lose control.

VF SCW DYSART SCHOOL DISTRICT APRIL 2, 1980

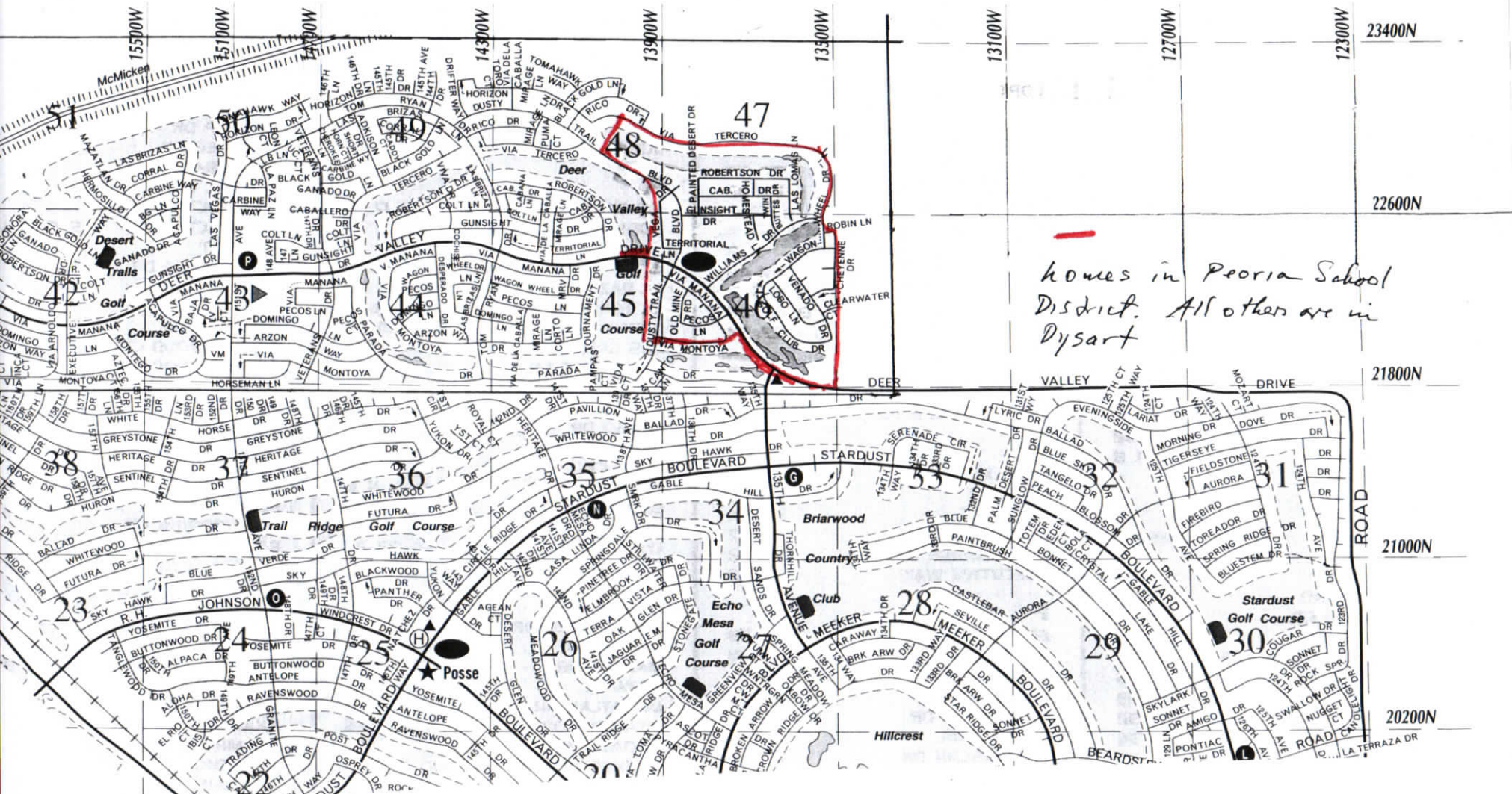
In considering what is the best action for the future of the schools, it would appear to be a separation of Sun City West and Dysart School District, according to Mrs. Baker. But that would require both sides to cast a majority vote in favor of the separation.

The first step would be to file a petition with the county superintendent of schools. After a check of the voter registration lists, a date is set for the election. If both sides cast 51 percent or more favorable to separation, the district is then reorganized with Dysart reverting to its original boundaries and Sun City West becoming an unorganized school district.

Advantages to the Dysart School District would be that parents and older residents would be able to retain control. The disadvantage under the new school bill would amount to nothing because the district would be assured the same amount and would share in the state tax for capital outlay.

The advantage to Sun City West would be considerable savings in taxes, according to PORA officials.

SCW



homes in Peoria School District. All other are in Dysart

THE WESTER Thursday, August 2, 2001

SCW no longer represented on Dysart School Board

AG's opinion waffles on liability as District is immobilized by resignations

By Beth Carlino

All Sun City West members of the Dysart Board of Education have resigned, and the Board now consists of only one person, Surprise resident, Diana Bass.

Doris Flax submitted her letter of resignation on July 24 and thereby became the fourth board member to relinquish the position. All have resigned because of concern with liability issues involving the location of Dysart High and Elementary Schools. The schools are in what has been deemed the "high-accident poten-

tial zone" of Luke Air Force Base.

Unless SCW residents have already submitted applications to fill the vacant positions, the community, which previously had total control of the Board, will have no representation.

Stated Edith Perez, administrative director of the County School Superintendent's office, "This office has received 12 applications or letters of interest for the Board positions. Beginning next week, Dr. Sandra Dowling,

County Superintendent of Education, will conduct interviews and fill the four positions as soon as possible."

Perez would not comment on whether or not any of the 12 applicants lived in SCW. Therefore, it is possible that residents of the "expansion area," although they pay taxes to the Dysart school system, will no longer have input or impact on the Governing Board.

Views of those living in that area vary regarding the issue of "taxation without representation." States Ann Walton, "The four people who resigned have done disservice to the school children and the SCW people who voted them in. They've left the taxpayers without representation."

Long-time community resident Victoria Mauro remarked, "The Board members resigned rightly so. They should not be held liable for negligence should an accident occur."

Having lived in the expansion area three years, Joyce and John Gaddis said, "We have no problem with paying our share of the taxes. It doesn't bother us not to be represented; it's time for parents in the district to assume membership on the Board."

In her resignation letter, Flax states, "The commander of Luke, Brig. Gen. Stephen Sargeant, has officially stated that schools should not be located in that area (the high-accident potential zone)."

OVER

She added that Attorney General Janet Napolitano's recently-stated opinion "addresses the issue of liability by stating that the statute (Senate Bill 1525) does not create liability by its terms, but in the very next sentence states that liability in any particular situation requires analysis of specific facts pertaining to that situation.

"While the School Facilities Board may not be bound to pay attention to the military's recommendation, I see no way that a prudent school board member can ignore the fact that the schools are located in a danger zone.

"I am a parent/grandparent/educator. I cannot live with sending children into an identified dangerous situation!"

In her statement of opinion, Napolitano differentiated between the geographics of being "in" or "near" an accident potential zone. She interpreted Senate Bill 1525 to allow construction of new schools "near" such zones (but not "in") and to allow expansion of existing schools "in" those zones.

Thus, the interpretation will allow Dysart High and Elementary Schools to remain "in" the

accident potential zone and for the high school to be improved and expanded.

Napolitano's opinion stated, "SB 1525 does not preclude the construction of new schools near a high noise or accident potential zone or the operation, improvement, or expansion of existing schools either in, or near, a high noise or accident potential zone. The legislation also does not, by its terms, impose any new civil liability for the operation or expansion of an existing school in or near high noise or accident potential zones. Whether or not the statutes might otherwise affect liability in any particular situation requires the analysis of specific facts and is not addressed in this formal legal opinion.

The final sentence in the above quotation, in which Napolitano leaves open the liability issue, further corroborates the position of the four resigning board members, all of whom cited concerns with liability.

These concerns are not without basis. Resigning member Bob Koch forwarded to this reporter an article in the Tucson "Arizona Daily Star" dated Oct. 15, 1998, describing the crash of a military jet on Oct. 26, 1978.

The article described the experience of Capt. Frederick L. Ashler as he came close to the conclusion of an uneventful flight from Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, where his plane had undergone routine maintenance. At the edge of the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base runway, he heard popping, similar to a car

without a muffler.

Ashler aimed his plane toward a football field. The plane was on a path to hit the field when it banked and hit on a crowded street. It set afire a string of parked and moving cars. Ashler had already ejected.

The plummeting jet narrowly missed a nearby junior high school which was close to the Air Force Base runway. But the crash killed two sisters who were parking their car. They were burned beyond recognition.

Five people were hurt when the military jet plummeted to the ground, close to the school which was in session.

The crash prompted a review and generated a policy to reduce military overflights of Tucson.

This is the fear of the resigning board members.

Meanwhile, the Dysart school system is immobilized, unable to proceed on making significant decisions because there exists only one remaining board member.

District employees are not being paid, no budget has been passed, and decisions regarding the construction of the new elementary school, Countryside, have not been made. The school, scheduled for opening in August 2002, may be delayed.

Countryside School will be built on a site originally banned by the State Facilities Board. Napolitano's opinion would now allow for construction on that site.

The SFB's reversal of its original decision was based upon the

Dysart parents say school board unrepresentative

Ward system urged for diversity

By Lori Baker
The Arizona Republic

EL MIRAGE — Jim Skonhovd is so disenchanted with the Dysart Unified School District that he pulled his daughters out of Kingswood Elementary School this school year.

He's upset with the school board, not the teachers.

"Parents are displeased because we don't have a voice with the Dysart board," said Skonhovd, whose 6- and 9-year-old daughters now attend a charter school, Paradise Education Center in Surprise. "They let us talk at board meetings, but they don't listen."

With Sun City West residents controlling the board, Skonhovd said, diversity is not represented.

Things would be better if Dysart had a ward system for electing board members, he said. Dysart would have board members elected from each of five geographical wards.

Although Dysart tried unsuccessfully to implement a ward system in 1996, the idea is being debated again.

During the November 1996 ward election, three board mem-

bers were elected. But Citizens for Tax Equity, a group of Sun City West residents, successfully challenged the ward system in court. Subsequently, four Sun City West residents were elected to the board.

At last week's board meeting, Dysart board member Mitch Eickmann said he'd like to see the ward system resurrected. Several parents, including Skonhovd, spoke in favor.

Skonhovd said he attends board meetings because his youngest daughter is a preschooler at Kingswood and he hopes that the unrest in the district will be settled so his older daughters can return.

Eickmann said he wants Dysart officials to push for a change in state law to allow a ward system.

Dysart's lawyers recently drafted a bill and submitted it to Gov. Jane Hull to consider for the 1999 legislative session.

Eickmann also suggests asking the U.S. Department of Justice to impose a ward system as a requirement to protect minority voting rights. That would su-

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persede state law.

"A whole community of people have been alienated from this process," Eickmann said. "Race is a factor in this."

About three-fourths of Dysart's residents are minority. Dysart now has an all-Anglo board.

Current board members from Sun City West have repeatedly said that they represent all Dysart residents from all ethnic backgrounds. This year, the board twice passed resolutions supporting the idea of increasing minority representation on the board, but nothing concrete was done about it.

Board member Rose Parker said she wants to consider alternative election methods because she believes it's important to have minorities and parents represented on the board.

"It was very disturbing to me that there were no minority candidates for the board election (on Tuesday)," Parker said. "I wish there were a way to get people more involved."

Parker and three other Dysart board members live in the Sun City West expansion area. They don't have children or grandchildren in the district.

Nancy Harrower, a Sun City

West expansion area resident, was re-elected to a four-year term Tuesday. Election officials have not yet announced which of the three write-in candidates won the second board seat now held by Eickmann. They hope to do so by Tuesday. One candidate is from Sun City West and does not have children in the district, and the other two are Surprise parents.

"Under the current circumstances, only one community of interest will have meaningful representation on the board for at least three more years," said Eickmann, who has children in the district. "The obvious inequity of this situation goes without saying and is likely to be exacerbated by continued growth within Dysart."

Three Dysart board members who had been elected to represent wards in November 1996 were ordered by a Superior Court judge to run for election again as at-large candidates.

One board member, Richard McComb, who is Surprise city manager, decided not to run. Rachel Villanueva and Mary Johnson lost their re-election bid in a November 1997 special election, and Sun City West expansion area residents Bob Koch, Eleanor R. Nelson and Parker won. Harrower won a seat

during a recall election in March and captured a four-year term Tuesday.

Koch, who is board president, said he welcomes proposals from the community about how a ward system should work and what the district should do to get it implemented.

He said the proposals would be reviewed by Dysart's lawyer, Don Peters.

Villanueva said the community trusts neither the board members nor Peters because they were involved in getting the old ward system thrown out.

However, she said she believes that the board should appoint a committee of community members to form proposals for a ward system.

Mary Izaguirre, a parent of two Dysart district students and an El Mirage school secretary, said she doesn't understand why there would be a problem with school districts having ward systems. After all, she said, the state and some cities are divided into districts for electing representatives.

"Having equal representation would be better," Izaguirre said. "People from different areas could work together."

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz. Wednesday, Feb. 3, 1999

Sun Citians support schools

Donate \$196,000 to Dysart district

By KIM ANTONIOU
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun Citians take care of their own, and the Dysart Unified School District has the bank statements to prove it.

Out of 1,155 tax credit donations paid to Dysart, a whopping 980 came from the pockets of neighboring Sun City and Sun City West residents, totaling 86 percent — or \$196,000 — of the \$230,345 taken in by the district.

Superintendent Margo Seck released the numbers at Tuesday's governing board meeting.

Broken down, the tax credit money provided \$110,380 for programs at Dysart High School, \$37,400 for El Mirage Elementary, \$36,905 for Dysart Middle School, \$24,010 for Surprise Elementary, \$11,000 for Kingswood Elementary and \$10,650 for Luke Elementary. The funding equates to roughly \$42 per student.

Seck was pleased. "After all calculations are completed, Dysart will have the highest average in Arizona," she said.

"I think this is important for the community to know about, because seniors have been dragged through the mud around here lately," board member Eleanor Nelson said after the meeting, referring to comments parents in the district have made regarding seniors' reluctance to spend money on education.

In another financial matter, the board gave the district the nod to submit an application for the second phase of Students FIRST funding. The district will present information on enrollment forecasts, available local funds and new construction plans — which include proposed purchases of school sites and new construction for an elementary school at Greenway and Reems roads, as well as additions at El Mirage and Surprise elementaries.

"We think we have enough data ... to ask for additions at those two schools," logistical planner Thomas Murphy said. "Also, we are qualified to ask for a new school, and we intend to do so." The application deadline is Friday, Murphy said.

Is it possible for a district that drew more than \$200,000 in tax credits to raise enough money to build a new school without calling for a bond?

It's never happened before in Arizona, but Dysart Superintendent

Margo Seck says yes. That is Seck's vision for Legacy School, a preschool for 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds in the Dysart Unified School District.

"There are a lot of grant monies out there," Seck told the governing board and audience of roughly 50 people at Tuesday's meeting. "This won't cost the board anything; it's based on donations. Basically, it's built upon whatever the public wants to give."

Citing the successful six-week drive for tax credits, Seck suggested that funds to help build the school might also come from donations from the Sun Cities, the Northwest Valley and developers.

"I don't care whether people donate one, two, three, four dollars, \$5,000, \$10,000," Seck said after the meeting. "They can buy a door for the school, buy a brick. And I think we'll get this done. But it'll take time."

Money isn't the only resource needed to build the new school, Seck noted. "I'd like to bring in retirees — architects, engineers — to help with the planning," she said. "We can accomplish a lot if we put our heads together."

Right now, Seck has "no idea" how many students Legacy School may accommodate, how much money it may require, or how long it may take to build.

"We'll probably build it in segments as funding becomes available," she said. "I'm not worried about details right now; I just think we need to rally around a cause for the kids."

The superintendent — formerly an administrator in the wealthier Paradise Valley district — conceded her time at Dysart has changed her approach to education. "There have to be advocates for districts like Dysart," she said.

"They don't have the same chances other districts do.

"When I was in a wealthier district, I didn't know Dysart had problems. But when decisions come down to 'Are you going to buy computers, or fix the roof?' ... you know it's time to do something. And I think all children should have the same opportunities."

Seck believes the time is right to push for Legacy School.

"Perceptions of the district have changed, and perception is reality," she said. "If this happens, it'll be the first time in the state. It'll draw attention to the Northwest Valley, and that's what I'm after."

No Dysart parents on school board

By Lori Baker

The Arizona Republic

With voters' blessing, the Dysart Unified School District board will be composed entirely of Sun City West expansion-area residents who don't have children at district schools.

Len Guy, a retired business executive, will be the final person to join the five-member board. Guy was elected as a write-in candidate with 1,397 votes. Results were released on Thursday by county officials.

Guy bested Surprise parents Donna Hartell, a construction company project manager who received 65 write-in votes, and Dennis Roehler, a Paradise Valley Unified School District maintenance supervisor who garnered 581 write-in votes.

Roehler, the father of two preschoolers, said he plans to run again in 2000.

"I hope that the members of the board are truly looking out for the kids," he said. "We'll be keeping our eyes on them."

Hartell, who was the first of the three to become a write-in candidate, called for the resignation of the five Sun City West residents elected to the board.

"Just because you hate the fact that families are moving in around you and you can't control it doesn't mean that you have the right to decide what education that our kids will get," Hartell said in a prepared statement.

— Please see **NO PARENTS**, Page 3

— **NO PARENTS**, from Page 1

She said she would work toward getting the district's election system switched from an at-large system to a ward system to make it easier for parents to be elected to the board.

Nancy Harrower, a certified legal assistant and a Sun City West resident, had won re-election during the Nov. 3 election. She was the only candidate to have her name on the ballot, which listed two open seats. The Rev. Mitch Eickmann, a father of Dysart students and who has served for four years, did not seek another term.

Harrower joined the board in March after capturing a seat during a recall election against longtime board member Pamela Justice, whose term would have expired in December.

Eickmann said he is saddened that a parent didn't win a seat on the board.

"It's a real sorry state when a parent doesn't have a chance to say anything about their child's education," he said.

He blasted the Citizens for Tax Equity, a group of Sun City West expansion-area residents, for endorsing a Sun City West resident rather than allowing the two parents to compete for a seat.

CTE President Ron Fernandez said he believed that Guy's business knowledge would be an asset to Dysart. Guy is the fifth board member CTE had endorsed.

Guy and Harrower will begin their four-year terms in January.

Board President Robert Koch and members Rose Parker and Eleanor R. Nelson, all of Sun City West, were elected during a special election in November 1997 to terms that expire in December 2000. The court-ordered election was held because a Maricopa County Superior Court judge had ruled that Dysart's ward system for electing board members was unconstitutional.

Three board members elected in November 1996 were told to seek election again or step down from their seats. Richard McComb did not seek re-election, while Rachel Villanueva and Mary Johnson unsuccessfully tried to keep their seats.

CTE had challenged the ward system and sought the recall of Justice. The group, however, was unsuccessful in its attempt to de-annex the Sun City West expansion area, Sun Village in Surprise and a portion of Youngtown from the Dysart district.

Nelson said she was disappointed that a parent didn't win a seat on the board. However, she said she didn't believe that Hartell or Roehler had the right qualifications for the job.

"Just because we don't have parents on the board doesn't mean that we don't know what is best for the children," she said. "In the last year since the seniors took over, it has been evident that we have the children's welfare at heart."

Nelson pointed to the discovery earlier this year that the district had about \$1.8 million in unused funds; the restoration of several student

programs in the fall; and getting a new district administration in place.

She said board members will get parents' perspective about the district through site council members at the schools, comments made at board meetings and members of the ad hoc financial review committee. Roehler is on the financial panel.

Koch said he doesn't think the absence of a parent from the board will make a difference.

"I don't want to downgrade parents, but parents tend to have a narrow view of what's going on," he said. "The number one issue for the district is to make it run efficiently and bring us into the modern era with technology."

Guy, who has 31 years' experience with a Fortune 500 company, said he believes his business expertise will help improve the district's efficiency. He said wants to encourage residents to participate in the tax-credit program through which they would give up to \$200 to Dysart for extracurricular programs and receive a \$200 tax credit on their state income tax.

Harrower, too, would like to see the district look for innovative ways to do its business. She also is working with classified employees to review their job descriptions and salaries.

Raising student test scores is vital, she said.

"Anybody who really cares about the children have to be concerned about the test scores, because it reflects directly on what the children are learning," Harrower said.

New group plans Dysart takeover

Recall drive targets SC West school board members

By KATY BORNHOFEN
Independent Newspapers

A new faction in the contentious Dysart Unified School District is preparing to take over the board.

A group of Sun Cities, Peoria and Surprise residents calling themselves Citizens for Education Equity — varying the name of a group that previously tried to deannex from the district and four of whose members presently control the school board — began meeting May 14 to plot a strategy to retake control of the school board.

Those who attended the first meeting indicated they should recall most, if not all, of the four Citizens for Tax Equity-sponsored school board members: President Robert Koch, Rose Parker, Eleanor R. Nelson and Nancy Harrower.

All four board members live in Sun City West.

Three were elected to the board in November. Mrs. Harrower won her seat March 10 when 13-year board member Pam Justice was recalled.

”

I can't see into someone's heart. All I can see is their behavior. The behavior of the current school board concerns me.

The Rev. Walter Wieder
Minister, Unitarian Universalist Church of the Sun Cities, and a member of a new group looking to recall four Sun City West residents who control the Dysart School Board.

“I can't see into someone's heart,” said the Rev. Walter Wieder. “All I can see is their behavior. The behavior of the current school board concerns me.”

Mr. Wieder is minister of Unitarian Universalist Church of the Sun Cities, which is planning to build a church near the West Valley Art Museum in Surprise. Because the church will be in the community, he said he believes he has a stake in what happens at Dysart even though he does not represent the church when participating in political activities.

Mr. Wieder said the four board members CEE is targeting are more concerned with achieving goals laid out by the Sun City West organization.

“They remain tied to CTE, which has steadfastly refused to sit down with other stakeholders,” Mr. Wieder said. “They are committed to playing hardball politics.”

Mr. Wieder has admonished school board members at meetings, most recently to oppose their moving public comment to the end of the agenda.

“They really don't want input from the community. The only input they'll take is input that is shoved down their throat,” he said.

Richard Snyder, another vocal CTE opponent, was named treasurer for a political action committee the new group plans to form. Don Dunn was named chairman. Organizations filing for PAC status must specify those two offices. Forming a PAC will allow the group to raise money for their pro-

posed recall effort, as well as the November board election.

“Do we have the energy to field any candidates? If so, how many? Who?” Mr. Wieder asked. “I clearly want to avoid a generational conflict. ... It's not old people against young people.”

Former board member Rachel Villanueva added, “I feel there's a lot of qualified retirees who could do a better job than the people who are there.”

The Rev. Mitchell Eickmann, the fifth school board member who has opposed many of the other four members' actions, also attended the CEE meeting.

“I think we need to have a balance of people on the board,” he said.

There are no Hispanics on the board, although the district is 70 percent Hispanic. A ward system designed to encourage minority participation was thrown out by a judge after CTE successfully challenged its legality.

Mr. Eickmann's term, along with Mrs. Harrower's, will expire in November. CEE members were undecided who would be the target of a recall. Board members must be

in office for six months before a recall against them can be filed. The six-month point for Mr. Koch, Mrs. Nelson and Mrs. Parker was May 15 — the day after CEE's meeting, said Mrs. Justice.

Mrs. Justice criticized the three board members for limiting their focus to Dysart's financial matters. She said when she was still on the board, Mr. Koch mentioned he did not know state law specifies school board members' job descriptions, which include responsibility for curriculum and programs. He said he was just a “numbers man,” Mrs. Justice said.

Mr. Koch refused to comment on Mrs. Justice's allegation.

Mr. Eickmann agreed, saying board members have repeatedly told the public they found at least \$1 million in unallocated district funds.

“The whole purpose of this mythical million dollars has been to discredit the administration — the minorities and Anglos alike,” Mr. Eickmann said.

“The reality is, we don't have the capital to deal with the capital needs. We don't have the M&O (maintenance and operations) to

deal with the M&O needs. ... The only way we can be restored to anywhere near ground zero is — son of a gun — an override.

“The board members who are currently present are not responsible for money that is there. ... They are responsible for zero dollars and zero cents of it,” he said.

Citizens for Educational Equity is forming a search committee to look for board candidates.

Editor's note: Katy Bornhofen is editor of the Surprise Independent.

Dysart's extra cash took too long to find, critics say

— **DYSART'S**, from Page A1

because the programs had been canceled.

Valencia, who has played since third grade, is hopeful that band will be among the programs restored, and he's already signed up for the class.

He was happy to find out that money is available but he's concerned about the misrepresentation of the district's financial situation during the past school year.

"I'm not looking at who to blame but who is going to rescue the programs," said Valencia, who this year has attended most board meetings as the high school's representative.

It took nearly the entire school year to find out the district's true financial situation. A change in business managers and an almost entirely new school board triggered the financial investigation.

In February, business manager David Hammond told the board he had uncovered about \$1 million in unallocated money in the budget. Wondering what else might be found, the board hired Coopers & Lybrand to do an audit.

On Thursday, the accounting firm showed the board that \$1.9 million was available to spend.

The money includes funds carried over from the previous year, donations, building rental income, increased state funding because of new students, money no longer needed to pay legal expenses and money unspent because employees were not hired as planned.

Robert Sampieri, a Coopers & Lybrand auditor, said it's unusual for a school district to be unaware of its financial situation this late in the school year.

"It's a pleasant surprise that it went in a positive direction," Sampieri said. "Often districts that don't have a handle on their budget have financial problems."

The found money is a surprise, yes, but not as pleasant as it could have been, board members said. A lot of hard feelings could have been avoided if they had received regular financial reports as in previous years. The information might have allowed them to restore cut programs, they said.

Board members will meet at 3 p.m. Friday to decide which programs could be reinstated for the next school year as well as giving employees raises, hiring more staff and making building repairs.

Board member Mitch Eickmann, who has served for three years, blamed Hammond for why board members weren't aware of district's finances this year.

"There were opportunities to amend our budget in September and December but no information was given to the board about that from the business manager," Eickmann said.

Arizona, with 73 percent of its students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches.

The Sun City West expansion area is considered middle class with a predominantly Anglo population.

Former board member Pamela Justice, who was recalled in March after 12 years on the board, said she doesn't buy Hammond's explanations.

"The district couldn't have been in such a financial condition that it

took 10 months to find out about this money," Justice said. "It's bizarre."

Mary Izaguirre, a Dysart parent who works in the district, said she wants the finger-pointing to stop.

"I want to concentrate on the future and how the money will be spent to help kids," Izaguirre said.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

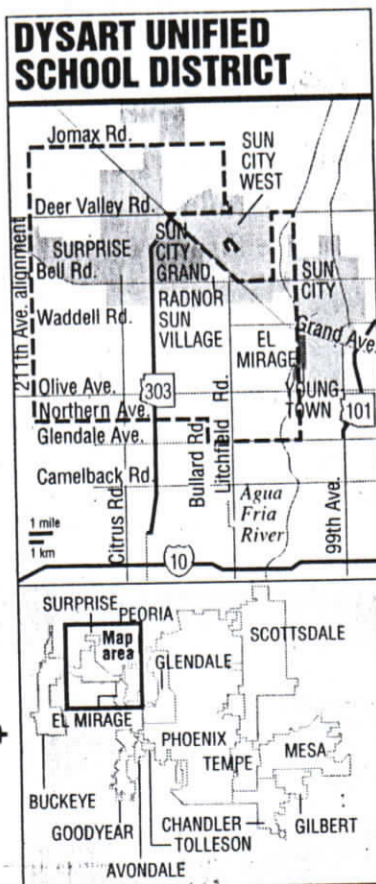
Hammond said that he has spent the past several months fixing problems in the district's financial reporting system and that he could not present information sooner to the board.

The district, which serves 4,300 students from Luke Air Force Base, Surprise and El Mirage, began taking a closer look at the finances at the urging of three new Dysart board members, all Sun City West expansion-area residents, who were elected in November. A fourth Sun City West expansion-area resident was elected in March during a recall election.

"It bothers me that the children were led to believe that we (senior citizens) were at fault," said board president Bob Koch, one of the Sun City West residents.

He said he also was concerned about the racial tensions that have occurred among students, parents and board members.

Seventy-five percent of Dysart students are minorities. Dysart is one of the poorest districts in



Dysart audit compounds confusion

Errors, oversights cloud fiscal picture

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

When it comes to finances in the Dysart Unified School District, answers don't come easy.

It seems even the professionals are having a hard time with it.

An audit of the 1996-97 budget, conducted by the Scottsdale firm Cronstrom and Trbovich and delivered to Dysart Business Manager David Hammond on Monday,

shows that more than \$2.8 million remained in the budget at the end of the last fiscal year.

But Hammond, after reviewing just one budget component, Debt Service, has already found a substantial error. Listed at \$496,164 in the audit, it should actually be about \$270,000. "They've already admitted to this one," said Hammond, who hasn't had time for an in-depth review.

The error amounted to a

difference in the way interest on bonds was calculated. "It was just an oversight. I missed it and he missed it," said Sandy Cronstrom, a partner in the firm.

"There's money left in the budget, but not \$3 million. Hopefully, I'll be able to explain it," she said.

The firm, in the third year of a five-year contract to conduct the state-required audit, will present its findings to the board at Tuesday night's regular meeting.

"The state of the district's books is such that any examination is more complicated than anyone anticipated," said Board President Robert Koch.

To Bill Nelson, who presented a report on Dysart's finances at a Tuesday night meeting of Citizens for Tax Equity, one thing is clear: sports, music and other student programs did not need to be cut last year.

CTE is a Sun City West expansion group that failed in an attempt to deannex from the district, but succeeded in electing four members to the school board. Nelson's wife,

Eleanor, is one of them.

"My message is that all the evidence indicates that this money was there and they (the previous board members) had to know," he said.

It's generally agreed that money remains available for spending in this year's budget, but exactly how much is still unclear. In late March the board voted to spend up to \$29,500 to hire Phoenix-based accounting firm Coopers & Lybrand to examine the district's finances and clear up the questions. Estimated to take two weeks, the company delayed the review to take

care of more pressing business, but will resume on Monday, Hammond said.

Hammond, who joined the district last July, uncovered some of the discrepancies after analyzing each one of the district's 5,000 accounts.

While he's trying to prepare a budget readoption for this year, he's been busy answering questions from, well, just about everyone, including staff, the board, district patrons, the media, auditors and, this week, the state Department of Education.

► See Dysart business, A5

Dysart business manager mired in bookkeeping maze

◀ From A1

In a letter received April 24, State Director of School Finance Richard Wiggall informed the district of a \$21,841 overdraft in the 1996-97 Maintenance and Operation budget, as well as adjustments of \$220,000 to the capital budget limit. Again, Hammond disagrees with several of the figures.

"We spent a half day yes-

terday (Wednesday) going over the entire thing with them," he said. "I keep going backwards trying to get stuff fixed."

Meanwhile, board members met Thursday afternoon to begin work on the 1998-99 budget, though the district's financial situation remains elusive and the state Legislature has yet to approve a budget, which includes funding for schools.

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Both sides call truce for Dysart

Big decisions ahead for board, members say

By Lori Baker
The Arizona Republic

Senior citizens and Dysart Unified School District parents and staff called for a truce in the bickering over the school district's operations.

The message repeated over and over by speakers at last week's board meeting was: Leave the past in the past and focus now on helping children get a good education.

De-annexation was defeated at the polls on March 10, and Sun City West resident Nancy Harrower, a certified legal assistant, was elected to serve the rest of the board term that ends Dec. 31. Pamela Justice, who had served 12 years on the Dysart board, was recalled by voters.

Justice received a standing ovation at the board meeting after several people thanked her for her service to the district.

Harrower joins a board that includes three Sun City West residents who were elected in November to serve terms through Dec. 31, 2000. The fifth member, the Rev. Mitch Eickmann, who has served three years, is the only one with children in the district.

Board members have many decisions to make in the next few weeks.

"We all have to come together and trust one another," board member Rose Parker said. "We need to get Dysart back on its feet. I want to improve everything. I know it won't happen overnight."

Parker suggested that board members have a series of meetings with Superintendent Jesus de la Garza and other administrators to discuss the district's operations and the challenges facing the board.

De la Garza said he welcomed the opportunity to work with interested parties on how the communities can work together toward common goals.

"It's a time for healing and it is a time to come together," de la Garza said.

In addition, Elias "Buster" Estrada, presi-

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Dysart opponents urge truce, work on problems

— **DYSART**, from Page 1

dent of the Dysart Education Association, made a plea to the senior citizens in attendance to help Dysart.

"Let the past be the past. We all need to work together to make this a great district," Estrada said.

The uncertainty of the district's financial situation is one of the most pressing matters facing the board. Board members agreed to spend up to \$30,000 to hire a financial consultant to determine how much money is available to the district, but a bid has not been awarded.

Dysart business manager David Hammond estimated that about \$1 million may be available in this year's budget, but board members want to verify his information.

"Things are up in the air until we know what money we have," Eickmann said. "We should have been given this information much earlier in the school year."

Eickmann said he's pleased that the other board members said they want to work together for the betterment of the district. But he said he is cautious about the future because the board members were associated with Citizens for Tax Equity, a group of

Sun City West expansion area residents who helped defeat repeated override and bond proposals.

"Their (board members) actions will speak for themselves," he said.

Board members last week authorized administrators to reopen "meet-and-confer" negotiations with the Dysart Education Association to consider giving teachers raises and bonuses for professional growth for the current school year if additional funds are available.

In addition, board members approved scheduling meet-and-confer sessions between administrators and teachers' union representatives to discuss employee salaries for the next school year. Board members are scheduled to vote on an agreement with teachers before April 15, the deadline for offering contracts to district employees for the next school year.

Board members have not begun discussing the budget for the 1998-99 fiscal year, which starts July 1. They are likely to talk about whether they can restore some of the programs that had been cut this school year including athletics, art, music and physical education.

Another issue is whether to extend

de la Garza's contract by one year beyond the current expiration of July 1, 2000. Board members are now evaluating the superintendent.

The district's future growth is a long-term issue. Surprise has several residential developments under construction or planned that are expected to add hundreds of students to Dysart.

How the district should get ready for the expected growth has yet to be determined by board members. The district has no bond money available to construct new schools.

While some developers plan to donate land to the district, administrators are concerned that the sites are not large enough or are in bad locations for schools.

Additionally, the state Legislature is considering new school funding that would give schools like Dysart money for construction. Also, some Dysart board members want to continue pushing Surprise to levy impact fees on developers to help pay for school construction even though Surprise officials have said they cannot legally do that.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

Dysart vote doesn't end split

De-annexation backers vow to find new plan

By Lori Baker

The Arizona Republic

EL MIRAGE — With de-annexation's defeat, Citizens for Tax Equity leaders say they will focus on improving the efficiency of the Dysart Unified School District.

ELECTION



"We're disappointed with the vote, but we plan to work within the parameters the voters have given us," said Ron Fernandez, president of the group, which has led efforts to defeat over-

ride and bond proposals in recent years. "We will find cost-effective measures to streamline the overhead of the school district while giving the children the programs they need to achieve a proper education," he said. "It's always been about the welfare of the children and tax equity."

Voters on Tuesday rejected a proposal by the tax group to allow most of the Sun City West expansion area, Sun Village in Surprise and 18 Youngtown homes to no longer be part of the district and no longer be obligated to pay Dysart primary property taxes.

Approval required a majority vote among people in the areas targeted for de-annexation and voters in the rest of the district. According to unofficial results, among people in the de-annexation areas, the vote was 2,059 to 306 in favor of de-annexing; in the rest of the district, the vote was 2,327 to 127 against.

The Rev. Mitchell Eickmann, one of only two members of the five-member Dysart school board who wanted to keep the retirement community in the district, said he is afraid the three board members who live in Sun City West will try to sabotage the Dysart schools with funding cuts.

"I have a hard time believing that since they've lost this election that they're going to all the sudden change their feelings about the school district," Eickmann said. "I think they will definitely make some vindictive moves against the district because they didn't get their way in the vote."

Eleanor R. Nelson, one of the board members from Sun City West, said Eickmann is wrong.

"When we were elected in November, he said the same thing, that we would sabotage the district. We have no intention of doing that," she said. "We will continue to work for the welfare of the children."

The three board members, for example, prodded district officials into delving into the budget, and that resulted in the discovery of \$1 million in unallocated money for the current fiscal year.

"We have already discovered money

— DYSART, from Page 1

in district coffers that the district could have spent for children's programs that were cut this year," Nelson said.

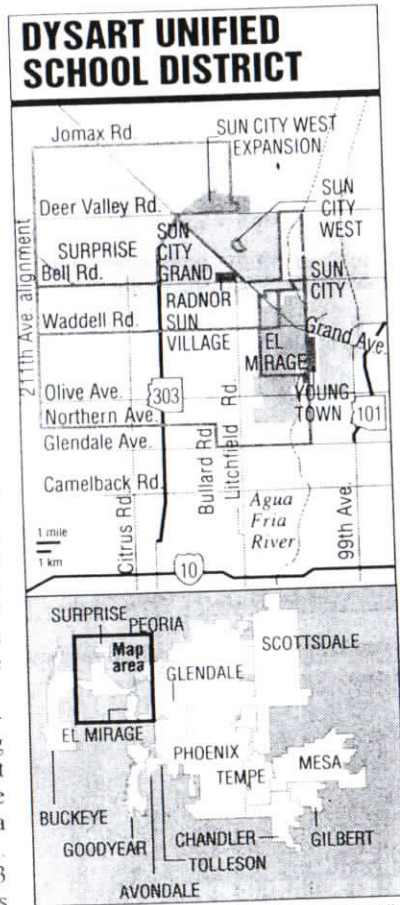
Rose Parker and Robert Koch, also Sun City West residents who serve on the board, were unavailable for comment.

The tax tug of war has captured national attention as a battle pitting senior citizens against children.

Retirees say they are upset that they are being labeled as child haters and say they just want tax equity.

Residents of the original Sun City West, which was de-annexed from Dysart in 1981, pay a tax rate of \$2.20 per \$100 valuation because they live outside a school district, and their money goes to the state's general fund. Residents of the Dysart district pay a tax rate of \$6.92.

Dysart voters also sent a message to the retirees by supporting Pamela Justice, a 12-year Dysart board veteran, to remain on the board. She was the subject of a recall attempt by the tax group. The unofficial vote tally was 2,493 votes for Justice and 2,267 votes for Nancy Harrower, a Sun City



The Arizona Republic

West resident.

Justice, who is president of the Arizona School Boards Association, said she is happy that the majority of voters supported her and is grateful for the help she's received on her campaign, including from senior citizens.

"I'm glad I can be on the board to represent the parents and children in the district and bring the focus back on kids and away from the pocketbook issues," Justice said.

Bill Lipscomb of Surprise, who supported Justice, said he is relieved that she retained her seat.

"It would have been a terrible loss to have seen Pam removed from office," he said. "Here is a person with over 13 years' active experience with school business and with the political savvy to help influence our state legislators and other agencies in dealing with educational and school affairs for the benefit of the Dysart School District."

Dick Daniels of Sun City West said he was disappointed that Justice kept her seat.

"It only shows allegiance, not trust," Daniels said. "Incompetents invariably make trouble for people other than themselves."

“
I'm glad I can be on the board to represent the parents and children in the district and bring the focus back on kids and away from the pocketbook issues.

PAMELA JUSTICE
SURVIVOR OF A RECALL ATTEMPT

Justice and Eickmann's board seats will be up for re-election in the November general election.

The three members from Sun City West remain in control of the five-member board. If the de-annexation proposal had been approved, they would have stepped down on June 30, when the new boundaries would have taken ef-

fect.

Students and parents are wondering whether any bond or override proposals will be brought before the voters while the retirees serve their terms through Dec. 31, 2000. The three board members, who were elected during a court-ordered election in November, were former members of the tax group.

There also are concerns about Superintendent Jesus de la Garza's contract; the board is considering whether to extend it by another year.

De la Garza has been criticized concerning the district's financial situation.

The district cut \$779,000 worth of programs this school year, including art, music and physical education, after an override failed in May. After the recent discovery

of \$1 million in funds, the board hired a consultant to verify how much is available.

Another issue facing the board is how to deal with the district's growth. Dysart now serves about 4,200 students from El Mirage, Surprise, Luke Air Force Base and Waddell. But Surprise has several large residential developments under construction or proposed that would add thousands of students to the district. Although developers have proposed to donate land for school sites, no bond money is available to build new schools.

Includes information from the Associated Press. Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

Dysart funds spur bickering

Almost \$1 million unspent, available

By Lori Baker

The Arizona Republic

While Dysart students have held carwashes and sold candy to raise money for their struggling schools, a closer look at the district's finances shows nearly \$1 million in unspent funds.

Parents and children blamed senior citizens for the loss of \$779,000 in programs, including art, music and gym classes, because Sun City West expansion-area residents helped defeat a 1997 override. District officials now say that they likely wouldn't have made all the cuts if they knew that funds would have been available.

The school board learned of \$313,350 in unspent funds two weeks ago; further digging has revealed about \$600,000 more. The district, which serves students from Luke Air Force Base, Surprise and

— Please see 'FOUND MONEY', Page A7

'Found money' causes controversy

— 'FOUND MONEY', from Page A1

El Mirage, began taking a closer look at the finances at the urging of three new Dysart board members, all Sun City West residents.

"The parents have blamed the seniors from the beginning for the loss of the programs and convinced their children of it, and now it's obvious that the seniors are not responsible," said Eleanor R. Nelson, one of three Sun City West residents elected to the board in November.

Dysart Superintendent Jesus de la Garza is accepting responsibility for the budget problems. But he said he wasn't aware of the available money until recently. The oversight was, in part, because of a change in business managers July 1, he said.

"These things are difficult to keep track of," de la Garza said. "It is disappointing, embarrassing and difficult to accept."

Assistant superintendent Margo Seck said she "forgot" about \$201,000 in funds set aside to pay litigation costs for pending cases in

March 1997. The cases have been closed, and it's estimated that \$130,000 to \$140,000 of the money is left.

"I made a mistake. I'm part of the administrative team, and we need to know what's available," Seck said.

But Mitch Eickmann, who has been on the board for three years, said he thinks people are wrongly jumping to the conclusion that hundreds of thousands of dollars are available to spend. A large portion of the money is needed to fill vacant positions, pay promised raises to employees or to handle emergencies, he said.

"The perception is that the district is either very incompetent or there is a more sinister reason why this money is there," Eickmann said. "We have people changing their stories, and we don't have the facts. We don't know how much money is available free and clear."

Bill Lipscomb, a parent of Dysart students, said he's baffled by the "found money."

"It's great that this money has

been identified, but it reflects upon the fact that the system is broken," he said.

Announcements of the available money has been trickling in.

In January, it was discovered that \$67,000 was available in a fund from money raised from renting district facilities. Board members decided to use that money to hire four physical education teachers for elementary schools for the remainder of the school year. Only one has been hired so far.

At the Feb. 10 board meeting, it was disclosed that \$313,350 was available in this year's budget because of increased state revenue and budget cuts the district made.

Last week, de la Garza said there was an additional \$200,000 available because the district has been unable to hire special education teachers to fill vacancies and because new employees were hired at lower salaries than their predecessors.

Tuesday night, business manager David Hammond said the district has \$258,000 carried over from last

year's budget, plus \$26,000 in donations that haven't been earmarked.

Board members decided to hire a financial consultant to determine how much money is unallocated. They also decided to spend \$100,000 to make needed repairs to school buildings this year.

The board also will negotiate with teachers about the possibility of giving teachers raises.

Elias "Buster" Estrada, president of the Dysart Unified Education Association, said teachers did not receive raises for professional growth and a one-third step increment that was promised to them, costing \$161,020.

Because of its financial woes, 96 employees — 20 percent of the staff — left at the end of last school year. Negative publicity also has made it hard for Dysart to hire special education teachers this year, which accounts for some of the found money.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

History of contention hounds Dysart district

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

Same story, different year.

Three times in the course of nearly 25 years, residents in Del Webb's retirement communities, angered by what they considered to be unfair school taxation, have rallied to repeatedly defeat override and bond elections in Peoria and Dysart school districts.

Three times they have managed to elect three members and take majority control of those respective school boards.

Twice they have successfully deannexed. Sun City and Youngtown were first in 1974, when, after 17 defeated bond elections, Peoria school district officials asked them to leave. Commercial business areas, which include Sundome Shopping Plaza and Del Webb's corporate offices, went as well.

Sun City West followed suit in May 1981, though this time a commercial



Seniors protest 'anti-kid' image

◀ From A1

new home he had ever owned — in the expansion area in 1993.

Though he questioned Del Webb's sales staff about school taxes, he said they admitted his taxes would be one-third higher than in Sun City West, but as more people moved into the area the rate would drop.

A \$25 million bond vote in March 1995 alerted residents to the possibility of taxes going even higher. Their school tax rate was three times that of the original Sun City West and total property tax was double. They also realized they were paying on existing bond debt and a \$1.5 million override that would not expire for two more years.

Fernandez and others went to Del Webb officials for help in getting the school district to "let us go. To let us be the same as Sun City West." When those efforts failed, CTE was formed.

Since then, three more bond and override elections have been defeated; CTE successfully challenged in court a ward system of voting that they claim "disenfranchised seniors"; deannexation and recall efforts were launched; and members elected three of their own to the Dysart school board.

Distrust of Dysart's administration and board has grown, with accusations made that Superintendent Jesus de la Garza and board members intentionally made cuts in children's programs to make seniors look bad for defeating the bond and override elections. There's even been talk that it is a racial issue.

But this time may be different.

"If they succeed, it will significantly raise taxes for those of us remaining in the district," said Dysart board member Pam Justice, "and that selling point should bring out enough voters to keep the deannexation proponents from prevailing."

Fifty-one percent of the voters remaining in the district must vote to allow the other areas to leave in order for deannexation to occur.

It also appears that not everyone, not even the majority of residents in Sun Village, are behind the efforts. "The great majority is not for deannexation," said Gerry Hase, a former homeowner's association board member in the 1,382-home Surprise community. "The whole situation is being promoted by a very small, but vocal group of about eight to 10 families."

Hase said he and another community leader personally checked the deannexation petitions at Sun

Ridge Recreation Center in September. "The petitions were quite generic and we were unhappy about it. If they had said Sun Village at the top we would have taken them off the table and tore them up right then," he said.

Hase said no formal survey has been taken of area residents, but just by talking and "man on the street" type interviews, he has narrowed the deannexation effort down to those families.

"We've gotten painted with a pretty good-sized brush," said Hase, adding that the issue has brought disaccord to the community. "We're just waiting for the whole stupid situation to go away," he said, laying the blame at the feet of the state Legislature, which has yet to come up with an equitable formula for funding school construction costs.

Indeed, parents have admitted disliking seniors, seniors have blamed parents for lack of involvement and failure to vote.

Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer has become a vocal opponent of deannexation, liking it to "a cancer" because it "spreads and kills school districts," and referring to those seeking to avoid paying taxes as "gray-haired old farts." She found sponsorship for a bill that would require the \$2.20 tax paid into the general fund by deannexed areas to the school districts from which they have withdrawn. She has not, however, found a sponsor for her bill to outlaw deannexation.

"We were forced into a corner, put into a box. Deannexation was the only move we could make," said Ron Fernandez, president of Citizens for Tax Equity, a formidable Sun City West group behind the deannexation movement and the effort to recall Justice.

"We just want to be in Sun City West, the area we were meant to be in," said Fernandez, who bought a 1,300-square-foot home — the first

▶ See Seniors protest, A5

WEDNESDAY

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School district discovers funds

Dysart audit divulges \$300,000

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

The Dysart Unified School District has more than \$300,000 left to spend in its 1997-98 budget, the governing board learned at a meeting Tuesday night.

A report by business manager David Hammond also revealed that the current budget fell \$35,809 short of the 1996-97 budget, raising questions about the necessity of budget

cuts that left students without physical education, music and athletics programs.

Board member Eleanor Nelson said she requested the lengthy report to see why it was necessary to make \$800,000 in cuts. "It says here there's a difference of \$35,809. Does that mean that was all the district had to cut to make the budget balance?" she asked Hammond.

"If we did not want to give any raises, then yes, that is correct," replied Hammond.

Many, such as Buster Estrada, head of the Dysart Education Association, found the news disturbing. "We were trusting that they were giving us the correct information," said Estrada, referring to teachers' salary negotiations. "For several

years teachers were frozen on a step. Maybe the money was there."

Last year teachers' salaries were increased by a two-thirds increment on the wage scale. Twice during the meeting Estrada asked board members to meet with teachers about using some of the extra money for further salary increases.

"It's a frustrating situation," said Bill Lipscomb, head of Citizens for Doing What's Right, a grassroots group opposing deannexation. "We depended upon the information Dr. de la Garza and Mr. Hammond have been providing all these months. A lot of things were riding on that information and the information was incorrect," he said.

Residents of the Sun City West expansion area, Sun Village and a portion of Youngtown are seeking to

deannex from the school district, thus cutting their property taxes in half. Deannexation, along with the recall of veteran Board Member Pam Justice, will be decided in a Mar. 10 election.

Justice, a board member for 13 years, called the mistakes "a travesty. This is money that could have been used to bring programs back for the kids and it should anger everybody," she said, adding that it is "disheartening" if at least a portion of the money cannot be carried over to fund programs for next year.

Of the \$779,206 actually cut from the budget, nearly \$356,000 went to other uses such as pay raises and benefits for employees and a 3 percent increase in supply costs. Another \$110,000 is needed to move three teachers from Title I to the

Maintenance and Operations budget, leaving \$313,350 available for spending.

Hammond, who said he found the errors about one month ago, attributed nearly \$256,000 to underestimated state revenues and a budget balance carry forward. The business manager, who joined the district July 1, 1997, said he is investigating another fund where money might also be available.

"My priority was the current year data base, not the prior year," Hammond told the board. "I assumed the balance carrying forward was good."

"When a budget is being created it's a very fluid process. You don't have the same information available

► See Superintendent defends, A5

Superintendent defends budget process

◀ From A1

throughout this process," said Superintendent Jesus de la Garza, eliciting moans from the mostly senior crowd. "There are time frames that come into play here," he said, explaining that hiring commitments for the next school year must be made to staff by April 15. "We were looking at making decisions with the information we had at the time."

"Some of that money is there because of the measures we took," the superintendent added. "It's not new money. It's money that has been saved because of the two-thirds increment."

"I do not accept that once a decision has been made, it can't be changed," said board President

Robert Koch, adding that if money became available, those teachers should have been offered the option to come back to work for the district. "Why weren't extraordinary measures used to make sure the children came first?" he asked.

"The point I'd like to make is the seniors have been blamed for the defeat of the override and budget cuts and that was not true. Even after the pay raises there was still enough money left to pay for those programs," said Nelson, referring to music and athletics programs.

"The seniors in the expansion area have taken a big hit," board member Rose Parker said. She added reports calling the seniors "child-haters," have "hurt me very much because I

don't hate kids."

"How do you think we felt when we found this money?" asked Assistant Superintendent Margo Seck, who joined the district in July of 1996. "I am embarrassed and very angry and I want to fix it. ... I did not train to be an expert in school finance, but I'm willing to take the blame and be held accountable for it as part of the leadership team," said Seck, adding that the mistakes were not deliberate.

"I'm not accusing anybody of doing anything wrong or stupid. If mistakes have been made we need to look at it, but part of this community has been blamed," said Koch, referring to comments made earlier in the meeting by student body President

Juan Marino. "We saw what he was saying. Parts of Sun City West have been cheating him. He's not been living out his dream. He and the other students ought to know. The truth ought to emerge from all of this."

Board member Mitch Eickmann called for a study session on the budget to give board members a "clearer picture of the overall perspective." That session will be on Feb. 23.

The board will continue discussion of the report at the Feb. 24 meeting.

Lipscomb said he would like to see the findings "put in layman's terms," and would like to hear de la Garza admit the mistakes. "I guess I'd like

to hear him say it was a goof, and if so, was it a completely blindsided goof?"

In other business, the board heard a report on services available from Coopers & Lybrand, a school consulting service. Reviews could be made of any or all components of the district from community participation to education, with costs varying by scope of the report and size of the district. A comprehensive audit of the large Houston school district cost over \$700,000.

Board members took no action on hiring a consulting firm and indicated they would call for bids if they decide such an audit is necessary.

Dysart board president, mayor at impasse

War of words continues over de-annexation bid

By Lori Baker
The Arizona Republic

Robert Koch, new president of the Dysart Unified School District board, says he will not meet with Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer unless she stops bashing people who favor de-annexation from the district.

He also wants Surprise government officials to publicly state that they would use development fees and place a moratorium on residential construction if the fees are found to be legal.

Shafer last month had extended an olive branch to Koch at a Dysart board meeting in hopes of setting aside their differences for the sake of children in the district. She asked Koch, who favors de-annexation, to

meet with her to come up with a compromise.

Koch said that before he meets with Shafer, he wants her to stop making "derogatory, negative or untrue" comments about people in Sun City West, Sun Village and Youngtown.

In particular, he was referring to comments Shafer made in an article in the *Washington Post* on Jan. 13:

"They're being selfish, self-centered, gray-haired old farts," Shafer said about residents of the Sun City West expansion area and other retirement communities that want to leave the district. "The children are being held hostage while the adults argue about who's going to pay."

Shafer said Friday that she apologizes if she offended anyone.

"I made that comment lovingly, because I'm a gray-haired myself," said Shafer, who

is 68. "I do not apologize, though, for saying that the de-annexation will hurt children."

Koch said he does not want to meet with someone who "doesn't act in a civilized manner." He said Shafer criticized de-annexation supporters on Jan. 29 at the Surprise library, just two days after the board meeting, covered by CNN, in which she asked Koch to meet with her on a compromise.

"Everyone has treated Mayor Shafer with dignity and respect and never attacked her personally," Koch said. "If she won't make assurances that she won't make more



Robert Koch / Board chief puts conditions on meeting with Surprise mayor.



Joan Shafer / Won't apologize for saying that de-annexation would hurt kids.

negative comments, there is no deal."

Shafer responded in a letter Thursday to Koch that she wants to meet privately with him without any conditions.

Koch said he won't meet with her unless she meets his terms.

Shafer and Koch have been at odds over an anti-tax group's push to have the Sun City West expansion area, Sun Village in Surprise and a

small portion of Youngtown de-annexed from the Dysart district. Voters will consider the proposal March 10.

— Please see **BOARD**, Page 7

Board chief, mayor still at impasse

— **BOARD**, from Page 1

The tax group, Citizens for Tax Equity, says residents of the areas seeking de-annexation pay three times more school taxes than residents in the original area of Sun City West, which was de-annexed from Dysart in 1981. Residents in the original Sun City area pay \$2.20 per \$100 assessed valuation, compared with Dysart's rate of \$6.97 per \$100 assessed valuation.

Koch, a former president of the tax group, was elected to the Dysart board in November and became board president in January.

He has criticized Shafer and other Surprise officials for approving new housing developments without imposing development fees to help pay for new schools. Surprise officials said they cannot legally impose development fees for schools.

Shafer suggested in her letter that she and Koch join forces at the state Legislature to lobby for a school funding system that will be equitable to children and taxpayers.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

Two groups join to fight deannexation in Dysart District

By PATRICK O'GRADY
Independent Newspapers

Sensing a need for urgency in two upcoming elections involving the Dysart Unified School District, two groups are joining forces in hope of preventing a deannexation and recall attempt by seniors in surrounding communities.

Citizens for Justice, a group trying to stop the recall of Dysart governing board member Pam Justice, and Citizens for Doing What's Right, a group trying to stop deannexation efforts in Sun City West, Youngtown and Surprise, met jointly Dec. 29 to lay groundwork for fighting the two election proposals.

About 65 people attended the meeting, which included discussion of plans to mobilize voters and raise funds for the effort to defeat the recall and deannexation attempts. Both issues will be decided in a March election.

Beating the proposals is a matter of numbers, group officials said. There are about 4,000 register vot-

ers in the areas wishing to deannex — compared with 8,000 registered voters outside those areas, said Gary Mozenter, a Paradise Valley resident helping the groups with their efforts.

"You must take advantage with that tremendous majority you have," he said.

Mr. Mozenter, whose daughter lives in the Dysart district, said he became involved after seeing news reports about Citizens for Tax Equity, a Sun City West-based group, and its efforts to stop paying taxes directly to the Dysart district.

"They are facing a single organization that has one purpose: to not pay taxes (to the district) and to deannex," Mr. Mozenter said.

Although sharing many of the same members and goals, the two groups will remain separate because they must raise funds in

different ways. Citizens for Justice is limited in the money it can collect because it is for a political campaign, Ms. Justice said.

"We are just one group of individuals working for the cause," she said.

Individuals serving on a common strategy committee come from various community areas, and include Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer, the city's public relations director Dave Reuter, Citizens for Doing What's Right founder Bill Lipscomb, as well as Mike Planeta, Annette Baker, Chris Pirone and Mr. Mozenter.

Each will head various committees of the two groups, organizing them to make sure all members of the group are in communication with the others.

The immediate goal of the groups should be the "single-minded purpose" to stop the deannexation attempt and the recall of Ms. Justice, a 12-year board member

and president of the Arizona School Board Association, Mr. Mozenter said.

After that, the two groups should concentrate on taking back control of the governing board. The board is currently made up of Ms. Justice, Board President Mitch Eickmann, and three former members of Citizens for Tax Equity, Eleanor R. Nelson, Robert Koch and Rose Parker.

Mr. Pirone, who heads the groups' school board tactics committee, said he will work to keep board members accountable during their tenure. That will include making sure parents attend meetings and voice their concerns.

"My long-term goal: I want them off the board, period," Mr. Pirone said.

The group also will attempt to make board members take a stand on issues of deannexation and bond votes, as well as attempt to stop rumored plans to eliminate the pub-

lic's speaking at governing board meetings, Mr. Pirone said.

"The more of the public we get there, the more they're going to know we're there and we care," he said.

With the election only two months away, fund raising is critical, said Ms. Baker, who heads the fund-raising committee. The groups hope to have most of their money raised by Feb. 1 and are looking to hold a large fund-raiser sometime near the end of January.

The groups were scheduled to take part in a Jan. 12 rally at the state capitol to show legislators the nature of their plight.

Anyone wishing to get involved in the groups' efforts may call the following people on the strategy committee: Mr. Reuter, 546-5676 or 498-7586; Mr. Pirone, 546-8006; Mr. Planeta, 546-0766; M. Mozenter, 348-1241; Mr. Lipscomb, 546-0598; and Ms. Baker, 935-1622.

Countdown To An Election

Deannexation has lengthy history in the Sun Cities

By CHRIS RASMUSSEN
Independent Newspapers

1998

Voters in the Dysart Unified School District will go to the polls March 10 to decide if some areas of Sun City West, Sun Village (in Surprise) and a few residences in Youngtown should remain in the district.

Deannexation elections are nothing new to Sun City West.

In fact, 17 years ago, bond and override initiatives were repeatedly defeated, petitions were circulated for deannexation and three Sun City West residents took control of the district's board.

"It is a mirror image," Sen. Ed Cirillo, Sun City West, said of the Sun City West expansion area's previous attempt to get out of the school district. "The difference today is the district doesn't want them to leave."

The question of whether or not retirees should pay taxes to support schools has been heatedly debated in the Sun Cities since the communities' inception.

It did not take long for residents of Sun City to question their need to pay school taxes. By 1963, just three years after Sun



The current battle over school taxes is nothing new to the Sun Cities. In the early 1980s, residents of Surprise held a protest in Sun City West to show their displeasure with a move by retirees to remove themselves from the district.

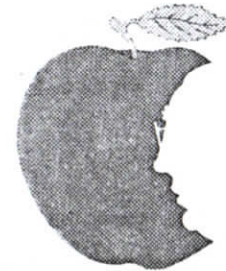
City's founding, residents defeated a school-bond issue. Sun City was part of the Peoria Unified School District at that time.

The significantly larger voting population in Sun City made it nearly impossible for the district to build new schools. Overcrowding became a real problem and children were forced to attend double sessions.

"I hadn't lived here for more than a week before there was a school bond election," recalled Hawley Atkinson, former District 4 Maricopa County supervisor and former presi-

Countdown to an election

The first in a three-part series dealing with the effort of some Sun City West residents to deannex from the Dysart School District. This initial article focuses on the history of deannexation in Sun City and Sun City West. Subsequent installments will address the impact deannexation would have on the Dysart School District and the March 10 deannexation election.



See ■ DEANNEXATION, Page 3

(OVER)

dent of the Northwest Valley Taxpayers Association. "I was amazed at how the bonds were being defeated by Sun City people. But after I had lived here for a while, I became a little more knowledgeable and realized what was going on."

Mr. Atkinson said residents thought the district was not being properly administered, they questioned whether the schools were teaching fundamentals and wanted to see more quality in education.

Finally, 10 years after the power struggle between the two entities began, a petition drive was mounted to extricate Sun City from the district. However, enough invalid petition signatures were found to quash the initiative. A second petition drive was mounted to remove Sun City, but was also ruled invalid.

After the defeat of 17 subsequent bond issues, Peoria school officials decided it was in the district's best interest to allow Sun City and Youngtown to withdraw.

In November 1974, at the request of Peoria School District officials, the Maricopa County Superintendent of Schools removed Sun City and Youngtown from the district. Sun City and Youngtown still pay reduced school taxes that go into the state general fund rather than to the district.

"They (Peoria school officials) are the ones that initiated the action to remove Sun City," Mr. Atkinson said. "Sun City didn't oppose it, they accepted it from that time on."

set, some in Sun City West began to question why they should also pay property taxes to support local schools.

Founded in 1979, the entire Sun City West Phase I and commercial core was within the boundaries of Dysart's school district. Construction of the expansion area wasn't begun until the mid-'80s, and was included in the district at that time.

Tensions between Sun City West and Dysart first emerged during a \$27.55-million bond election in 1980. Residents questioned the need for the funds, especially criticizing a \$950,000 vocational education building the district wanted to build.

Several groups of residents, led by a committee of the Property Owners and Residents Association, began campaigning against the multi-million dollar bond election. Subsequently, their efforts led Sun City West residents turn out in droves to defeat the bond proposal, 2,801 to 88.

Seeking more control over the district, with hopes of eventually removing the community from the district, three Sun City West residents were sworn in as members of the Dysart Board on Jan. 6, 1981.

Gen. Robert Williams, a former PORA president who later served in the Arizona House of Representatives, led the PORA committee against Dysart. Gen. Williams said in the Feb. 25, 1981, issue of the *Sun City Citizen* said that he had been assigned three duties as committee chair.

First, kill the \$27.55-million bond authorization. Get three Sun City West residents elected to the

board and after that is accomplished, consider disassociation from Dysart.

"The whole thing would have never happened if the district hadn't levied a \$27.55 million bond before the first family moved into Sun City West," Mr. Williams, now 76, said last week. "That is what made everyone so mad. They had us by the hair before we even moved in. Had they not authorized that bond, none of this would ever have happened."

To fight the Sun City West resident's efforts, Dysart parents led by Maria Resendes organized Parents Organized to Protect Education (POPE). Leading campaigns to register Dysart parents to vote in bond and override elections, the organization circulated compromise petitions to remove Sun City West residents from the district, but keep the communities commercial core.

POPE even led a demonstration of angry parents and children during the 1981 LPGA Sun City Golf Classic at Hillcrest Golf Course.

Gen. Williams rejected POPE's petition and distributed his own petition to remove all of Sun City West, including the commercial core, from the school district.

"(POPE's petition) is totally unacceptable to us," Mr. Williams said in a March 4, 1981, issue of the *Sun City Citizen*. "We have left all of Phase II (expansion area) in the school district and this is a major concession."

In the meantime, three Sun City West residents, Rose Ratner, Jack Ratner and Ingelletta Hawkins were elected to the board. Their

first action was to rescind a \$950,000 construction bond approved by the previous board.

With both groups beginning to lean toward the compromise petition, it appeared deannexation was imminent.

"We did not want to leave the district high and dry," explained Gen. Williams, who later abandoned his petition. "So we left the commercial core."

Gen. Williams noted the commercial core, roughly along Camino del Sol and Meeker Boulevard, is today a booming area with new businesses constantly being built.

The election for disassociation from the Dysart District was held May 12, 1981. Voters in both areas overwhelmingly approved the "amiable divorce" of the compromise petition, which excludes all of the residents and some commercial properties but retains the commercial core to help support the district's tax base.

Disassociation in Sun City West passed, 2,131 to 180, while in the rest of the district the count was 362 to 138. The issue rallied Sun City West residents who nustered a 27.8-percent turnout.

The deannexation of Sun City West from the district resulted in a 50-percent reduction in the local school levy for both Dysart and Sun City West.

Although the community was now out of the district, it was still obligated to pay off a previously issued bond totaling over \$3 million. The bond was paid off in 1989.

SCW

District restoring PE classes in primary schools

By Lori Baker

The Arizona Republic

EL MIRAGE — Physical education classes will resume soon for about 2,900 elementary students in the Dysart Unified School District.

Board members last week decided to hire four physical education teachers for the remainder of the school year. About \$65,000 is available from the district's civic center fund, which contains money raised from rentals of school district facilities.

Board member Eleanor R. Nelson had questioned why the civic center fund money was not being used. Other board members agreed that the gym classes should be offered.

Superintendent Jesus de La Garza pointed out that the money may not be available next year to continue the program.

"We cannot predict how often our facilities will be rented," he said.

But Nelson said she wants physical education to continue next year and that a permanent source of funding will be allocated.

Gym classes at El Mirage, Kingswood, Luke and Surprise elementary schools had been canceled for the 1997-98 school year as part of budget cuts resulting from the district's failed override election in May.

Now, students will get at least a half-hour of physical education instruction once a week.

"This is good for the teachers, too, because it will give them a planning period," Nelson said.

Elias "Buster" Estrada, president of the Dysart Education Association, had asked board members to use the \$65,000 instead to pay teachers who had earned college credits and didn't get the raises they were supposed to.

While Nelson said she believes teachers should get paid what they deserve, she said the money would be better spent on the gym classes because it would more directly affect children.

Board members also approved spending \$550,000 for

— Please see PE CLASS, Page 3

PE class to resume in Dysart

— PE CLASS, from Page 1

capital improvements to schools and left \$100,000 for future emergencies. Some improvements include sewer hookups at Surprise and El Mirage schools, \$129,000; renovating portable buildings districtwide, \$92,000; and roof repair at El Mirage school, \$38,000.

At board member Rose Parker's request, board members decided to include about \$4,000 to pay for doors in one of the girls bathrooms at Surprise school.

District officials said there are many other needs at schools for repairs but there isn't enough money available.

At their next meeting, at 7 p.m. Jan. 27, board members will be presented with a report comparing the district's budgets for the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years.

Information to be highlighted will include how much new state money was provided and what increases in costs the district incurred such as hiring new teachers to meet needs of increased enrollment, providing employees' pay raises and increased special-education costs.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

New Dysart Board finds 'harmony'

By Ruth Borchardt

"Things seemed to go more smoothly at the last Dysart School Board meeting" said new Board member Eleanor Nelson.

Some concerns arose over the expenditure of money, such as a reported \$22,542 total for a three-day planning retreat in Prescott, including a planning consultant fee of about \$19,000. About \$2,000 came from the Federal Government, the rest from the Civic Center Fund according to Nelson. The plans for the District, she thought, were vague.

New members discovered a Civic Center fund of \$70,000 in January from rental of school facilities. After deducting around \$20,000 from the fund, approximately \$57,000 remained.

Nelson went on to say that, based on the Auditor's opinion as presented by Business Mgr. David Hammond for the District, a recommendation was made that



"The people seemed more receptive now we've shown we're trying to work for the children. I hope they will believe that we are."

—Eleanor Nelson

the Board reinstate some of the programs that had been cut, and she made a motion to fund the sports program.

According to Nelson, Pam Justice asked that the staff make recommendations on how the money should be spent. Nelson went along with it and it was agreed that the staff should conduct further studies on how the money should be best spent.

Referring to Hammond's report, Nelson noted the fact that the loss of money from the defeated override issue was about the same as new money given the District by the state. \$471,341 was appropriated by the state for Dysart. The loss of funds from

See DYSART, Page 2

DYSART: Board finds 'harmony', from Page 1

the 10% override was \$471,927.

Nelson further stated that the Board, due to the new members, voted to re-instate the district in the case of the Roosevelt Elementary School District vs. Bishop, a seven-year-old lawsuit that will force the legislature to put forth some outline how to equalize the funding of school districts. Dysart was one of the original districts contending that the school funding is inequitable.

Rose Parker, according to Nelson, spoke at the meeting and said that she had visited Surprise Elementary School and found

there were no doors on the stalls of the girl's restrooms.

Bob Koch, according to Nelson, mentioned that there is \$526,000 remaining in the Capital Reserve Account, and questioned why necessary repairs had not been done.

In closing, Nelson said "The people seemed more receptive now we've shown we're trying to work for the children. I hope they will believe that we are."

Dysart saga dominates news in '97

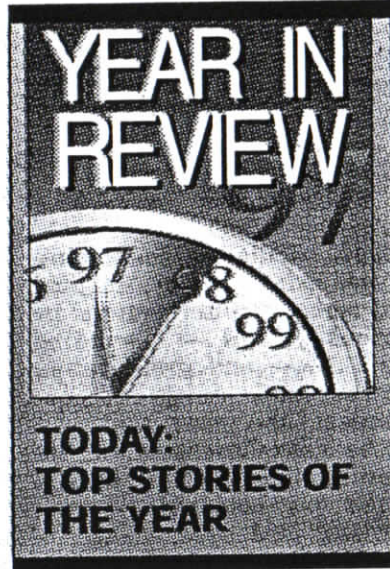
By DAN BURNETTE
Editorial page editor

The continuing animosity between some senior residents and the Dysart Unified School District was named the top local news story of 1997.

Three related stories in the Dysart saga finished 1, 2 and 3 in the voting among the writers, editors and photographers of the Daily News-Sun. Runner-up to the Dysart stories was a state attorney general's ruling that casts in doubt the future of age-restrictive zoning in Youngtown.

Other stories garnering votes for top local stories were the number of unsolved bank robberies in Sun City, growth in Surprise, the controversy over construction of a communications tower at a Sun City recreation center, concern over development around Luke Air Force Base and the acquisition of the Daily News-Sun by Thomson Newspapers.

But it was events in the Dysart District that the news staff felt were the most significant stories of the year. The single most important event, according to the news staff, was the filing of petitions by two groups to withdraw from the Dysart District. Seniors in one area of Surprise and another in the last-developed area of Sun City West say the district's high property tax rate, nearly 2½ times higher



than the rates in neighboring communities, is unfair to them.

If the deannexation efforts are successful, those areas that are removed from the Dysart District will no longer pay primary property taxes to the district, but will continue to be obligated to pay off any bonds already issued. School officials have said that deannexation effectively will raise property taxes in those areas that remain in the district.

Two other events in the Dysart District ranked No. 2 and 3: Voters' defeat of a proposed budget override and a court ruling that struck down a ward system of electing members to the governing board. The budget override



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Residents of retirement communities located in the Dysart Unified School District line up at Palm Ridge Recreation Center in Sun City West to sign petitions calling for the deannexation of their areas from the district.

was proposed to help keep a number of programs, including athletics, afloat. A low turnout in the May election allowed senior opponents of

more spending to carry the day, shooting down the district's third budget override proposal in a row.

The district acted to end

several programs in the summer, but donations to the district and some juggling of funding sources allowed the district to restore the football

team and several other activities.

The creation of a ward system, wherein each of the five

► See Growth issues, A7

WEDNESDAY

Dec. 31, 1997

The Daily News-Sun

VF - Dysart School

Growth issues garner Top-10 rankings

◀ From A1

governing board members was elected from each of five new districts, was successfully challenged in court as violating the rights of voters in areas with high concentrations of senior citizens. The reversal of the system led to the election late in the year of deannexation proponents to three of the five seats on the governing board. The year ended with an acrimonious board meeting in which some parents and students questioned whether the new board

members could really have the interests of the district at heart.

Also in the news was a potentially fatal blow to Youngtown's senior-only zoning — not on the basis of age discrimination, but because the town improperly imposed the zoning, according to a ruling from Arizona Attorney General Grant Woods. The ruling could be challenged in court, but Youngtown officials have questioned whether the town has the financial resources to see a case through legal channels.

Also on the Top-10 list was the large number of bank robberies in Sun City — a total of nine in 1997.

There were eight bank robberies in 1996; and three in January 1997 alone, prompting Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio to pull deputies from other areas to sit near Sun City banks as a preventive measure.

No bank robberies had been reported in 1995.

Even as controversy roiled the Dysart District, the community accounting for the largest part of the district's

growth, Surprise, was growing exponentially. Chief among the growing developments was Sun City Grand, by developer Del Webb Corp., that saw more than 1,000 houses sold in 1997. Surprise's growth generally was named the No. 6 story; Sun City Grand's growth finished seventh. Growth in the Northwest Valley also continued to stir concerns of officials on the West side and at Luke Air Force Base. Residential development, they said, will continue to lead to more complaints about jet noise and fears about crashes

from the Air Force's only F-16 training base. Luke encroachment was cited as the No. 8 local story.

Sun City saw its biggest story in the erection of an 80-foot tower at Marinette Recreation Center. A subsidiary of U S WEST had negotiated the deal for a new type of device known as the personal communications system — but members found out about the deal after the fact. Apparently, the general manager of the centers and the president, now out of office, had negotiated the deal that was never

formally considered by the board as a whole.

In mid-December, Thomson Newspapers acquired the assets of the Daily News-Sun, which had been owned by Ottaway Newspapers Inc. since 1984. Thomson purchased the East Valley Tribune Newspapers from Cox about a year ago; thus, the acquisition of the News-Sun is expected to strengthen Thomson's position in the Phoenix metropolitan area. The Daily News-Sun transaction rounded out the Top 10 local stories of the year.

SCW

Dysart survives tumultuous year

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

"I like to talk about the future. I always look to the future," said Jesus de la Garza, superintendent of the Dysart Unified School District.

Perhaps it's because de la Garza's now-famous district is anything but unified, split into factions over a defeated override election, a deannexation attempt by four retirement areas, and drastic cuts that left students without physical education, music and sports programs, and teachers without jobs.

It's been a year of court cases and appeals, angry

faces, hurtful words, disappointed students and ousted board members.

"It's been difficult, challenging, frustrating and perplexing, but I'm not a person who gives up easily. I'm persistent and determined," said de la Garza.

The year began with Citizens for Tax Equity, a Sun City West group fighting for equal taxes, challenging the ward system under which board members Mary Johnson, Surprise City Manager Dick McComb and incumbent Rachel Villanueva were elected in November 1996.

The two new board members were on-again-off-again,

ousted by an April 28 Maricopa County Superior Court ruling, then reinstated May 6 when the Arizona Court of Appeals stayed the earlier ruling. Finally, the ward system was ruled unconstitutional and the two board members, along with incumbent Villanueva, would have to face another election, based on a citywide voting system, in order to retain their seats.

Johnson and Villanueva elected to run again, but McComb bowed out of the election, held in November. Three members of Citizens for Tax Equity — President Robert Koch, Vice President El-

eanor Nelson and Rose Parker — ran on a platform garnering enough votes to win in Sun City West. The trio lost, however, at four other polling sites where voter turnout ranged from 15 percent to 28 percent, but a 69 percent showing at the Palm Ridge Recreation Center more than canceled out those results.

Though Sun City West is in the voting minority compared with the overall district, it was the second time this year that retirees triumphed at the polls. On May 20, a \$1.5 million override was defeated.

In reaction, the governing

► See Dysart 'blazes, A5

over

SCW

Dysart 'blazes toward millennium'

◀ From A1

board unanimously voted to cut nearly \$808,000 from the school district budget, axing athletics and band programs at all six schools, along with 26 teaching, administration and counseling positions.

Next March, the district will go to the polls again, this time to consider the deannexation of two areas of the Sun City West expansion area, Sun Village and Youngtown, as well as the recall of Pam Justice, who has been on the governing board for 12 ½ years and currently serves as president of the Arizona School Board Association.

In its recall petition, CTE charged that Justice has "totally failed to consider and represent, or even attempt to understand, the needs and interests of a substantial number of her constituents, i.e., those electors constituting the retirement community, particularly those retirees residing in the Sun City West expansion area."

The district won a bit of

reprieve earlier this month when Superior Court Judge Robert Myers ruled that the deannexation election, as structured, violated state statutes.

The petitions, as submitted, would have allowed those in the deannexed areas to vote twice: once to leave the district and once to allow the other areas to leave. As a result of the judge's ruling, the election will proceed with a single ballot question.

Whichever way the election goes, the Dysart district is hardly a winner, however. If the deannexation is defeated, school officials would need to rally enough voters to get an override or bond election approved — a feat they have failed to pull off in three past attempts. If deannexation is approved, the district will be left with a bonding capacity of about \$7 million, far short of the \$20 million they say is needed immediately for a new school and other capital improvements.

"The deannexation issue has not gone away for us," de

la Garza said. "In principal I'm opposed to it, but the dilemma we face is that if people continue to be opposed to a bond issue, we still have a major problem in the district."

It is the Legislature, said de la Garza, who holds some of the answers to Dysart's dilemma.

As a result of the Roosevelt vs. Bishop lawsuit, filed on behalf of the state's poorer school districts, the legislature faces a June 30, 1998, deadline set by Superior Court Judge Rebecca Albrecht to come up with an equitable plan for the capital funding of school districts or face shutdown of the entire public school system.

"I believe the Legislature will offer plans that are a better attempt to resolve (the school funding issue)," de la Garza said.

In the meantime, he's hoping the Legislature will pass a bill, sponsored by Sen. Ed Cirillo of Sun City West, R-District 15, requiring that the property tax of \$2.20 per \$100 of assessed valuation paid

into the general fund by deannexed areas go to the school districts from which they were taken. "That's an amount we're hoping to gain," the administrator said.

For de la Garza, the bright spot in 1997 was putting the Strategic Planning Process into action.

It began in August with a team of 28 parents, students, staff and community members gathered in Prescott. Under the guidance of a national consultant, the team developed a vision and direction reflective of the entire school community. Out of it came the slogan, "The Blazing Force in the New Millennium."

Since August, four committees have been meeting to come up with specific action plans for the target areas of student success, staff development, community support and parental involvement. Final recommendations will be coming to the board in early 1998, de la Garza said.

"It's a blueprint that takes us into the future," he said.

Alliance fights Dysart de-annexation, recall

— ALLIANCE, from Page 1

Unified School District. There is no effort to de-annex from the Peoria district.

The school district boundaries were set in 1993 in an agreement with Sun City West developer Del Webb.

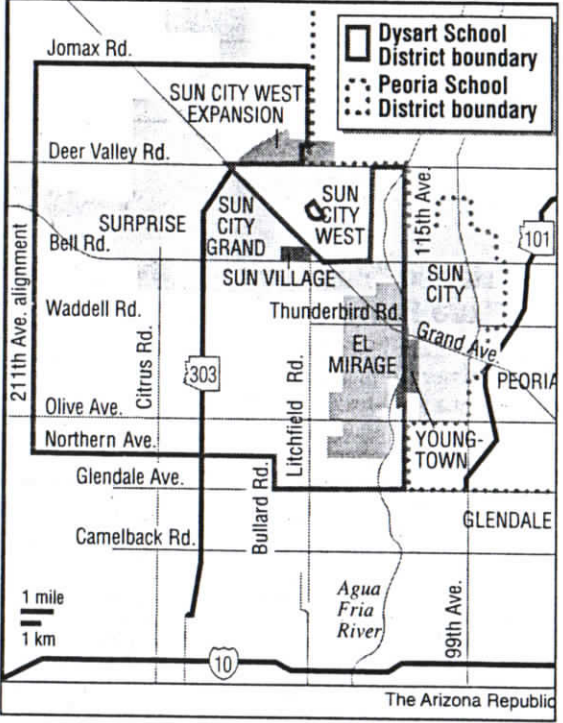
Henry Dellamalva, who lives in the Peoria district portion of Sun City West, said he doesn't mind paying school taxes, but he wants his neighbors in Dysart to realize that his taxes are higher than theirs.

Peoria's tax rate is \$9.46 per \$100 assessed valuation. The owner of a \$100,000 house in that area of Sun City West pays \$946 in Peoria district taxes, which is \$350 more than neighbors in the Dysart area and \$726 more than those in the de-annexed area of Sun City West.

Lipscomb said Dysart is in a Catch-22 situation.

On one hand, de-annexation would mean the district would lose a sizable amount of property valuation and the tax burden would be shifted to the people remaining in the district.

On the other hand, Sun City West residents have repeatedly rejected bond and override elections in



and Rosemary Parker — who are former leaders of Citizens for Tax Equity — were elected to the Dysart school board in November during a special election for a term ending Dec. 31, 2000.

As long as they control the five-member board, parents say it's unlikely that voters will be asked to consider bond and override proposals.

The three new board members will not discuss their plans other than to say that they want to help the district.

Sun City West expansion area resident Dick Daniels said everyone should give the three new members a chance to show what they can do.

"Their backgrounds speak for themselves," Daniels said. "They have a fiduciary responsibility to do

the best they can for kids in the district."

However, Chris Pirone, a parent who is fighting de-annexation, said some community members already are talking about recalling the new board members. State law requires that board members serve six months before a recall attempt can begin. The earliest an election could be held would be next November.

"I want them recalled because I believe they had ulterior motives getting on the board," Pirone said. "If they don't get what they want, they will run our district into the ground."

Both sides agree on one issue — Arizona's current education financing system is inequitable. They want the Legislature to develop a different financing system that is not based on property taxes. One idea is to impose fees on developers to help pay the cost of building schools.

The Legislature is under a court order to come up with a new funding system.

The next Dysart board meeting will be at 7 p.m. Dec. 18 in the Dysart High School cafeteria, 11405 N. Dysart Road, El Mirage.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

Alliance fights for Dysart

Group opposes recall, de-annexation effort

By Lori Baker
The Arizona Republic

Dysart Unified School District parents and senior citizens are joining forces to fight an attempt by a retiree group to de-annex from the district and recall a longtime board member.

The new organization called Citizens for Doing What's Right is locking horns with Citizens for Tax Equity.

The tax equity group, primarily made up of Sun City West expansion area residents, collected petitions to force a March special election seeking to recall 12-year board veteran Pamela Justice, who becomes president of the Arizona School Boards Association on Thursday.

Voters also will determine whether property owners in the retirement areas of the Sun City West expansion area, Sun Village in Surprise and a small portion of Youngtown should be allowed to leave the Dysart district. A majority of voters who wish to leave the district and a majority of voters who would remain in the district must both approve the proposal for it to pass.

"We don't just have parents who are concerned about their children's education in our group," said Bill Lipscomb, one of the leaders for Citizens for Doing What's Right. "We have some senior citizens who believe that it's their responsibility to pay taxes to educate children."

Ray Hayes, a Sun Village resident, is among the senior citizens volunteering to help.

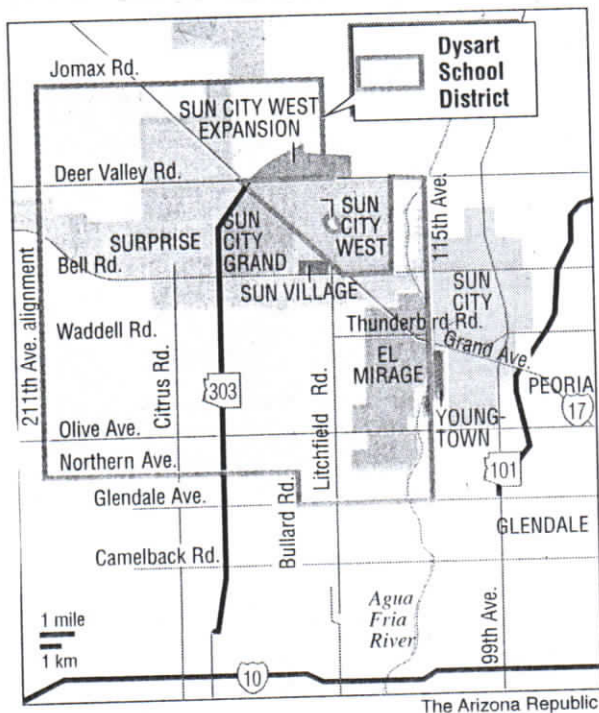
"As an individual who lives in the Dysart district in the proposed de-annexed area, I'm going to do whatever I can to help Pam Justice beat the recall effort and will work against the de-annexation," Hayes said.

The tax equity group said it seeks de-annexation to equalize taxes. Residents in the original Sun City West, which was de-annexed by Dysart in 1981 during a special election, pay a school tax rate of \$2.20 per \$100 of assessed valuation compared with Dysart's rate of \$6.96. That's a difference of more than \$400 a year for a house assessed at \$100,000 in the original area and the expansion area.

The money from the original Sun City West area goes to the state's general fund rather than to the Dysart district.

With de-annexation, the only tax affected would be Dysart's. Property owners would continue to pay other taxes, including those for the state, county and the community college district, as well as the flood-control district.

Complicating matters in the de-annexation fight is that not all of the Sun City West expansion area is in the Dysart district. In the area, more than 2,900 homes are in the Dysart district and 540 homes are in the Peoria



Dysart school district wins round vs. retirees

By Lori Baker
The Arizona Republic

12/2/97

A Maricopa County judge has dealt a blow to a group of retirees that doesn't want to pay taxes to Dysart Unified School District.

Citizens for Tax Equity, the group pushing for a March de-annexation vote, had proposed a ballot that could have allowed the retirees to vote one another out of the district. Dysart challenged that, saying that the four areas should be consolidated as one.

Judge Robert Myers agreed with the district and called the group's proposal "absurd."

"The Arizona Legislature could

not have intended the statute to permit a person ... to manipulate the de-annexation process to obtain a result which likely would favor one side to the de-annexation," Myers wrote.

He ruled that a proposed ballot item for de-annexation will have a single question rather than four questions asking voters whether portions of the district should no longer be obligated to pay Dysart taxes. State law requires approval by a majority of those voters who wish to leave the district and approval by a majority of those who will remain.

"The likely results of this elec-

— Please see **DISTRICT**, Page A16

— **DISTRICT**, from Page A1

tion, if four ballot questions are put to the voters, would favor those who wish to de-annex and seriously dilute the votes of those who wish to remain in the Dysart district," Myers wrote.

This was the first victory for the financially strapped Dysart district in a battle that has pitted senior citizens against students, parents and educators.

Citizens for Tax Equity, made up primarily of residents from the Sun City West expansion area, has been battling the Dysart district for years. It led an effort to reject several bond and override elections to avoid tax increases to pay for school programs and construct buildings.

Last month, three retirees who were leaders in the tax equity group

were elected to and took control of the five-member Dysart board. The group also had filed petitions to force a March recall election against longtime Dysart board member Pamela Justice, who becomes president of the Arizona School Boards Association on Dec. 11.

But the group's ultimate goal is de-annexation. Residents in two portions of the Sun City West expansion area, Sun Village in Surprise and a small section of Youngtown want out of the Dysart district because they pay higher taxes than residents in neighboring retirement communities.

Don Peters, a lawyer representing Citizens for Tax Equity, said he's unsure whether he will appeal.

"It's a difficult issue and we respect the judge's decision," he said.

Dysart board President Mitch Eickmann said he is pleased with the judge's decision.

"Legally, they (retirees) can have their de-annexation election, but the way they had it set up would have made a mockery of the democratic process," he said.

Arizona is the only state where voters have voted themselves out of a school district to avoid taxes.

Dysart Middle School eighth-grader Tiana Orberon said students do not understand why people in retirement communities don't want to pay for their education.

"If the people in El Mirage can pay taxes on the little salaries they have, so can the people in Sun City West," she said.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

SCW

Students organize protest group

By MONICA ALONZO
Special to the Daily News-Sun

About 40 Dysart Middle School students gathered in the school cafeteria Tuesday to discuss the deannexation of the retirement communities from the Dysart Unified School District. The meeting came after students attempted a walkout last week to protest the deannexation effort.

Student representatives from homeroom classes discussed petitions, marches, and the problems associated with the loss of tax money that helps fund their school. They expressed concerns about the shortage of supplies, programs, and extracurricular activities available to them.

Cecelia Covarrubio, an eighth-grade student, said that her class is involved in a project to record their voices, but that there are only three tape recorders for 30 students.

"We have to wait so much, and our time doesn't go toward learning," Covarrubio said. "We need more supplies. In science,

► See Students learn, A5

Students learn lesson in civics

◀ From A1

we don't have the equipment for experiments."

Student Maricruz Olguin, one of the organizers of the Future Representatives for Equal Education (FREE), said schools should be funded equally, but that Dysart Middle School students are not getting the same level of funding that other Arizona middle school students are getting.

The main focus of FREE is to urge communities not to deannex from the district. Students currently do not have music or band classes, and they only have limited art classes offered for one semester.

"Not everyone wants to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or a mathematician," Romulus

Marve said. "Some students want to be artists and basketball players."

He said students should have the opportunity to participate in art, music and sports in order to develop those talents.

Elizabeth Carillo used to be a trumpet player at Kingswood Elementary, but she said that was taken away from her when the band classes were cut because of a lack of funding.

Jennifer Gherman said that not having any extracurricular activities was not fair to students.

"Some of us don't have anything to do after school," Jennifer said.

Diane Fox, middle school principal, said she thinks it's a good idea that the students organized FREE.

"They need a voice," she said. "They are the ones who are heavily impacted. They are the ones losing out on an equal education, which they have every right to have."

Their organization will also "prepare students for the democratic process and (teach) them how to go about getting things changed for the public good," Fox said.

Members of FREE are starting to make signs and planning possible locations for an upcoming march to protest deannexation.

"We need people to see what we need. We need other students to join us," Desiree Arias said. "We are going to make fliers, make announcements at school, and put up posters so that everyone will be informed."

They are also working on

getting a student to represent them before the Dysart school board and inform the board of the conditions of the school.

Students have begun collecting signatures for a petition they plan on presenting to the school board and the state Legislature. The petition states that citizens should not be able to deannex from the district because then schools within the district will not have funds for a "comprehensive public education that matches the educational opportunities that other students in the ... United States of America receive in their public school systems.

"If the citizens are allowed to deannex, our right to a fair and equal public education will be infringed upon even more than it is now," the students said in their petition.

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50 cents

Court hears deannexation issue

Dysart district disputes petitions

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

No decision has been reached on the legality of a deannexation election, although parties in the suit presented oral arguments Tuesday morning before Superior Court Judge Robert Myers.

The Dysart Unified School District,

represented by Jose Martinez, has filed suit against the Maricopa County Elections Department alleging that Citizens for Tax Equity petitions, submitted as four separate ballot measures for the four areas seeking deannexation, violate state statutes.

The statutes in question, 15-549 and 15-460, state that those who remain in the district and are responsible for picking up the extra tax burden must approve the deannexation. As submitted, those in the deannexed areas would be allowed

to vote twice: once to leave the district and once to allow the other areas to leave.

Don Peters, attorney for CTE, filed a substitution naming Bob Koch, Eleanor Nelson and Rose Parker, newly elected members of the school's governing board, as parties in the district's lawsuit, but Myers disallowed the motion, calling it a conflict of interest since the three are also members of CTE.

Peters disagreed with Myers' ruling, but said it doesn't make any

difference if the three are named in the suit or not.

County attorney Dean Wolcott, who advised the elections department to accept the petitions, rebutted some of Martinez' remarks.

Ray Hayes, who filed an intervention on behalf of a dozen schoolchildren, argued on the district's behalf, challenging the legality of the petitions as presented.

Myers questioned the lawyers about the impact deannexation would have on the district.

"The judge seemed to understand what the issues were and have a good understanding of the contrast between how the petitions were submitted and how the statute reads," said Jesus de la Garza, superintendent of the Dysart district. "He seemed to understand the implications for the district if all four areas deannex."

"We weren't there to argue deannexation, but what the statute calls for," said Peters, pointing out that the courts can only interpret, not change, the law.

Dysart's new board challenged

Retiree members mum on de-annexation stand

By Angela Rabago-Mussi
Special for The Republic

EL MIRAGE — The scores of cars heading down Dysart Road long before the scheduled meeting signaled what was to come.

Hundreds of cafeteria seats quickly filled as residents of the Dysart Unified School District gathered Tuesday for the first meeting of the new school board.

For much of the next 3½ hours, parents took turns questioning, chastising and pleading with the three new members who now hold the majority vote: the same retirees from Sun City West who had led efforts to get out of the district.

The majority of comments came at two points during the meeting.

Some spoke out after a presentation about bonds and override elections revealed that a de-annexation could mean a 60 percent tax increase for remaining district residents if the election were approved. Others spoke during an agenda item reserved specifically for discussing de-annexation with the board.

Residents' fears were evident in their questions and comments directed at the new members:

"Would you support a bond and override in the future?"

"Are you going to work as hard for the school district as you did for the tax equity group?"

"Please don't use our children as your steppingstones out of the district."

— Please see **NEW**, Page 5

New members of Dysart board mum about de-annexation stand

— **NEW**, from Page 1

+ "If your goal is not to be here, then you shouldn't be on this board."

But this time, Dysart supporters weren't the only ones in the audience. Retirees from the areas seeking de-annexation also were present.

Applause, boos, sarcastic laughter and taunting was heard from both sides, those retirees supporting efforts to de-annex from Dysart, and parents, students, senior citizens and school staff who oppose it.

The meeting at times became chaotic as people argued with each other.

The board members elected three weeks ago — Robert Koch, Eleanor R. Nelson and Rose Parker — said they expected the meeting to be contentious. The pressure was evident.

"We've taken an awful lot of crap from you guys tonight," Nelson said at one point to a chorus of boos.

Other residents pressed Koch, former president of Citizens for Tax Equity, which is pushing for de-annexation, to answer to conflict-of-interest charges.

"People in an area have a right to vote on whether to belong to a district or not," he said.

After more pressure to say whether he supported de-annexation, Koch finally said, "I support the right of the people to vote — take it or leave it."

The sides met on common ground over only one issue: a call to go after the Legislature for equitable funding.

All the board members agreed that the group should work together toward that goal.

But Joan Shafer, mayor of Surprise, challenged the three new members to show their cooperation through action.

"You say you want the Legislature to solve the problem," she said. "Well, then, damn it, drop the de-annexation and work together."

She received a standing ovation from some in the audience, but Koch in turn challenged her to slow her city's growth, which puts a greater demand on the schools.

Board President Mitch Eickmann agreed that pressuring state lawmakers was one positive of the evening but added that it will be "really hard to work toward that end with the differences we have."

He said the rift will be difficult

to overcome.

"Just because something (the de-annexation) is legal does not make it right," Eickmann said.

Another major division is the belief that de-annexation supporters are willing to "sacrifice" others' children to make their point, he said.

The battle of the past two years between the groups has caused a lot of hard feelings.

"I've heard a lot of horrible comments about ethnic minorities in this district and about our administrators being liars," Eickmann said.

Another obstacle is the fact that Koch and Nelson began a recall drive against longtime board member Pam Justice. The recall election

is scheduled to be held in March.

Justice said she felt "a little uncomfortable" serving alongside her detractors but said she hopes they change their minds after working with her.

After the long, hostile meeting, Parker said it had been "healthy."

"It all has to come out, and then we can start from there," she said.

Nelson wasn't as optimistic.

"They've got their minds made up," she said. "They've already decided we can't possibly want to help the district."

Sun City West resident Keith Watkins, who spoke opposing de-annexation, agreed with Parker.

"There's a lot to be done," he said, "and the conversation has just begun tonight."

Dysart anger, confrontation of board part of democracy in action

For 3½ hours Tuesday night, the miracle called democracy survived a tough test in the Dysart High School cafeteria.

Where else but in America can two opposing sides so philosophically removed sit down and conduct a public meeting without bodily harm?

There was plenty of tension in the air, but never the kind of confrontation that I anticipated. No modern-day Salem witch hunt took place, and Robert Koch, Eleanor R. Nelson and Rose Parker weren't forced to walk the plank.

The three Sun City West retirees, who have helped defeat a half-dozen Dysart district bond and override elections in the past three years, now form a majority on the five-member board.

Only in America.

And there was Nelson, who has led a



Herb Whitney

recall drive against board member Pam Justice, smiling and chatting with Justice before the meeting began.

The three have also led a de-annexation campaign in hopes that their Sun City West neighborhood may one day leave the district, thus lowering residents' school taxes. If de-annexation passes, the three would have to step down from the board by June.

Only in America.

Two dozen people, mostly parents, went to the microphone to talk to the new board members. Some pleaded for compassion, for

their children's sake. Others chastised the three for not supporting the district in the past.

But all of them, in a nutshell, were asking this:

Are you with us or against us? Will you try to help our children, or is this all a charade that will allow you to abandon us?

Koch, a retired lawyer, answered the question by pointing out that under Arizona law residents anywhere can de-annex from any school district.

When asked if his de-annexation role doesn't represent a conflict of interest now that he is on the board, Koch said:

"I will try to avoid a conflict of interest, I will do the best job I can for the children and the other residents of the district."

The most tense moment came when the retirees were asked why they voted down the bond and override elections, and Nelson

said this:

"I didn't think there was a need for them."

When that was greeted with hisses and boos, Nelson added this:

"You can listen to us or not. We'll walk out of here and there'll be no quorum. We've taken an awful lot of crap from you guys tonight."

I don't think the three were subjected to any such thing. True, they were subjected to some hard questions, but that's part of the territory any school board member should expect.

And it's especially part of the territory in a school district where teachers haven't had a raise in six years and classes in music, physical education and health have been largely eliminated because of budget cuts.

The parents who went to the microphone found themselves in the strange position of

appealing to the perceived enemy, who is now in control.

Only in America.

"We're all Americans," Criz Urquidez told the board. "We go to church on Sunday and feel good, then we try our best to deal with life the rest of the week."

"Because of what's happened between you and us, we're concerned about our children."

Four generations of Urquidez's family live in the Dysart district. She attended school there and now has two grandchildren doing the same.

"My mother and father are in their 80s and they never said 'No' to paying their taxes," she said. "Put down this de-annexation. Your hearts have to soften for our children."

Herb Whitney writes about the West Valley. He can be reached at 780-7129 or herb.whitney@pni.com via e-mail.

SCN

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SCW

New Dysart members quit group

3 elected to board led Citizens for Tax Equity

SUN CITY WEST — Three leaders of Citizens for Tax Equity resigned their positions last week in the wake of their election to the Dysart Unified School District board.

Robert Koch stepped down as president and Eleanor R. Nelson as vice president, and Rose Parker quit as a member of the group's advisory committee.

However, they will still be members of the group.

The three were elected to the Dysart board on Nov. 5, and their first school board meeting was Tuesday.

Citizens for Tax Equity, a group of primarily Sun City West residents, has filed petitions for a March election to consider de-annexation of the rest of Sun City West, as well as Sun Village in Surprise and about a dozen Youngtown homes, from the Dysart district.

A court hearing to decide whether the election will proceed is scheduled for Tuesday. The Dysart district and a Sun City West attorney representing some Dysart students are challenging the de-annexation effort.

Retirees in the newest part of Sun City West say they are seeking de-annexation out of fairness. They pay a rate of \$6.93 — more than three times as much in school taxes as their neighbors in the de-annexed areas of Sun City West and Sun City. Those communities pay an unorganized school tax rate of about \$2.20 per \$100 of assessed valuation. That money goes to the state rather than to Dysart.

Christine Stelter, the remaining Citizens for Tax Equity officer who served as secretary, will assume the post of interim president until there is an election of new officers Jan. 20.

Stelter, the only official spokesperson for the group until new officers are installed, said 600 to 700 people usually attend the group's meetings.

She said her group is working for equitable property taxes statewide and supports legislation to comply with the Arizona Supreme Court's mandate of equal funding for schools. It also supports impact fees on developers so they assume more responsibility for growth.

New members of Dysart board pen 'to-do' lists

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

Searching for funding to restore art, music and sports programs is at the top of the "to-do" list for two of three newly elected members of the Dysart Unified School District governing board, Eleanor Nelson and Rose Parker.

The top priority for Bob Koch is to work for overhaul of the current school funding system. "The funding of public education is terrible. It's inadequate and it needs overhauling," he said pointing out that nearly everyone, including the Arizona Supreme Court, agrees. The task is convincing the state Legislature, said Koch. He would like to see the board lobby the Legislature and support proposals, like the one by Lisa Graham Keegan, state superintendent of public instruction, aimed at changing the system.

The most immediate concern for Koch, however, is bringing unity to the district. "There's still a lot of misstatements lying around. Some factions obviously are not willing to accept that fact that the new board members have ideas. We ought to be given the opportunity to make them work."

"The factions have to be educated," he said. Koch added that he hopes to address some of the concerns and misstatements tonight at his first board meeting.

"I would like to look into and see if there is a way we can put back music and art. I want to see if there are other things that can be cut," said Rose Parker.

Nelson concurred. "The first thing I want to do is try to find funding to restore those programs. I want to see if cuts can be made. Most businesses — and the school district is much like a business — have a lot of fat that can be cut from somewhere."

Nelson suggested they may look at the personnel budget. "I would like a list of the administrators' salaries and jobs. I personally want to see that," said the former reporter and bureau chief for the Chicago Tribune who won awards for her investigative journalism.

Koch, Nelson and Parker, members of the Citizens for Tax Equity group, ran on the same platform, beating out incumbents Rachel Villanueva and Mary Johnson. Write-in candidate Richard Snyder was the only other challenger.

Koch, a retired attorney, is "glad" about being elected and said he can "contribute to making the district better."

Nelson said the Sun City West residents will bring a new perspective and expertise to the board. "No one has looked at the district from an outside viewpoint. I believe we can have a broader perspective of what is best for the children in the long run," she said, adding "It requires ex-

pertise to make effective positive changes, not just good motives."

► See Retirees ready, A5

Retirees ready for 1st meeting

◀ From A1

Even if the board members are only in office until the end of June, a possibility if Sun City West expansion area residents vote to deannex from the district in March, Nelson said, "I believe I can make a positive difference — even if it turns out to be a few months."

However, Nelson is weary of the deannexation question, "We wish people would not focus so much on the question of deannexation. It may not be necessary if the Legislature acts to equalize school funding and the builders assume their responsibility for funneling more children into the school system," she said. "We wish people would focus instead on the children and their needs. We are committed to improving the entire Dysart school system and hope we can restore the art, music, band and physical education programs."

Nelson says she is ready to serve the entire three year term.

Directors sworn in ... just in time

Staff report

Newly elected Dysart Unified School District Governing Board members took the oath of office just in the nick of time Monday.

A school district courier picked up the certification letters for Bob Koch, Eleanor Nelson and Rose Parker from the Maricopa County Elections Department in downtown Phoenix about 3 p.m. and the three Sun City West residents were sworn in individually by Pat Cholewa, the superintendent's secretary, between 3:30 and 4:30 p.m.

State statute and board policy mandates that school board members be sworn in at least 24 hours before voting on any matters. A regular board meeting is scheduled for 7 tonight, so members had until 7 p.m. Monday.

Although a canvass of the votes had been completed early last week, Marc Frazier of the Maricopa County Elections Department said the cer-

tificates had to be signed by the chairman of the board and County School Superintendent Sandra E. Dowling and "that takes time."

Pat Cholewa, a notary, administered the oath in her office and validated the board member's signatures.

Handmade signs posted around the city of Surprise and a flier at City Hall, paid for by Citizens Against Higher Taxes, encouraged residents to "Save the Children" and attend the meeting. The group, made up of parents mostly from the Kingswood Parke development in Surprise, organized one day after the election and are expected to attend the meeting tonight.

The flier contains several inaccuracies, according to Koch, and he hopes to address those statements at tonight's meeting.

Although few items on the agenda require a vote, a discussion of concerns about deannexation is scheduled. District officials and board members, expecting a large crowd, have moved the meeting from the classroom-sized board room to the high school cafeteria.

Admitting a board member "needs to be Hercules," to deal with the problems facing the district, Parker said she is looking forward to the challenge. "I expect that it will take a lot of my time, but it's very exciting and I intend to learn as much as I can and work very hard at it," said the longtime elementary and special education teacher, now retired. "I really have to learn how to be a good board member," she added.

Getting an overview of the district: the history, problems and day to day operations is a priority for Parker. "I think it's important to get a whole picture of what went on," she said, adding that she would like committees to bring back reports on finances, curriculum and staffing.

As a start, Nelson and Parker planned to meet with Margo Seck, assistant superintendent, to review textbooks and discuss curriculum.

Community

The Daily News-Sun welcomes your comments and news tips. Please call Jim Painter, news editor, at 977-4660 with your suggestions.

LWV examines school-finance situation

By JEFF OWENS
Staff writer

The political minefield of Arizona education financing was the subject of discussion at a meeting of the League of Women Voters of Northwest Maricopa County Friday morning.

Several dozen members gathered at 9:30 in the Bell Library, where guest speaker Tim Hogan outlined the recent history of the state's school finance woes. Hogan is the executive director of the Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest, which has initiated litigation aimed at attaining uniform education funding.

League President Jeana Petersen started the meeting by calling atten-

tion to the divisiveness created by the ongoing property tax battle in the Dysart Unified School District.

"We are becoming polarized, and there is a hate issue here that is tearing our area apart," she said.

"Equal state funding is an issue the league can really look at," Petersen said.

But in order to look at it in an appropriate light, the issues need to be understood as wholly as possible, hence the address by Hogan.

Hogan has been involved in Arizona education-finance litigation for seven years. His firm was instrumental in hastening court rulings that stipulate the state Legislature must devise a uniform school finance plan by June 30, 1998, or public schools may be shut down.

Hogan said that constitutionally, equity in school financing isn't a difficult idea to grasp. "This is a very straightforward case; it doesn't take a genius to understand that 'uniform' means uniform," he said.

The main obstacle to reform is the Legislature, which has a "minimalistic and simplistic" response to the state Supreme Court's order to come up with a fair and workable plan, he said.

Hogan said the state Senate is the problem, with powerful legislators blocking solutions simply because of their own electoral ambitions. Republican Senate President Brenda Burns is blocking a solution, Hogan said, because she has aligned herself with Republican Sen. Tom Patterson,

who will run for governor next year. "If you're running for governor, you don't want the current governor to be able to claim to have solved the problem," he said.

Hogan also said Gov. Jane D. Hull's rhetoric differs little from that of her predecessor, who supported the Assistance to Build Classrooms bill which was declared inadequate by the courts earlier this year.

A solution needs to come quickly, Hogan said, because with the governor's and legislative seats up for election next year, "it kind of messes things up if the schools are closed."

If that happens, the finger pointing will be toward the governor's office and the Legislature, not the lawyers and the school districts, Hogan added.

SCW

School-tax issue dominates meeting



Steve Chernek/Daily News-Sun

Dr. John Holten of Sun City talks to Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer at a Northwest Valley Taxpayers Association meeting in Sun City West Wednesday.

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer found little support for her views on deannexation Wednesday morning when she addressed a standing-room only crowd at a meeting of the Northwest Valley Taxpayers Association in Sun City West.

Shafer made comments for about 10 minutes, then fielded pointed questions and responded to accusations and a few heated comments during the 40-minute question-and-answer period.

Association President Cliff Cowles Jr., who invited Shafer to speak, called it a "red hot issue" and asked the 100 or so people crowded into the Community Room of the Bank of America building on R.H. Johnson Boulevard to remain polite.

Introducing herself as "your neighbor across the street," Shafer

challenged the audience to "pay what I pay (for school taxes) because I'm your neighbor, too."

Shafer is seeking to outlaw deannexation and get a bill passed requiring the \$2.36 paid into the general fund by already deannexed areas to go directly to the school district from which they withdrew. "You live on a fixed income. So do I, but by the looks of some of the houses here, I'm more on a fixed income," she said.

"I say what I feel and it regularly gets me into trouble," Shafer said, tearing in half a speech the city manager had written for her.

Referring to Sun City West, Shafer commented, "I believe when a community becomes so large and so populated, it should have to incorporate to get off the county tax role," adding that her tax dollars help pay for streets in the un-

► See Views on, A5

over

Views on deannexation meet resistance

◀ From A1

incorporated community. "Maybe I should deannex from Maricopa County.

"Wherever your grandchildren are going to school, someone is paying for their education, probably someone our age. How would you feel if they refused to pay?" the gray-haired mayor asked. She said it bothers her that a "spiked fence is going up between the retirees and the young. I hear it every day," she said, giving the example of a little boy who asked her why the "old ones" hate him and are denying him an education.

Audience members challenged "misinformation" passed out at the polls during the Nov. 4 Dysart school board election that said deannexation would mean a 50 percent

to 60 percent tax increase for those remaining in the district, and accused Shafer and others of fueling the debate with such "propaganda."

The mayor, who said she personally donated "a large amount" to funding of the literature, acknowledged that taxes would increase by about nine cents, but could reach the higher figures if an override and bond election passed.

"Do me a favor and tell them to leave the new board members alone so they can do their job," remarked one man.

Shafer directed a challenge at newly elected Dysart school board member Rose Parker, who received the applause of the crowd. "No infrastructure can be built in six months. Drop the deannexation and

stay in there for the three years."

Spontaneous shouts of "no" rippled through the crowd.

"I'm glad you said the Dysart schools have been in bad shape for a long, long time because you never say that in the newspaper and we get blamed for everything," Parker said. She also disputed the 50 percent to 60 percent higher tax figure. "You didn't follow up with the other information. It's misinformation. It's not right and it's not true."

"We're not just saying we don't want to pay taxes. What we really want is equal state funding," one man said.

"If you would quiet down on the rhetoric, things might calm down a little. We would have better feelings if you would stop calling deannexation a cancer and call it a

surgery instead," said another man. "Let's do something about the cancer which is tax inequity."

Shafer calls deannexation a cancer because it "spreads and kills" school districts. "Where is it going to stop?" she asked.

One man, who called himself "as narrow-minded" as Shafer, said the bickering should end and the two sides should work together to get the government to equalize taxes. "We're busy fighting and the government of this state is not doing a darn thing to get it straightened out. It doesn't take a lot of brains to equalize this tax."

"Tax equity means we all pay equal taxes. Deannexation is un-American," said one woman. "Every one of us got an education through the

public education system."

"No way," said some members of the audience, motioning for her to sit down.

"Can we equalize tax short of deannexation?" a man asked.

Shafer advocated the "sales tax route," relieved that she finally got some applause. "If we can put a sales tax on to build a damn stadium, then why can't we put on a tax to build and maintain schools?" she asked.

"When you explained to that little boy about the evil people who didn't want him to get an education, did you explain about all the people who volunteer in the school?" one woman asked.

Another, bothered by this "hate thing," said Shafer tap-

ped her on the shoulder at a polling place and asked her whether or not she liked children. "We were fighting for our rights," the woman told her Wednesday.

Some suggested that the city impose impact fees on developers. Shafer said impact fees are currently illegal in the state, although Gilbert and Apache Junction, two high-growth areas, are trying to take the issue to court. However, Shafer said she would not support impact fees anyway, because such fees would rule out affordable housing for young, struggling families. Estimates made by city officials, which she could not substantiate at the meeting, were that \$15,000 would have to be added to every new house to meet the building needs of the school district.

THURSDAY

Nov. 6, 1997

Vol. 41 No. 86

Builders' boon contributes to district's bane

First in a series

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

The city of Surprise is "the Surprise of Arizona," touts promotional brochures and videos.

There's no doubt business is booming in Surprise. The city was founded in 1929 and incorporated in 1960, and its boundaries have expanded like a rubber band to encompass some 65 square miles.

Industries are beginning to trickle in and a new house is completed in the city on an average of every three hours and six minutes. Over the past 40 years, the population has grown from 500 to nearly 15,000 this year and is projected to more than double by the year 2005.

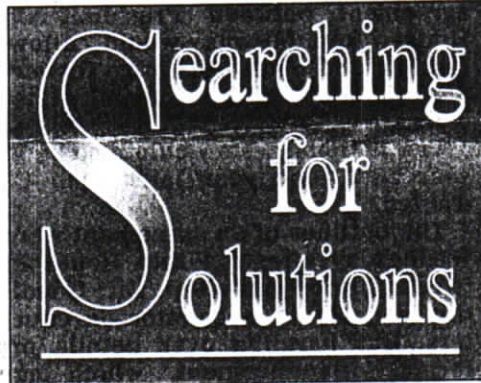
It's a sunny picture ... until the focus turns to the schools.

Surprise is located in the Dysart Unified School District, which includes four elementary, one middle and one high school.

For new families moving to the area, the real "surprise" comes when they enroll their children in the financially strapped district only to find out that there is no art, music, band, gifted program, or even physical education in the lower grades, and that the high school athletic program is running on donations alone. Forget field trips. Turn-over is high with 40 percent of the district's middle school teachers replaced this year alone.

A gamut of challenges faces the district including extreme poverty, a diverse population, and a large constituency of retirees, who have managed to defeat the past four budget override and bond elections. To top it off, retirement areas in the district are attempting to deannex, taking \$79 million in assessed valuation with them and dropping the district bonding capacity to \$7 million — maybe enough to build one elementary school.

Surprise Mayor Joan Shater is working on getting two bills passed during the next legislative session: one would make deannexation illegal, and the other would require that the \$2.36 tax paid into the gen-



eral education fund by already deannexed areas would go to the districts from which they have withdrawn. But passage of the first bill, if it comes, probably won't happen before the March 1998 deannexation vote.

"Education in Arizona is basically not the best," Shafer pointed out. "What makes us different is we don't have the money to work with. We have to spend too much time on elections — time that could be spent on education," she said referring to the deannexation election, and a recall drive against school board member Pam Justice.

District Business Manager David Hammond said 80 percent to 90 percent of school districts depend on the 10 percent maintenance and operations and 5 percent kindergarten through third grade budget overrides to fund the extra programs. If approved, those overrides would pump \$2.25 million into the struggling district.

But, chances are, an override won't pass as long as the retirement communities remain in the district. The first bond/budget override election, in March 1995, failed by a 10 percent margin, while the fourth, in May of this year, was defeated by a 19 percent margin.

Dave Reuter, manager of community and public relations for the city, occasionally gets questions from prospective residents about the school district. He tries to stress the positives — the commitment and tenure of teachers as well as innovative programs. "I try to explain

► See District woes, A5

District woes plague builders

◀ From A1

the dynamics of what happened in Peoria and the options we have this year with a new governor who is a former school teacher," he said. Peoria suffered through defeated bond elections and the eventual deannexation of Sun City to become one of the state's better districts.

But for now, the school district is a hard sell for new home subdivisions. "It is one of our biggest hurdles," admits Rick Bertsch, sales associate for Brown Family Homes in West Point Towne Center. "It's a problem we address, but it's a dismal problem. We tell them it isn't as it should be for a full education, but in four or five years things will improve," he said.

"It's definitely a roadblock," agreed sales associate Jeff James, even though the subdivision tallied 95 home sales in its first 12 weeks. "The schools are not that much of a problem for people with kids in the lower grades, but in junior high and high school the lack of athletics is a huge negative," said James, adding that it has affected sales of the larger homes. "They fall in love with the home, then they find out what school district it's in."

"It's a valid point and it does put a damper on sales," said Donna Dougherty, sales associate for Estes Homes, also located in West Point Towne Center. "This generation of parents is concerned about kids getting a good education and I tell them that all the programs are not in place, but they need to talk to their neighbors and get out and vote on bond issues and when the population comes up it will get better," she said.

11/6/97

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Cathy Piskel, who moved to Kingswood Park from Minnesota in June, said she feels "misled" by her Shea Homes salesperson. "They told me it was an excellent school district," she said.

While visiting the area in April, Piskel, concerned about the education of her three children, ages 13, 9 and 8, went to nearby Kingswood Elementary School and met with school officials, who told her about the upcoming bond/override election.

"In my naivete, I thought there's no way they would cut out all that stuff," Piskel explained, but by the time she received a postcard from the school telling her the override was defeated, it was too late to cancel the move.

Although she has found Dysart teachers to be "excellent," she is disappointed in the lack of funding. She said, "It goes beyond physical education and music. In my daughter's fourth-grade class there are not enough textbooks. They have to share. I see the need to focus on academics, but they still need to have something to balance their day."

Piskel, who speaks Spanish, said she likes the diversity of the middle school, where her son attends eighth grade and where she volunteers in the library, but she has more serious concerns. The math book he is using this year is the same one he used in sixth grade in Minnesota. In addition, she said the school's "rules and regulations are overwhelming. It's policed."

"I can't pin down what it is," she said, searching for words. "It's the poverty, the lack of caring ... the administration thinks everyone is bad, and there's no respect for the kids."

Sitting in the living room of her beautifully decorated two-story home, Piskel said that knowing what she knows now, she would not move to the area again. As for the future, she said, "We absolutely will move. We will probably not stay over three years. I will not have my daughters in the junior high."

In the meantime, she is considering driving the children to a Catholic school.

EDITORIALS

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

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SCW

CTE wins in Dysart

Trio vows to improve district

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

Members of the Citizens for Tax Equity group ousted incumbents Mary Johnson and Rachel Villanueva by a nearly 2-1 margin to take control of the five-member Dysart Unified School District Governing Board.

Sun City West residents Robert Koch, Eleanor Nelson and Rose Parker, members of the group seeking deannexation from the financially troubled school district, each garnered about 2,800 votes out of the 4,515 ballots cast. Each voter could vote for three candidates.

CTE, the group that essentially forced the election, had challenged the ward system instituted for last year's election. The ward system was ruled unconstitutional by the Arizona Supreme Court, forcing Tuesday's vote.

The three will finish the remaining three years of the four-year term unless a deannexation proposal is approved by voters in March. In that case, the three would no longer reside in the district and would have to resign from the board, probably at the end of the fiscal year, June 30.

The senior citizens join Pam Justice, who is facing a recall election in March, also prompted by CTE, and

President Mitch Eickmann, making it an all-Anglo board in a district with a population that is 66 percent Hispanic, 5 percent African-American and 26 percent Caucasian. Both ousted incumbents were minorities.

"I think the Justice Department lacked some information on representation by minority groups," said Surprise City Manager Dick McComb. "Now all of them have been removed." McComb, who was also elected to the board under the ward system, did not run this time.

"The people of Sun City West have bitten off a big chunk. I just hope their statements are true that they are interested in the kids' education," he added.

In a prepared statement, Koch, Nelson and Parker said, "Our aim will be to improve the education of the district's children. We hope that parents and school personnel will support us in achieving this goal."

"Why can't people accept the fact that we could possibly want to help the district?" Eleanor Nelson asked. "Why would we try to do a disservice to the district when there are hundreds of people here who spend time volunteering in the district?"

"Everything we do will be aimed at bettering the school system down

► See Victors pledge, A5



Election Results

Dysart

Here are the unofficial results of the Dysart Unified School District Governing Board election.

Mary Johnson.....	1,766
✓ Robert Koch.....	2,901
✓ Eleanor Nelson.....	2,876
✓ Rose Parker.....	2,769
Rachel Villanueva.....	1,568
Richard Snyder.....	1,308
Other write-ins.....	19

Peoria

Here are the unofficial results of the Peoria Acacia District city council election.

✓ Hortencia Gutierrez.....	276
Victor Borrero.....	174
Michael Patino.....	76

Victors pledge to improve district

◀ From A1

there — everything," Nelson said. "We hope we can change the attitude of parents and school officials because we need their cooperation to help bring about the changes to improve the education for their children."

The diverse Dysart district encompasses tiny El Mirage, the second poorest city in Arizona, Luke Air Force Base, fast-growing Surprise, parts of Sun City West, as well as rural ranches.

Nelson said it is not necessary to be Hispanic to understand the needs of the people in the district. "There is the assumption that we don't understand or we don't care to understand and that is an erroneous assumption," she said. "What you need is the background and expertise to do what is best for the district."

"I'm pretty disappointed," said Eickmann. "It's unfortunate that people are only concerned about their tax bill and don't care about the kids'

education."

He likened the election to a group of children playing baseball on a neighborhood lot with makeshift equipment. Along comes a bunch of older, bigger kids with bats, balls and gloves and they want the lot, so they challenge the younger kids to a game, with the winner taking possession of the lot. "It doesn't mean it's right for the older kids to do it, but they had the power to do it ... they had the power to take it," he said.

Clergymen called upon to help heal rift

By JEFF OWENS
Staff writer

Healing the relationship between the financially troubled Dysart Unified School District and the surrounding communities was the topic at last week's breakfast meeting of the Sun Cities Area Ministerial Association.

Clergymen from the West Valley met in the Sun City Country Club.

Noel Willis of Sun City West's Property Owners and Residents Association was the featured speaker.

Without delving into the complex web of tax issues and accusations that accompany almost any discussion of the district, Willis spoke of a genuine need for healing among the communities who have seen the figurative spilling of some bad blood in the disputes over district funding and policy.

Representatives of all faiths accepted his remarks resoundingly.

"I just know the Presbyterians," Willis said with a laugh afterward.

SCAMA Secretary Gina Griesman applauded Willis's efforts, and said what better group to start a discussion of healing than the local clergy.

"When Noel first contacted us about addressing this group, his concern was, 'How do we start the ball rolling — healing the community not just with the tax issues, not just with the Dysart issues, but acting more like civilized human beings to each other,'" she said. "And, of course, this group, these pastors in the pulpit, they are in the perfect position to start the ball rolling on this."

"If they can carry this message back to their groups, I think it's certainly step one."

Tax equity group strikes out on splitting ballot

Judge rules Dysart one consolidated area

By Ruth Borchardt

With a definitive "no," Judge Robert Myers ruled against Citizens for Tax Equity although the group of retirees apparently was not named by the judge.

A proposed ballot that could have allowed them to vote one another out of the Dysart School District was vetoed by the judge. Dysart held out for one consolidated area, and Judge Myers agreed with them.

The proposed ballot item for deannexation will have one question instead of four. Voters will be asked whether portions of the district should no longer be obligated to pay Dysart taxes. There must be a majority of those voters who want to leave the District, and a majority of those who will stay to pass the issue according to the ruling.

Myers' ruling was to the effect that four ballot questions would dilute the votes of those wishing to remain in the Dysart District.

Cristine Stelter, interim president of Citizens for Tax Equity, said the organization will have no comment until after the election of a new president and board in January.

Eleanor Nelson, former active member of the group, is no longer

involved, since she was elected to the Dysart School Board in November. She did say, "I think we need to get beyond the subject of deannexation, and on to improving the operation of these

"We will see every child in every grade has a textbook."

—Eleanor Nelson



schools."

Nelson, Bob Koch and Rose Parker have visited two schools in the area. Nelson said that she feels there is a threat to the health of the children in some of her research at Kingswood Elementary. There also seems to be overcrowding, and according to some teachers, a great lack of books. One teacher reportedly said that "we are in great need of more books."

Kingswood School's Principal Fernando De La Ossa said, "There will be enough books.

"It's an open ended question

with our 'growing pains'. The books are spread around as much as possible. New books have been ordered. Not all have arrived yet. In some instances, with certain types of literature programs, sometimes books are shared—perhaps one for every two students. Among 100 kids there may be 15 to 20 without books in mathematics and science.

"Two years ago we didn't have the money and it was voted to use just one half set of books. Now we have more money. It's the overcrowding that's the problem, all the new students arriving. I'm not so sure what enough is enough. With every shipment of books distributed, I check with the teachers and ask, 'What do you need?' But we won't be able to please every single teacher. There are primary textbooks, plus other supplemental ones. We won't always be able to supply the supplemental ones to each student.

"I think we're missing the point. We should be focusing on class size, and also there aren't enough programs such as music, art and P.E., plus our district has a much lower pay scale for teachers. We can't compete with

districts paying as much as \$4,000 a year more. These are bigger problems than textbooks. I'm concerned where we're going to put the new kids."

Nelson said, "We will see every child in every grade has a textbook," apparently believing this is a major issue.

Seemingly, some of the teachers did not know of the decision not to have a text book for every child. There seemed to be a lack of communication.

Nelson was reportedly somewhat taken aback to see outside a kindergarten classroom newspaper articles pasted on the wall in

See TAX, Page 3

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TAX: Equity group strikes out, from Page 1

disfavor of the new board and it's members. One letter of criticism was also noted, and not one article giving any favorable picture of the three new retiree members and the goals of what they are trying to achieve was included, according to Nelson.

SCW

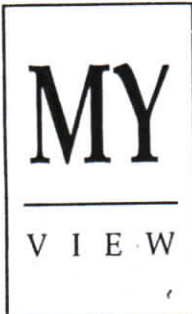
Koch, Nelson, Parker will set Dysart District on course

By ROBERT F. KOCH,
ELEANOR R. NELSON
and ROSE L. PARKER

Robert F. Koch, Eleanor R. Nelson and Rose L. Parker are running as a slate for the three open positions on the governing board of the Dysart Unified School District.

Their combined experience in the fields of teaching, school administration, journalism and law, as well as in parenting, will enable them to meet the challenge the district now faces.

Koch, Nelson and Parker are



united in their commitment to improving the district's educational programs, students' test scores and financial position. They are deeply concerned about the district's students and faculty and realize the importance of good education for the next generations.

It is common knowledge that the Dysart Unified School District has many problems. School officials have cut programs, because, they say, there is insufficient funding. Academic performance must be improved.

These problems can be solved if the district is led by citizens with wisdom, knowledge and experience, and if all factions of the community

are willing to work together.

As members of the governing board, Koch, Nelson and Parker will work hard to solve these problems. They will become familiar with the present operation of the school district and will work at resolving its current difficulties. They also will explore new educational approaches that could benefit the children.

Changes must be made, and Koch, Nelson and Parker have the courage and expertise to make them. A vote for Koch, Nelson and Parker is a vote for our children's future.

The writers are candidates for the governing board of the Dysart Unified School District.

'Deannexation is a cancer and cancer kills. I do not want to see our educational system dead.'

**Joan Shafer
Surprise mayor**



Surprise drafts bills to nip deannexation

By JANICE TARLETON
Staff writer

Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer received unanimous approval from the City Council to proceed with plans to draft two legislative bills aimed at school district deannexations. Council member Johnny Montoya was absent.

The bills, to be written and sponsored in conjunction with Sen. Ed Cirillo of Sun City West, R-District 15, would make deannexation illegal and would require the \$2.20 tax paid into the general fund by deannexed areas to go to the school districts from which they have withdrawn.

In asking for the council's support, Shafer, who appeared a bit nervous, said it wasn't her intention to get involved in the administration of schools.

"The city is only as strong as its citizens. Children can only be as strong as the school system. They have a right to a good education and we have a responsibility to see that they have it," she said.

"Deannexation is a cancer and cancer kills. I do not want to see our educational system dead," she continued. "I hope all the citizens can be behind me, because it's going to take all of us to get it through."

There was no public hearing or comment on the matter and little reaction from the 20 or so people in the audience.

At the end of the meeting, Shafer reported that she and other council members handed a letter to Gov. Jane Hull at a League of Cities meeting earlier this week detailing concerns about deannexation. They handed out 100 copies of the letters to officials from other cities also, asking them to sign the letter and return it to Hull, she said.

In other business, the council authorized City Manager Dick McComb to institute litigation, if needed, to acquire 640 acres of land owned by the City of Phoenix.

McComb said litigation to acquire the abandoned airport property may not be necessary.

► See Council shares, A5

Council shares concerns in letter to Hull

◀ From A1

"There's a lot of negotiations going on," he said. "Phoenix wants to work with us in trying to get it resolved."

A zoning variance to allow construction of a three-story, 110-unit assisted living facility located at Parkview Place and Mountain View Boulevard was approved. The variance was requested because the city's current zoning ordinance does not address this type of development, said Shirley Berg, planning director.

The change increases density from 22 to 28 units per acre, decreasing unit size from 2,000-square-feet to 1,550. A neighbor, who said she bought a home in the area for the "open-space effect," objected to a three-story structure. Her concerns were somewhat allayed by viewing drawings of the building. Vice Mayor Roy Villanueva voted against the request.

Seven members, chosen from a field of 17 applicants, were appointed to the Surprise Planning and Zoning

Commission. They include returning members Donald Jones, chairman, and Darrell Belk, along with new appointees Antonio Segarra, Mariah Bradford, Daniel Morris, Robert Gonzales and Carl Cox. Selected for the first time by a committee rather than the mayor, they will each serve a two-year term starting today and ending June 30, 1999.

Council members discussed the possibility of drafting an ordinance that would stagger the terms and require that

members be selected by committee. "It's too great a responsibility for one person," said Shafer.

In other action, the council renewed a one-year contract for \$96,993 with Canyon State Property Services for landscape maintenance on Bell Road. Even with an increase of nearly \$10,000 over last year's contract, the company was the lowest of three bidders. Council members remarked that the company has done a good job.

Mayor fights deannexation

Staff report

Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer will ask the City Council for authorization to draft two legislative bills aimed at curbing deannexation at a meeting scheduled for 7 p.m. today in City Hall, 12425 W. Bell Road, Suite D-100.

Shafer said the bills, to be written and sponsored in conjunction with Sen. Ed Cirillo of Sun City West, R-District 15, would make deannexation illegal and would require tax money paid into the general fund by deannexed areas to go to the school district in which they reside.

A Sun City West group, Citizens for Tax Equity, representing homeowners in the expansion area of that community, has collected enough

signatures to force a spring 1998 vote on deannexation from the Dysart Unified School District, of which Surprise is a part. If that drive is successful it will cut expansion area tax bills in half, putting them on par with what residents in the original Sun City developments pay now.

However, the already-strapped school district would have to depend on state aid for 80 percent of its budget, and other taxpayers in the district would see an increase in tax bills of 10 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation.

Shafer, who called deannexation "a cancer that is going to destroy our schools," said her action was prompted by the latest deannexation attempt. She said a "domino"

effect has been created and, if it continues, "we will have a state of nothing but sick school districts."

Del Webb's original Sun City deannexed from the Peoria Unified School District in 1974.

In other business, the council is expected to appoint members to the city's Planning and Zoning Board. Two new and three returning members, selected by a committee to represent a broad section of the community, will serve a term from Oct. 10, 1997, to June 30, 1999.

The council also will have its first reading of an ordinance that proposes several changes to the City Zoning Ordinance.

Thursday, November 6, 1997 THE WESTER Page 5

Surprise Mayor takes up the cause against school deannexation

By Ruth Borchardt

Nov. 12, 10 a.m., at the Bank of America Community Room on R.H. Johnson Blvd., a public meeting will be held where the guest speaker will be Mayor Joan Schaeffer of Surprise.

The subject of deannexation from the Dysart School District, still being hotly debated, not only in Sun City West, but in other neighboring areas, will be addressed by the Mayor.

The Northwest Valley Taxpayers Association is sponsoring the event. Cliff Cowles, Jr., president of the NWTVA, said, "Our Board, acting on the recommendation of Jerry Medford, member of the Sun City West Recreation Centers' Governing Board, decided that this is a subject that has not had enough public discussion and is too important, and possibly will become too divisive an issue to leave in limbo."

The members of Citizens for Tax Equity are strongly in favor of deannexation. Mayor Schaeffer feels, "We are not a nation of elderly or young, but a nation that needs to work together for the betterment of all."

This will be an open meeting for all parties interested in attending.

There will be a question and answer session after Schaeffer's talk.

With many of the residents of the expansion area of SCW and Citizens for tax Equity group working for deannexation, the topic is in the forefront of many Westers' thinking.

Retirees win another

By Lori Baker
The Arizona Republic

EL MIRAGE — Retirees are in the lead in their battle with the Dysart Unified School District, but they may be in for another fight yet.

On Wednesday, the retirees scored their third victory in their bid to alter the Dysart district when a Maricopa County Superior Court judge denied Dysart's request for a temporary restraining order to halt a de-annexation election that could let four retirement communities leave the district.

However, Judge Robert Myers found that the school board's complaint stated a "valid claim" and ordered that a hearing be held Nov. 25 to determine whether to halt the election.

Eleanor Nelson, vice president of Citizens for Tax Equity, which filed petitions for the de-annexation election, said her group has no plans to halt preparations for the election. It is scheduled for spring.

The Rev. Mitchell Eickmann, president of the Dysart school board, said he looks forward to the hearing but was disappointed that the restraining order wasn't granted.

"I certainly hope that for a change the court will look as to what are going to be the long-term repercussions," Eickmann said. "The damage they (members of the citizens group) are doing is so much more than the little benefit they would gain, it seems unconscionable that someone could

— Please see **RETIREES**, Page 3

Retirees win another round against Dysart

— **RETIREES**, from Page 1

support the de-annexation at this time, especially by an unfair electoral process."

In their motion for a restraining order, Dysart officials challenged the way the group's petitions were set up.

Dysart's attorney, Jose Martinez, argued that the de-annexation area should be consolidated rather than divided into four areas.

Martinez pointed out that residents of the retirement communities could cast votes both as residents of the de-annexed areas and as residents of the territory to remain in the school district. By dividing up, the retirees could vote each other out of the district.

Each voter may vote on all four questions. A Sun City West voter, for example, could vote on his own area to be de-annexed and then vote on the other three questions that he is willing to assume financial liability for the other de-annexed areas. But if the Sun City West area is de-annexed, that voter would not have to bear the tax liability.

County Schools Superintendent Sandra Dowling, county elections director Karen Osborne and the county supervisors were named as defendants in the lawsuit in an attempt to bar them from taking action to hold the de-annexation election.

Dean Wolcott, deputy county attorney, said he believes that

“

The damage they (members of the citizens group) are doing is so much more than the little benefit they would gain, it seems unconscionable that someone could support the de-annexation at this time, especially by an unfair electoral process.

THE REV. MITCHELL EICKMANN

DYSART SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT

multiple questions in the de-annexation election are allowed under law.

The de-annexation petitions have not been validated by county officials to determine whether an election should be called, Osborne said.

The citizens group filed petitions Sept. 3 with Dowling's office to call for an election for voters to consider de-annexing four areas from the Dysart district: two sections of the Sun City West expansion area, Sun Village and a portion of Youngtown.

Residents in those areas want out of the Dysart district because they pay higher taxes than residents in neighboring retirement communities that are not in the district. The citizens group has been blamed for defeating two overrides and three bond proposals in the past two

years, leading to the cancellation of some academic and sports programs.

The citizens group had won other victories in recent weeks.

The group successfully challenged the district's tax rate. County officials agreed that a mistake was made in the notices sent to taxpayers. The rate should be \$1.20 lower than initially set, and Supervisor Jan Brewer said taxpayers who already paid their bills can get refunds or credits.

Dysart's total tax rate initially was set at \$8.13, up from last year's \$7.32 per \$100 of assessed valuation. The new total rate is \$6.93.

Three weeks ago, the citizens group scored a legal victory on a different issue. The state Supreme Court refused to consider Dysart's appeal of a ruling that declared the district's ward system for electing board members unconstitutional.

As a result, an at-large school board election will be held Nov. 4 to determine who should serve the rest of the terms that expire in 2000. Four Sun City West residents and incumbents Rachel Villanueva and Mary Johnson are competing for three seats. Villanueva and Johnson were elected in the ward system election, along with Richard McComb, who decided not to run again.

The de-annexation election could be held as early as March.

Eickmann said he believes the proposed de-annexation would be a

burden on an already financially strapped district.

If the de-annexation is successful, the retirement communities will no longer pay Dysart taxes.

"The burden will then fall on remaining taxpayers in the school district, which is generally made up of lower middle, middle class and minority residents," Eickmann said.

If the proposed four areas are de-annexed, Dysart would lose about one-fourth to one-third of its assessed valuation of property, from \$31 million to \$41 million. The primary assessed valuation is \$123 million, said David Diamond, Dysart's business manager.

That would result in an increase in the primary tax rate for remaining taxpayers of between \$1.92 and \$2.96 per \$100 assessed value. The current primary tax rate is \$5.92, he said. The primary tax rate generates revenue for the operation of the school district.

Retirement communities like Sun City and the original Sun City West now pay an unorganized school district tax rate of \$2.20 per \$100 of assessed valuation, compared with the Dysart district tax rate of about \$8.12 per \$100. The unorganized district tax revenue is spread among all school districts rather than in a specific one.

Republic reporter Jennifer Barrett contributed to this story.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7777 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

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SCM

Retirees win another round against Dysart

By Lori Baker

The Arizona Republic

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— Please see **RETIRES**, Page 3

Dysart files lawsuit against county agencies

By JEFF OWENS
Staff writer

The Dysart Unified School District has fired the latest salvo in the battle over the proposed deannexation of four retirement communities from the district.

Dysart attorneys filed a lawsuit in Maricopa County Superior Court on Tuesday seeking to stop a March 1998 deannexation referendum.

The suit was filed against the Maricopa County school superintendent, Maricopa County elections director and Maricopa County Board of Supervisors. It charges that the

proposed deannexation by residents of the Sun City West expansion area — split in two for electoral purposes, Youngtown, and Sun Village in Surprise is illegal.

"All the main defendants have responsibilities as it relates to holding the deannexation election," said Dysart attorney Jose Martinez. "Therefore, they are the logical defendants in a lawsuit seeking to stop the deannexation election."

Dysart officials released a written statement on Tuesday which explained their "belief that the ballots, as they have been submitted, violate the statute which authorizes deannexation elections."

nexation elections."

That law, A.R.S. 15-460, requires approval on deannexation by both a majority of voters in the proposed deannexation area and a majority of voters in the remaining area of the district.

As currently designed, the March election will allow residents of the fleeing retirement communities to vote as residents of the deannexing areas and as residents of the area remaining in the district. The result, according to Tuesday's statement, is that "residents of the deannexing retirement communities may vote to deannex and avoid school taxes and,

at the same election, have their vote count as a vote in the group remaining in the school district in favor of deannexation."

Governing Board President Mitchell Eickmann said that "when you set up an election like this where some voters can vote both sides of the issue, you're basically stacking the deck against the residents of the district who ultimately remain."

Dysart officials believe that in such a scenario, the retirees will succeed in deannexing, even while the majority of voters living outside

the retirement communities are against deannexation.

Deannexation petitions from the four retirement communities given to the county school superintendent's office were forwarded to the Elections Department early in September. The groups were easily able to collect the necessary signatures during their petition drive.

If deannexation is successful, those retirement communities will no longer pay education taxes, and the expense will then fall to the district's remaining taxpayers.

K.I.D.S. may knock on your door this week

By CHRIS RASMUSSEN
Independent Newspapers

9/26/97

Prohibited by law to campaign for its May 20 override election, Dysart Unified School District is receiving a helping hand from a newly created organization that aims to bring awareness of the dis-

trict's condition to the voters.

Project K.I.D.S. (Keep Improving Dysart Schools) plans to campaign for the district through a variety of means, including door-to-door visits to residents in the expansion area of Sun City West.

"We're going to get an army of volunteers and go door to door, let-

ting people know the terrible financial shape the district is in and how important this override election really is," says Jane Plank of Sun City West.

The Dysart Unified School District is bounded by Jomax Road

See ■ KIDS, Page 10

to the north, Glendale Avenue to the south, the White Tank Mountains to the west and the Agua Fria River to the east.

In addition to door-to-door visits, the organization plans to mail literature, advertise in newspapers and conduct a telephone campaign.

"I'm going to vote for the override," says Sun City West expansion resident Lee Ormsbee. "I think it's needed.

"I heard that on a \$160,000 home, which is what most of the homes in the expansion area cost, the tax is \$27 and I certainly can afford that. I would hope everybody could," says Mrs. Ormsbee.

Project K.I.D.S. member and Sun City West resident Lila Schwartz says the group will be involved with registering voters throughout the district, including the expansion area.

More than \$12,000 has been raised and budgeted for the group's efforts.

"It's a political action committee made strictly of volunteers," says Dr. Jesus de la Garza, Dysart Unified School District superintendent.

"They are trying to share information with individuals who might be willing to listen to a different point of view."

Felix Maccagnano, who lives in the Dysart Unified School District,

hopes to change a few minds on the override issue.

"For people to want to pull out and not help the schools is wrong," Mr. Maccagnano says. "I have grandchildren in other districts and other people help to pay for their education. Well, these grandchildren need help also."

Pam Justice, president-elect of the Arizona School Board Association and Dysart board member, says people don't realize how little the override will actually cost them.

"A \$100,000 home would cost taxpayers \$14 a year," Mrs. Justice says. "I don't think people realize it's going to cost so little."

The Rev. Keith Watkins, who lives in the Sun City West expansion area, says he plans to support Project K.I.D.S. because he views education as the key to a strong community, state and nation.

"The public schools are part of the basic institution of American life," the Rev. Watkins says. "All Americans have an obligation."

Mrs. Ormsbee agrees. "I've always been for public education. I have no children, and I have always supported schools.

"I think there are quite a few against the override, but I really think the other side hasn't gotten the message out. I don't believe all people in the expansion area are against it, I would just hate to believe that."

Dysart deannexers file petitions

By JEFF OWENS
Staff writer

Petitions from groups wishing to deannex from the Dysart Unified School District were forwarded to the Maricopa County Elections Department Friday by officials of the Maricopa County School Superintendent's office.

A vote on deannexation for Sun City West, Sun Village and Youngtown could come in March. More than 2,000 people signed deannexation petitions late in August, almost twice as many as were needed to put the issue on a ballot.

"We're kind of on hold right now," said Marc Frazier, chief deputy of Maricopa County school department, noting that the elections department now has 60 days to validate the signatures.

Officials of Citizens for Tax Equity

also filed school board nomination petitions with the Maricopa County School Superintendent office last week, moving the district one step closer to a Nov. 10 special election.

The petitions name four candidates for the three seats that will be open in the election, bringing the total to six — incumbent board members Mary Johnson and Rachel Villanueva have also filed ballot petitions.

Incumbent and Surprise City Manager Dick McComb is not seeking reelection.

Two of the four Citizens candidates are that organization's president and vice president, Bob Koch and Eleanor Nelson.

Citizens for Tax Equity have initiated a flurry of activity in recent months, organizing petition drives to accomplish three goals:

■ Representation on the school

board and abandonment of the district's ward system of election for the board.

■ Deannexation from the district.

■ Removal of long time Dysart school board member Pam Justice.

Representation and deannexation may appear contradictory — any of Citizens for Tax Equity's nominees who are elected to the school board would have to step down on June 30 if deannexation is successful.

"The sequence is a little unusual," said Dysart Superintendent Jesus de la Garza.

The special election stems from Citizens for Tax Equity's successful court challenge of the constitutionality of the ward system, which was adopted in 1996. The Maricopa County Superior Court and state appeals court invalidated the ward system, and the Arizona Supreme Court will decide on Sept. 16

whether to consider the matter.

Dysart critics in Sun City West have been instrumental in defeating three district budget overrides in the last two years, despite the fact that they are a voting minority in the district.

While the prospect of having some of Dysart's most venomous critics on the school board presents "a very difficult position" for Dysart administrators, de la Garza said the ward system was designed to include, not exclude, those minorities.

"We're not averse to representation on the governing board from Sun City West — we never have been," he said. "It (the ward system) was intended to ensure proportionate representation on the board."

"But if the ward system is not able to be continued, I think it jeopardizes any minority representation on the board."

Retirees target control of Dysart

But de-annexation try could make reign short

By Lori Baker
The Arizona Republic

A group of retirees in the Dysart Unified School District hopes to gain control of the school board, but its reign could be a short one.

Three people endorsed by Citizens for Tax Equity might be elected during a special election in November, and a fourth might be elected to the five-member board during a recall election in March.

However, they might serve only until

June 30 if voters approve requests from Sun City West, Youngtown and Sun Village to get out of the district.

That decision also is expected to come in March. If de-annexation is approved, any board members living in those areas would have to step down. Sandra Dowling, Maricopa County's superintendent of schools, will seek a legal opinion about how soon replacements for those vacated seats would be named.

State law says de-annexation will take effect June 30 if the proposal is passed, but it's unclear whether the board members would be eligible to serve until then.

Citizens for Tax Equity filed petitions with Dowling's office last week to place

four candidates for the three seats on the Nov. 10 ballot. They are Sun City West residents Robert Koch, Eleanor R. Nelson, Ted Nuss and Rose Parker. Koch is the group's president, and Nelson is the vice president.

Board incumbents Rachel Villanueva, a nine-year veteran, and Mary Johnson, who joined the board in January, also have filed petitions to be on the ballot. Dick McComb, who has served on the board since January, did not seek re-election.

The special election is the result of a lawsuit filed by Citizens for Tax Equity protesting the creation of a ward system in November 1996. A Superior Court judge in April declared the system unconstitutional.

Under the ward system, district voters elected representatives from certain areas rather than at large. Villanueva, McComb and Johnson were elected to four-year terms in that election. A Court of Appeals judge allowed the three board members to serve until the special election. The Arizona Supreme Court is expected to decide Monday whether it will consider an appeal, which could halt the election.

The citizens group, which is made up primarily of Sun City West expansion area residents, led the effort to reject override and bond proposals the past couple years.

"We are convinced that the district can

— Please see **DYSART**, Page 5

Dysart takeover targeted

— **DYSART**, from Page 1

be run adequately within the present budget," Nelson said.

The citizens group also filed 672 signatures to force a recall election against longtime board member Pamela Justice.

The County Recorder's Office has 60 days to determine whether there are at least 203 valid signatures, as required. If the county calls for a March 10 election, candidates would be able to submit petitions to appear on the ballot. Nelson said one of her group's members would run in the recall election.

The group gave several reasons for wanting to recall Justice.

It contends that Justice failed to represent the interests of seniors and that she attempted to mislead voters in a recent override election.

Justice, who has served 12 years on the board, said she is confused about why the citizens group is targeting her.

"I do not understand why they are doing this," Justice said. "It will not benefit the children, and they may no longer be in the district if the de-annexation is approved."

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC+

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Group files bid to avoid school taxes

Senior communities seek to leave district

By Lori Baker
The Arizona Republic

Tired of paying higher school taxes than their fellow senior-citizen neighbors, some Sun City West, Youngtown and Sun Village residents want out of the Dysart Unified School District.

Citizens for Tax Equity submitted petitions Wednesday to the Maricopa County Superintendent of Schools Office. If enough of the signatures are valid, voters will consider de-annexing four areas from the Dysart district.

The group of senior citizens has been blamed for defeating two overrides and three bond proposals in the past two years. The group has decided to take it a step further and try to get out of the district.

"It's a miracle that we got the signatures when half our population is gone this time of year, and it only took us four days to get them," said Eleanor R. Nelson, vice president of Citizens for Tax Equity. "It shows the dedication of the people who were signing petitions in the heat and in the rain."

To get on the ballot, each petition needs 1,202 valid signatures, which equals 10 percent of the district's registered voters.

The areas are:

- Sun Village, a retirement community of about 1,400 residences in Surprise. There were 2,087 signatures submitted.

- Youngtown. There were 2,123 signatures submitted.

- The Sun City West expansion area, which has been divided into two parts for the purpose of the de-annexation. There were 2,120 signatures submitted from one part and 1,911 signatures submitted from the other.

Nelson said she hopes the de-annexation election will be held March 10.

"We were assured by the county that six months was adequate between the time when we brought in the signatures and the time it would be on the ballot," she said. "We worked very hard to meet that requirement."

T. Rae Zapata, county elections administrative coordinator, said the election date depends on when the County Recorder's Office validates the signatures to determine whether the election should be called. Zapata said state law does not set a time limit for the verification.

— Please see **GROUP**, Page 2

Group seeking exit from school district

— **GROUP**, from Page 1

To pass the issues, "yes" votes are needed from a majority of those voting both inside and outside the areas that want to be de-annexed.

Dysart board member Rachel Villanueva said she hopes voters will reject the de-annexation proposals.

"It's not fair to our community, our district and our students," she said. "The bottom line is, I feel that everybody should contribute to education no matter what community they live in."

Board member Pamela Justice said she believes de-annexation would cause a domino effect.

"When the new retirement communities being built in the district gain in population and control the outcome of our bond and override, they will want out," she said. "We can't afford to lose the assessed valuation."

Besides Sun City West and Sun Village, two more retirement communities are being built in the Dysart district.

The largest one under construction is Del Webb's Sun City Grand, which has about 700 residents. Plans call for 17,000 residents in 9,500 homes within 13 years, Webb spokesman John Waldron said.

"All of the residents in Sun City Grand will be part of the Dysart district, and we're working hard to include them in the district by encouraging them to do volunteer work," Waldron said.

Construction also has begun on Arizona Traditions North, a joint development by Westcor and Continental Homes, with about 2,200 homes planned.

Justice said she will lobby the state Legislature to change the law that allows de-annexation from school districts.

"I don't think we'll get support from legislators representing the Dysart district, because the Sun Cities are the majority of their constituency and they want to get re-elected," Justice said. "But the majority of people in the nation think it should be everybody's responsibility to pay for the education of our youth, because they are the future of our country."

The citizens group, primarily made up of retirees from the Sun City West expansion area, has been trying to de-annex from Dysart since 1995, saying it's not fair that other Sun City West residents don't pay Dysart taxes.

In 1981, the original Sun City West forced a de-annexation from the district after seniors took over a majority of the school board seats. Earlier, Sun City had

defeated 16 Peoria Unified School District bond requests before constituents voted the area out in 1974.

Those two retirement communities now pay an unorganized school district tax rate of \$2.20 per \$100 of assessed valuation, compared with the Dysart district tax rate of about \$8.12 per \$100. The unorganized district tax revenue is shared among all school districts rather than in a specific one.

If the proposed four areas are de-annexed, Dysart would lose about one-fourth to one-third of its assessed valuation of property, or \$31 million to \$41 million. The primary assessed valuation is about \$123 million, said David Hammond, Dysart's business manager.

That would result in an increase in the primary tax rate for remaining taxpayers of \$1.97 to \$2.96 per \$100 assessed valuation. The current primary tax rate is \$5.92, he said. The primary tax rate generates revenue for the day-to-day operation of the school district.

The effect on the secondary tax rate is uncertain, because county officials are waiting for a legal opinion about whether the de-annexed areas would have to pay for old bond debt. This year's secondary tax rate is \$2.20. The secondary tax rate repays bond debt. Hammond said — Dysart's attorney believes that the de-annexed areas do have to repay the old debt.

If the de-annexed areas would not have to repay the old debt, Hammond said, the secondary tax rate would go up \$.73 to \$1.10 per \$100 assessed valuation for taxpayers remaining in the district. It would remain at \$2.20 if those in the de-annexed areas would have to pay the debt.

If the de-annexation goes through and those taxpayers don't have to repay the old bond debt.

In addition, Hammond said, the lower property valuation would affect the district's ability to sell bonds because of a state formula that is tied to property values.

If voters approved bonds, the district would be able to sell about \$23 million worth under existing valuation; de-annexation would mean only \$13 million worth of bonds could be sold.

The de-annexation would affect future tax rates as well. If remaining taxpayers approve an override or bond proposal, their tax rate would be higher than if the de-annexed areas were included in the tax base.

Lori Baker can be reached at 444-7120 or at lori.baker@pni.com via e-mail.

SCW
 Monday, August 25, 1997

Dysart group to begin de-annexation drive

By Angela Rabago-Mussi

The Arizona Republic

A group of retirees trying to get out of the Dysart Unified School District will begin a four-day petition drive Tuesday.

Citizens for Tax Equity originally had planned to begin collecting signatures last week but was forced by the Maricopa County School Superintendent's Office to revise its petition papers.

Members of the group will solicit signers for the de-annexation petitions from 8 a.m. to noon Tuesday through Friday at Palm Ridge Recreation Center, 13800 W. Deer

Valley Drive, Sun City West.

The superintendent's office decided that "several minor changes must be made before signatures can be collected," said Eleanor R. Nelson, vice president of the group.

Nelson said the changes involved legal descriptions of the areas that are seeking de-annexation.

De-annexation petitions have been drawn for four areas:

- Sun Village, a retirement community of about 1,400 residences in Surprise.
- Youngtown.
- The Sun City West expansion area,

which has been divided into two parts for the purpose of the de-annexation.

Organizers are hoping to collect enough signatures to force a vote on de-annexation in March.

To get on the ballot, each petition needs enough signatures to equal 10 percent of the district's registered voters. There are about 12,000 registered voters in the district, so about 1,200 signatures are needed.

In another matter, Dysart officials have asked the Arizona Supreme Court to review a trial court's decision outlawing the district's ward system of election.

An appeals court upheld the ruling and

called for an election in November for the three seats that were filled on the school board using the ward system.

The district had used an at-large election system until last year, when it changed to the ward system.

Dysart asked that the Supreme Court stay the November election, which would be an at-large election, but the court refused.

Superintendent Jesus de la Garza said that as of now, the district will hold an election for the three seats Nov. 4.

The Supreme Court will decide Sept. 16 whether to accept the case for review.

Friday, August 15, 1997 The Arizona Republic

Dysart de-annexation drive starts

Reduction in taxes sought by retirees

By Angela Rabago-Mussi
The Arizona Republic

A group of retirees trying to get out of the Dysart Unified School District has scheduled six days to gather signatures to force a vote on the issue.

Citizens for Tax Equity, made up of residents of the Sun City West expansion area, is organizing the petition drive.

Members of the group will have de-annexation petitions available from 8 a.m.

to noon Tuesday through Thursday and Aug. 26-28 at the Palm Ridge Recreation Center, 13800 W. Deer Valley Drive, Sun City West.

De-annexation petitions have been drawn for four areas:

- Sun Village, a retirement community of about 1,400 residences in Surprise.
- Youngtown.
- The Sun City West expansion area, which has been divided into two parts for the purpose of the de-annexation.

As a result, four petitions will be available. Eleanor Nelson, vice president of Citizens for Tax Equity, said district residents who want all these areas out of the district should sign all four petitions.

To get on the ballot, each petition needs enough signatures to equal 10 percent of the district's registered voters. There are about 12,000 registered voters in the district, so about 1,200 signatures are needed.

The group also will have petitions calling for the recall of board member Pamela Justice.

About 200 signatures are needed to force a recall election.

If enough signatures are gathered, both measures likely would go to a vote in March, said T. Rae Zapata of the Maricopa County School Superintendent's Office.

Residents of the Sun City West expansion area say they want out of the district in order to have the same tax rate that their

neighbors in the older section of Sun City West and Sun City pay.

Residents in those two areas pay a school tax rate of \$2.20 per \$100 of assessed property value because they de-annexed from the Dysart and Peoria school districts more than 15 years ago. Expansion-area residents pay nearly three times that — \$6.33 per \$100.

Dysart officials oppose the de-annexation. Tax rates for other district residents will rise if the retirement community gets out of the district, they say.

Board member Rachel Villanueva said the district would lose too much of its tax

— Please see **DYSART**, Page 2

— **DYSART**, from Page 1

base with de-annexation. The Sun City West area represents about one-quarter of the district's property value.

She said she believes the retirement communities will get enough signatures to force a vote.

Project KIDS (Keep Improving Dysart Schools), a group of district supporters who campaigned for overrides and bonds, will work against de-annexation, she said.

"We're getting ready to meet again," Villanueva said. "We are going to have to get together and find out what we can do."

In order for the areas to be de-annexed, "yes" votes are needed

from a majority of those voting both inside and outside the areas that want to be de-annexed.

The Sun City West group has split the community in two to try to get a majority vote.

That way, each side (about 1,500 residences each) can vote for the other's de-annexation, Nelson said.

Since many retirees travel during the summer, Nelson said, the group is relying on the people still in town to collect enough petition signatures.

Angela Rabago-Mussi can be reached at 780-7127 or at angela.rabago@pni.com via e-mail.

Dysart high school athletics on the rebound

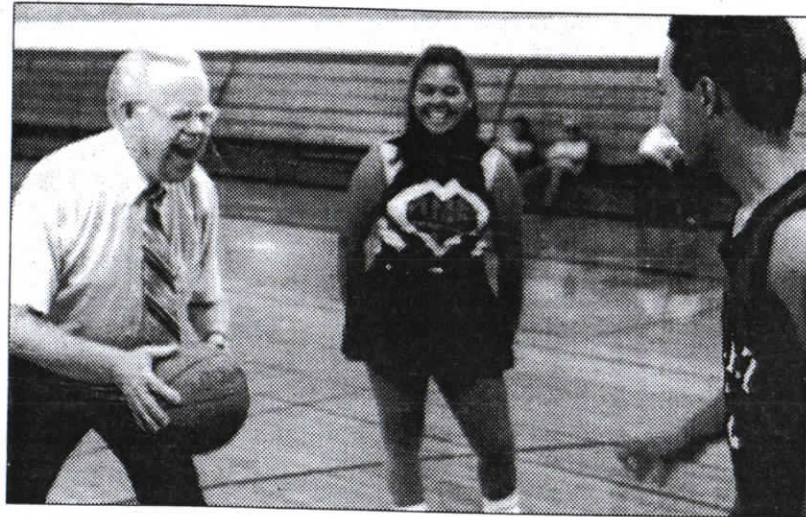


Photo by CHRIS RASMUSSEN/Independent Newspapers

Buzzer shot saves the game

Sun Cities Realtor Ken Meade, left, prepares his move against Dysart High School basketball player Jorge Ortiz while Dysart cheerleader Maggie Cortez watches the action. Mr. Meade donated \$1,000 to the district's high school athletic program with a promise for \$10,000 more. Overwhelming financial support from the Sun Cities in recent weeks may save the district's athletic program, but the school board must make a decision by Aug. 1.

having sports.

"Real estate in the Sun Cities has been very good to me. It's time to give back."

Support for the district isn't limited to surrounding communities. Valley-wide, high schools and businesses have expressed interest in supporting Dysart athletics.

There is even talk the Phoenix Suns may fund part or all of the cost for the boy's and girl's basketball teams. School board member Pamela Justice said the board is still waiting to hear back from the Suns, and the professional basketball team's board of directors has yet to

authorized the donation.

"The response from the community has been very upbeat," Mr. James said. "But we still need a lot of money from the citizens. I hope that more money is forthcoming from the expansion area. These kids are still in dire need."

Now that there is solid support from the community, it's up to the school board to decide what to do. Ms. Justice said the board has three options: reinstate the whole athletic program (winter, fall and spring sports), part of it or none of it.

In order for the Dysart Demons to field a team for fall sports,

Sun Cities support makes sports program possible

By CHRIS RASMUSSEN
Independent Newspapers

Students in the Dysart Unified School District may have an athletic program after all.

The district may have enough funds to reinstate its entire high school athletic program, thanks in part to Sun City West residents and businesses.

School officials said they were forced to cut the district's \$110,000 athletic program due to a lack of money after district voters failed to approve a May override election.

Overwhelming financial support from area residents and businesses, however, has convinced the school board to reconsider cutting athletics.

An effort led by Sun City West resident Gary James has raised more than \$20,000 for the district,

with hopes of more funds coming in before the start of the school year.

”

I got a little emotional when I thought about these kids not having sports. Real estate in the Sun Cities has been very good to me. It's time to give back.

— Ken Meade
Sun Cities Realtor

"This is a time the residents of Sun City West can demonstrate their concern and support for the students at Dysart High School," said Mr. James.

"We would really appreciate if the people who have already contribut-

ed money to the district tell their friends and neighbors," he said. "Unfortunately a lot of people have been out of town for the summer during the fund drive."

Mr. James is not alone in his quest to give the kids at Dysart High sports program. Del Webb Corp has contributed \$2,000, while Sun Cities Realtor Ken Meade has given \$1,000 with a commitment for another \$10,000.

Mr. Meade said he hopes his \$10,000 will encourage another business to match his donation guaranteeing some level of athletics at the high school.

"I think we could raise enough money for the whole program," Mr. Meade said. "I got a little emotional when I thought about these kids no

See ■ SPORTS, Page 3

including football — the board must make a decision by Aug. 1.

"I thought I was going to get to play basketball this year," said Dysart senior Jorge Ortiz. "I thought I had a good chance at getting a scholarship, but if I can't play my senior year, there's no chance of that happening."

Jorge, a shooting guard with a 4.0 grade point average, said it's frustrating to work for something, only to have it taken away.

"When you take out sports, a lot of people will just drop out (of school)," he said.

we weren't going to have sports this year," said Maggie Cortez, senior captain of the school's spirit line. "I felt very sad and I wanted to cry because our senior year is supposed to be special."

Maggie said she was excited to learn sports may be saved due to the support from people of Sun City West and Sun City.

Mr. James said, "This is the time to open your heart and your checkbook to these kids."

Residents may send contributions to: Dysart High Athletic and Music Fund, P.O. Box 5597, Sun City

THURSDAY

July 17, 1997

Vol. 4

Gifts drive Dysart sports

But private funding is short-term fix

By JEFF OWENS
Staff writer

Almost as quickly as they had disappeared, Dysart athletics returned last night.

Sort of.

The agenda at Wednesday night's special meeting of the Dysart Unified School District Governing Board was simple and brief. The meeting was hastily convened by Dysart officials for consideration and action on the agenda's only item: "Reinstatement of District Athletic Program/Acceptance of Gift."

The board voted unanimously to accept.

What the board actually approved was a reinstatement of all district athletic programs contingent on private funding. That means that when school starts later this summer, whichever sports can be afforded through community donations may begin again.

Dysart's \$110,000 athletics program was benched on June 3 as part of more than \$800,000 in budget cuts necessary after the defeat of the district's third bond issue in recent years.

Dysart is back in the game, but important hurdles remain.

The district is still short on

► See Questions remain, A7

Questions remain about future funding

■ From A1

coaches, and former Athletic Director Jim Braden, who has a full-time teaching contract for next year, would have to be reinstated as part-time athletic director.

And while the Arizona Interscholastic Association is willing to bend its deadline rules to allow Dysart into the fall football schedule, whether Dysart can even assemble a football team at this late date remains uncertain. The high school football season begins Sept. 5.

Dysart board members and administrators want it known that all funding for sports, including salaries, will not come from the district, but from publicly donated funds.

Braden said he believes that enough money has now been donated by the community to fund several sports.

"What we're going to do is collect the money we have, and see how much we have," Braden said. "Based on what we have, then we will bring back sports in the order that we need to, as we are able to."

Braden said he believes enough money is currently on hand to save football and volleyball.

The money has come from an army of supporters who are striving to keep Dysart High School's playing fields and gymnasium open.

In addition to Dysart administrators, faculty, and families, that army consists of some financially heavy-hitting friends who are willing to go to bat for the kids.

Friends such as Gary James, a Sun City West attorney who has led the funding drive with a guarantee of more than \$20,000 in corporate and individual donations.

And friends like Realtor Ken Meade, also of Sun City West, who has already given James \$1,000. Meade has pledged to donate another \$10,000 if a corporate sponsor will match that figure.

"I've made a lot of money out here, and there's nothing wrong with putting something back," he said.

Irene Aguirre, spokeswoman for Arizona Public Service's Community Relations department, said the utility has pledged \$2,500 to the athletic program.

While the reinstatement came as good news, a heavy cloud still hung above those at the meeting.

Superintendent Jesus de la Garza praised fund-raisers, but referred to the action as a "stopgap solution."

Governing Board President Mitchell Eickmann called it a "Band-Aid."

The current financial windfall is at best a short-term fix for Dysart, giving immediate relief to the symptoms, but not curing the disease.

The disease is inadequate school funding from the state Legislature, coupled with inadequate voter support for a bond override.

"This thing will crumble the way they're going," Meade said. "They've got to get these people out to vote."

Daily News-Sun

July 8, 1997

Vol. 40 No. 293

5 sections, 36 pages

Serving the Sun Cities and the Northwest Valley

50 cents

Donations might revive Dysart sports

By BRUCE ELLISON
Staff writer

Dysart school board members may vote tonight on reinstating the school district's athletics program — now that volunteers may have guaranteed enough money to maintain it.

An effort led by Gary James of Sun City West already has raised more than \$10,000 and volunteers with children in district schools said they think they can come up with enough additional cash or services to keep the programs operating.

James took on the effort after Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer chal-

lenged Sun City West residents to raise \$15,000 to help maintain the programs. He will have an exact figure of money raised so far at tonight's meeting.

"I'm pleased that it's going so well," Shafer said Monday.

"We've gotten some help from Kevin Johnson, and I'm still waiting for the Suns charities to respond, so things are moving right along.

"The response of so many people has been wonderful."

Dysart board members cut all athletics in June, after an override election failed to win passage for the third time, thus cutting tax funding

to the district. All told, this year's cuts reached about \$807,000, with athletics accounting for about \$110,000 of that.

On Monday, Dysart High seniors Maggie Cortez and Jorge Ortiz met with James, high school Principal Hector Placencia, Sun Cities Realtor Ken Meade and the district volunteer Denise Keller to see if the campaign to help restore the programs was nearing success.

Maybe, was the answer.

The money which James has been collecting, primarily from Sun City West residents, already is in the bank — including \$1,000 from Meade

and another \$2,000 from the Del Webb Corp., plus hundreds of individual donations.

For her part, Keller has organized parents to find as many different methods of paying for the programs as they can line up — everything from car washes to dances, to convincing the El Mirage police and fire departments to donate security staff and ambulance service for games.

"They use the gym for their own exercise programs, so we think it might be appropriate for them to trade with us," rather than billing the school district for the services, Keller said.

Meade said other fund-raising methods "have been under way on the q.t.," with money pledged from groups that haven't yet announced their efforts.

With a push from Shafer, the district soon will have a jersey and athletic shoes from the Suns' Kevin Johnson, which will be raffled off. Other folks have given the district used cars for a raffle.

And Meade said "we've talked with a couple of people and firms that may front enough money" to get the fall athletic program started.

► See Money pours, A5

Money pours in to aid Dysart

■ From A1

One plan under consideration, he said, "is to go to all the high school coaches in the Valley to see if with their help we can turn up enough money to keep the programs going, rather than kill them."

Meade, James, Placencia and Keller said they believe the board will act favorably if it doesn't mean putting up district cash — which simply isn't available.

"I don't think they (board members) realize the groundswell of support these programs had and have," Meade said.

Keller said she's been amazed at how much people are willing to do, in terms of time if not money.

Placencia said the board basically has three options tonight: to reinstate the entire program, sanctioning it as a regular school activity; reinstating a part of the program perhaps beginning with winter and spring sports, such as basketball, to be sure the money is in place ahead of time; or taking no action, thus leaving sports out in the cold.



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Jorge Ortiz, a guard on the Dysart Demons basketball squad, tries to block a shot by Realtor Ken Meade in the high school gym Monday, as Gary James of Sun City West, far left, and senior Maggie Cortez, Spirit Line captain, look on. Volunteers may have collected enough money to let the Dysart district restore the canceled sports program.

"I'm not sure that (doing nothing) is politically possible right now," the principal said.

James, the Sun City West lawyer who's spearheaded a campaign for cash, said board member Pam Justice assured him that if the money were there, the board would at least approve the high school basketball program.

That would be fine with Cortez and Ortiz. Cortez is captain of the spirit line, the cheerleading and team spirit effort, and also a dancer and clarinetist — with a 4.0 grade-point average.

Ortiz is on the football team and also plays point guard on the Demons' basketball squad. With a 3.1 GPA, he is interested in history and the saxophone.

"Sports have kept me coming to school," Ortiz said. "Well, I guess I would have come anyway, but it wouldn't have been so interesting."

Cortez said cheerleading "keeps me interested, so school isn't boring all the time.

"I love to dance," she said, "and so I can be in the Spirit

Line, I have to keep my grades up. They go together."

Ortiz shot a few baskets Monday morning in the Dysart High gym with Meade, as Cortez rolled past the pair while doing cartwheels — their way of thanking Meade, John Waldron from Del Webb Corp. and James for their efforts.

Meade, more than a little out of breath with just two points to his credit on the basketball court, said that "three of the kids on the team that are getting letters might not be able to play this season if we don't help.

"I'd hate to see them lose the chance to get a scholarship to ASU just because they couldn't play.

"That's the kind of thing that appealed to me, and got us involved in the effort."

Those interested in helping Dysart students may mail checks to the Dysart High Athletic and Music Fund, P.O. Box 5597, Sun City West, Ariz., 85376. Donations are not tax-deductible, James said.

Tonight's meeting begins at 7, at Dysart Middle School, 11405 N. Dysart Road in El Mirage.

Residents asked to make individual donations to Dysart

By CHRIS RASMUSSEN
Independent Newspapers

Last month's defeat of Dysart Unified School District's tax override forced district officials to eliminate a number of school programs some Sun City West resident feel are imperative not only to the students, but to the entire community as well.

Gary James, Sun City West resi-

dent and a director of the Property Owners and Resident's Association, is asking his fellow residents to donate funds to the financially strapped school district.

"The athletic and band programs are a very important part of their

education," Mr. James says. "Kids need more than just book work, they also need to be involved with athletics, which develops a sense of community pride and teamwork that these kids need later in life."

The idea of raising funds for the

district's athletic and band programs came about recently when Surprise Mayor Joan Shaffer approached PORA and asked the association to contribute \$12,000 to the district.

Mr. James introduced a motion during the last monthly PORA

meeting that would have given Dysart's athletic department \$500. But the motion was voted down 8-2. Mr. James and Lila Schwartz voted in favor of the donation.

"I just wanted to see if we could get them \$500 to give them a start," Mr. James says.

"There's so much controversy

See ■ DYSART, Page 11

■ DYSART

From Page 1

surrounding this school thing. To give money from PORA, that is supported by residents, would not be right since this has become a political issue," he says.

With his proposal voted down, Mr. James and fellow PORA Director Bob Jones decided to raise funds on their own. Their fund-raising efforts for the schools are in no way related to PORA.

"I feel strongly that citizens here should do what they can as far as contributing donations," he says.

"This is just a one-time basis. We're not consistently doing this every year," he says. "They (Dysart schools) are going to have to get their problems solved themselves through the legislators or the voters next year."

Mr. James says he hopes to collect a minimum of \$15,000.

"The members of this community have gotten kind of a bad rap. I think unnecessarily, because so far we have found that the people have been very generous and supportive of this.

"We've also had a few donations

from Sun City, which I am very proud to say we have received," he says.

"I think those kids need some help through these times," Mr. Jones says. "I would do anything possible to make it within the grasps of those students to be able to gain knowledge and experience, which you can get through athletics and band."

Donations can be made to the Dysart Athletic Fund at the Northwest Bank on R.H. Johnson Boulevard. Donations also can be mailed to P.O. Box 5597, Sun City West, 85375. Checks should be made out to the Dysart High Athletic and Music Fund

"I got one letter from a lady that was very touching," Mr. James says. "She said she was here on a very fixed income, primarily Social Security, but that she wanted to do her part and asked that we accept her small check.

"We were delighted to accept that donation because it isn't the amount of money (that matters), but the involvement."

June 4, 1997

SCW

PORA rejects Surprise mayor's plea

Board declines to donate money to Dysart district

By BRUCE ELLISON
Staff writer

Last week, Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer threw down the gauntlet, asking Sun City West residents to raise \$15,000 to help support the Dysart schools athletics program.

On Tuesday, the PORA board left the gauntlet on the ground, declining by a 10-2 vote to support the school district with even \$500.

the mayor that "such an activity as the challenge she issued should be undertaken on a district-wide basis, not just in Sun City West."

He pointed out that while some district supporters have noted that the expansion-area residents were responsible for the levy's defeat, it may have been apathy on the part of other district residents that saw the issue defeated. More than two-thirds of the voters in the expansion area went to the polls, while only 27 percent of the far-greater number of residents elsewhere voted.

Shafer, a vocal supporter of the Dysart Unified School District and its students, many of whom live in Surprise, had asked for help from the Property Owners and Residents Association after the May 20 defeat of the Dysart district's override request, which would have boosted district taxes.

Residents of the Sun City West expansion area, most of whom live in the Dysart district, were vocally op-

posed to the tax hike, and it was defeated district-wide. But, as PORA President Noel Willis pointed out Tuesday, most residents of Sun City West don't live in the Dysart district, from which they were removed in the late 1980s. And PORA, Willis said, "represents all the residents."

Instead, he told the board at its last regular meeting before September, "I asserted my feeling" to

Willis also said that if PORA were to support the district with a contribution, it might best be given for music, art and other educational programs being cut rather than for athletics.

Finally, he pointed out that PORA's charity bingo operation, which distributes about \$30,000 a year, does not make grants anywhere near the size of the \$15,000 Shafer sought.

While most board members nodded their agreement, Gary James
▶ See Local charities, A5

■ From A1

spoke up, supporting Shafer. "I think we have an obligation to this community. I say yes, give them the money, help keep the kids off the streets. Athletics are important."

But Marilyn Leighton promptly disagreed, saying if there were to be support for the Dysart system, it should be for academic programs.

She also said "our voters (in the expansion area) have made their decision; it's not up to us to change it."

Board member Dusty Rhodes added that "the 16-year-old boy may want the program, but his mother didn't bother to vote for it."

James put his action into a formal motion, "to support in some way the Dysart football team," first without an amount, then amending it to \$500 "for athletics."

But it was no go with the board, who turned it down, 10-2, with James and Lila Schwartz the only members voting in favor.

Later, when it came time for the board to approve a list of recipients of some \$12,000

in charitable contributions from bingo profits, James objected to giving \$600 to Freedom's Foundation, "to send one Dysart kid to Valley Forge for a week, when you just denied \$500 for the athletics program."

James said after the meeting that he would try to organize a private effort in Sun City West to help support the Dysart athletics programs.

The organizations that PORA did support, and the amounts for them, are: Sheriff's Posse of Sun City West, Sun City West PRIDES and Sun Cities Area Transit, \$1,000 each; Sun Health (Del E. Webb Memorial Hospital), Sun City West Community Fund and Westside Food Bank, \$800 each; Hospice Volunteer Services, \$700; Clinica Adelante, Centro Adelanto, Habitat for Humanity and Freedom's Foundation, \$600 each; Johnson Library, \$500; and Sun Cities Animal Rescue, Sun City West Meals-on-Wheels, Salvation Army, Interfaith Services, Recording for the Blind, El Mirage Senior Center and Lending Hands, \$400 each.

SCW
DYSART SCHOOL DISTRICT
VF

Dysart assesses financial crisis

By BRUCE ELLISON
 Staff writer

5/27/97

When student David Pallanes returned to the Dysart High School wood shop after Easter vacation, the major project he had been working on for months was soaked in places, its smoothly sanded surfaces spotted and discolored.

The nearly complete oak entertainment center that had taken six weeks to design, and about as long to build during shop periods, had been left on a workbench just beneath what turned out to be the low spot in a very leaky roof.

And it had rained that Easter weekend, the water collecting on the roof, running through the tar, down through now-soggy and falling ceiling tiles, along electrical and ventilation ducts finally to drip down on the top of Pallanes' stereo cabinet.

"I had it all done but the staining and putting on the doors," the Dysart High School junior from El Mirage recalled last week. "I had to sand it down again and rework the bottom where the oak sat in a puddle."

Fortunately, the entertainment center was salvaged, sanded, stained and finished, and will go home with Pallanes this week, said Joe Leyva, shop teacher.

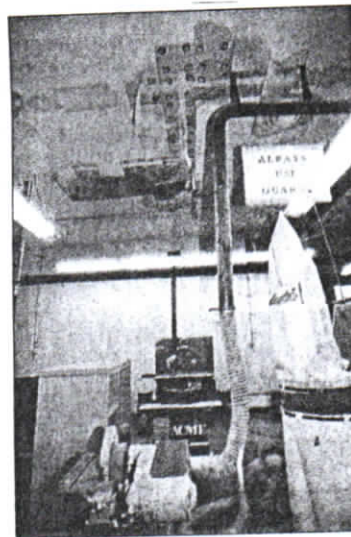
But Leyva wonders about next year.

With voters several times turning down bond issues that would have paid for the roof repair — and fixed dozens of other things throughout the district needing attention — there is no money to make repairs.

That remains the situation despite the Legislature's passage of two bills, one last year and one this year, that provided about \$132 million statewide for school construction and repair.

That money essentially goes only to school districts which have reached their bonding limit and cannot borrow more.

Because Dysart's voters continue to reject additional borrowing, lawmakers have said, they can't tap the state treasury for cash. If they could, the solons say, nobody would



Mollie J. Hopper/Daily News-Sun

A rain-damaged ceiling looms over the Dysart High School wood shop. The school's maintenance supervisor says it would cost \$300,000 to properly repair the roof, which must be done before lights and ceiling can be fixed properly. The building is 17 years old.

ever vote to tax themselves — they'd just wait until the borrowing was rejected a few times, then ask for a state handout.

The district was offered a small state loan, but officials see no way of paying it back.

Dysart board members now believe the only answer to their dilemma lies with the Legislature, and a possible change in the rules governing school finance.

Like other districts in the East Valley that have been growing rapidly, the Dysart district is poised for a spurt in enrollments, the results of dozens of family home developments now under construction that will see hundreds of new homes built within a year.

Leyva, the shop teacher, now
 ► See Maintenance problems, A7

(over)

From A1

nows where the roof leaks, kids don't leave their work here it can be damaged if it rains. But the ceiling tiles haven't been replaced because the district hasn't enough money in its maintenance budget for the \$100,000 roof repair, and, as facilities manager Gary Mitchell says, "there no point in replacing the tiles and painting if the next rainstorm or monsoon is just going to get them wet and soggy so they come unglued again." That, he says, would just be throwing money away, something he can ill afford to do with just \$148,000 — the entire maintenance budget for schools for a year, including the janitors, lawn mowing and minor repairs. Major repairs, like the roof, come from a separate capital budget that would have been denied from a rejected bond issue last year.

How can he fix the leaks in other roofs in the Dysart High School complex, such as the one that allows small rivulets stream into a storage area near art students where it follows an electrical conduit to the fuse box for a kiln.

Water also drips into the computer lab where 50 Macintosh computers and their cables are arranged in a haphazard configuration de-

signed to keep the dripping water away from the delicate electronics.

The ceiling is falling in a boy's restroom, also from water damage. The paneling is peeling off a wall from the same cause. It bulges out and should be replaced.

"We're up there every month, patching as best we can," Mitchell says of the 20-foot cracks in the roofing, cracks that keep expanding. He points out that the water also gets into the fire alarm system, the electrical conduits and plugs.

None of that pleases the state fire marshal, who has warned that repairs are essential.

Nor is there an intercom system in the high school that works.

Underground conduits are plugged with mud and dirt, the wiring can't be replaced, and there's no money in the budget.

Mitchell, a 1970 Dysart grad who worked years for the state of Arizona and left his post as director of physical plant, engineering and maintenance in the Department of Administration to join the Dysart district, knows what needs to be done.

He has the plans. He has the costs. He has the lists of priorities. He has the inspection reports from state agencies citing deficiencies,

violations of regulations, illegalities.

He has all he needs — except money.

So maintenance is deferred. Emergencies get handled. Routine care that could make things last longer doesn't get done. It's a vicious downward cycle, and he knows it.

It's been going on for years, as state funding for schools didn't keep up with inflation, and as voters rejected several bond issues and overrides that would have furnished more money.

"It's discouraging," he said, and many teachers and non-academic employees feel the same way. Some have left the system, their future made ever more uncertain by lack of funds. Two custodians quit last week, following the May 20 defeat of the override, Mitchell said.

"My budget is \$148,000," he said. "That's the same as last year. The same as two years ago. The same as three years ago."

But the buildings are older, deferred maintenance is piling up, and criticism of the district mounts.

Mitchell has other worries. The kids in the middle school are ripping up the Formica counters, spraying graffiti on tile in the bathrooms, setting fires in trash cans, cracking the urinals.

Vandalism is an unexpected

maintenance cost. "Sure, we prosecute them if we catch them," he said. "But you have to catch them. You also have to patch things together when you find the damage."

Mitchell is worried about the chillers in Kingswood Elementary School, the system's newest building, finished in 1989. There are two chillers, used to cool air on hot days. One doesn't work. On hot days, the other struggles to keep up.

If it fails, Mitchell said, "we're out of business. We'd have to close the school (which has no other cooling or ventilation system)."

So far, so good, with only a few days left in the school year. But what about the fall?

Repair estimate: \$30,000. The school board is trying to find the money.

Because of student increases, the maintenance room at Kingswood doubles as a storage area. It's got the chillers nearby, writing paper, janitorial supplies, rags, toilet tissue — and no place for a maintenance worker to work.

Kingswood also has roofing problems, some stress cracks in the masonry and is already too small for the number of children it serves. Fixing the roofing problem has been a bone of contention between the builder and the district for years.

Some things aren't quite so dramatic.

At El Mirage School there is peeling paint, dropping ceiling tiles, some leaky roofing. But so far it hasn't interfered with classes.

There's also a roof over the kitchen area in the cafeteria that's lifting up from its mountings. It's still there — but given a strong east wind similar to the Aug. 14 storm last year, "the whole thing would be peeled off like opening a can, and flipped into the schoolyard," Mitchell said.

"In a way, that would be a blessing. We have insurance that would cover that, but it won't cover the patching," he said.

It's on Mitchell's repair list. Estimated cost: \$40,000. Funds available: none.

And faced with the need to cut next year's education budget to make up for the funds that would have come from the override, it seems clear that things that directly benefit the students will be retained as much as possible, while maintenance again is put off, with fingers crossed.

Mitchell's wish list of capital-fund repairs and improvements from principals totals in the millions. He doesn't expect to see much of it approved by the school board.

FIGHTING FOR FUNDS

Dysart superintendent fears flier could defeat May 20 override

By CHRIS RASMUSSEN
Independent Newspapers

A flier urging residents in the expansion area of Sun City West to vote against an upcoming school override election has angered district officials who claim many of the statements made are misleading.

Dr. Jesus de la Garza, Dysart Unified School District superintendent, says the flier, which was distributed by a Sun City West organization to every homeowner in the expansion area and casitas in late March, is misleading and inaccurate.

He fears the flier will sway people to vote against the May 20 override election. The flier claims the district spent money on a lawsuit it could have better used on its students. It also claims the district has not justified why an override is needed and says the override is unnecessary because the district will be getting additional funds from the state.

The flier was prepared and distributed by Citizens for Tax Equity. Eleanor Nelson, a spokesperson for the group, says CTE stands firmly behind statements made in the flier.

"It's basically just a flier saying the facts, the things we believe and what our group has done," says Mrs. Nelson.

She says 600 members of the tax group recently voted unanimously to oppose the override.

The second paragraph of the flier states: "Dysart does not need this money when, at the same time, it chooses to pay lawyers over \$100,000 of taxpayer money to keep the illegal ward system in place. Dysart should use its money to educate, not litigate and

INSIDE

■ Dr. Lila Schwartz discusses the Legislature's role in public education.

Page 4

■ Century Club raises \$25,000 for Dysart schools.

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discriminate."

The paragraph refers to a ward system implemented by the district last November to restructure how district board members are elected.

Originally, board members were elected on an at-large basis, allowing members to be elected from any area in the district. The new ward system divides the district into five separate areas with voters in each area electing their own school board representative.

A superior court judge, however, has declared the system — which was pre-approved by the federal government — unconstitutional.

The judge maintains the system violates the rights of those in the wards because it only allows candidates from the wards with the highest percentage of minorities to serve on the board.

"Information out there from the

See ■ **VERRIDE**, Page 10

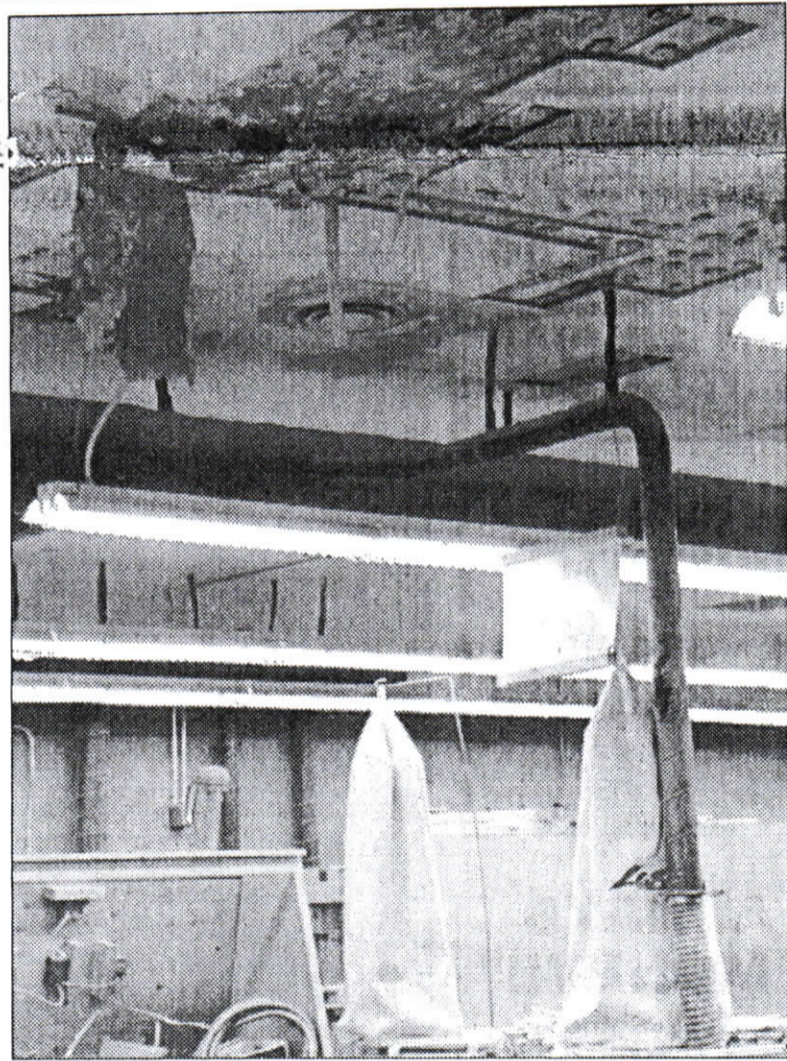


Photo by CHRIS RASMUSSEN/Independent Newspapers

Watch your head

Gaping holes can be found throughout Dysart's high school building. Gary Mitchell, director of maintenance facilities for the district, says he found out last week it would not be receiving any state funds it had planned on using to repair various problems with the district's buildings. He says the high school's roof in particular is a safety hazard and needs to be fixed immediately.

Citizens for Tax Equity asks that if we're hurting so much, why are we spending \$100,000 on litigation," Dr. de la Garza says. "The district didn't initiate the lawsuit, they did.

"Were not in a position where we can do anything about it. We have to respond and go to court when we're summoned."

Dr. de la Garza says the school district used no district funds for its defense, and that funds will be raised through levies on the district's taxpayers.

"We don't have \$100,000 that we could transfer out of some other fund to address legal issues," he says.

"The only way we could access any money for the lawsuit was to appeal to the county and that money will be levied," Dr. de la Garza says.

"So people will be taxed for that lawsuit, including the people from the expansion area."

Mrs. Nelson also supports claims

that the district misspent funds it could have used for its students.

"They spent money on this lawsuit that we filed because they did something illegal. The \$100,000 would include an appeal, perhaps. They probably haven't spent \$100,000 yet," she says.

"This is taxpayer money, this would pay the salaries of two or three teachers and they're moaning about the fact they don't have any money."

Dr. de la Garza also takes issue with the statement in the flier: "Dysart will now also be getting additional maintenance and operations money from the state. Dysart has yet to justify the override, and the fact is they simply don't need the money any more than any other Arizona school district needs money."

Dr. de la Garza says there is no additional funding coming from the state. He says the Arizona Legislature has yet to come up with

a solution to alleviate the district's funding shortfalls.

"The ABC bill was touted as one possible solution, but we were not going to get any money out of that," he says. "It basically provides funding for the lowest 10 percent of the districts in the state. There are 80 districts that will receive some money. We are not one of those."

Mrs. Nelson concedes she does not know for sure if any additional funds will be made available for the district's maintenance and operations.

Dr. de la Garza says his district is already operating at a minimum level with no frills. If the override fails, he says the district will have to cut \$800,000 from its budget and eliminate the district's athletic, band and music programs.

Administrators and teachers would also be affected by budget restrictions. Dr. de la Garza says the district would have to cut 26 positions including nurses, gifted teachers, counselors and librarians. District employees would face benefit reductions, salary freezes and reduced hours.

"At this point it's bare bones. We will cut out the athletic programs totally, there will be no sports," he

says.

"Sometimes the thing that keeps a student in school is athletics, the possibility of playing and developing those skills. It's the same thing with music and learning how to play an instrument and developing to a career."

”

What would happen if they took all those amenities away from the people of Sun City West? What if they took their recreation centers and their golf courses? The quality of their life goes down.

— Dick McComb
Surprise City Manager and
Dysart School District
board member

The override election would provide the district an opportunity to exceed its \$15 million budget by 10 percent for a period of five years. This is the third attempt at passing an override since March 1995.

Dr. de la Garza says the funding shortfall the district is experiencing stems from the state Legislature not compensating the district for infla-

tion, which has equaled \$3.6 million in lost revenue for the schools since 1992. The district will not be compensated for \$424,870 lost to inflation this year.

Dick McComb, Surprise city manager and Dysart School District board member, says he can't understand why the tax group opposes the override.

"They keep attacking the credibility of the school district. They don't provide any documentation to support their position," he says.

"They claim the school district won't give them any information. On the other hand, the school administrators say if they come over and ask for something they can get it and that's no problem.

"What has tentatively been laid out on the table for the school board is cutting all extracurricular activities — football, basketball, baseball and probably cheerleaders — that whole gamut," Mr. McComb says.

"What would happen if they took all those amenities away from the people of Sun City West? What if they took their recreation centers and their golf courses? The quality of their life goes down.

"Well the same thing happens in a school — the value of education

drops off. You have the social amenities that go with education that help drive the energy and enthusiasm kids have for school.

"Crowding classrooms and dropping needed programs is just not fair to the kids. These kids have not done a damn thing to anybody. All they're asking for is the same opportunities to get an education as any other kid in this state," Mr. McComb says.

Dr. de la Garza says he hopes residents in the expansion area will see that the district is genuinely in need of funds the override would provide.

"The generation that we keep referring to as the seniors, they're my father's generation. They served in the war and so forth. They were the first generation in the world that received an opportunity to go to college. The GI Bill provided for that," he says.

"So the opportunity they received is somehow forgotten for these children. If their grandchildren were in this district would they be doing what they're doing?"

"Would they deny them the right to get music and physical education, things they themselves had when they were growing up?"

Donation to Support Dysart School District SCW Resident Hopeful Contributions Will Offset 'Bad Publicity'

By Ruth Borchardt

Dysart Unified School District was the recipient of \$1,000 given by S.C.W. resident LeRoy Wentz

this week.

The donation was given by Wentz to "assist Bob Sullivan of the Sun City Century Club and

Keith Watkins of the "Project Kids" in actively supporting education within the Dysart School District.

Wentz said that he is hopeful the contributions will offset what he called "bad publicity" of the Deer Valley expansion area activists.

Wentz said, "These activists state the Del Webb salesmen did not inform them of the school tax. It's hard to believe that such active participants would not be aware of the Sun City West news media's countless articles on the



Bob Sullivan (r.) Sun City Century Club accepts LeRoy Wentz's \$1,000 check to benefit the Dysart Unified School District. Photo, RuthBorchardt

School
Continued on Page 3

Donations to Support Dysart School District

Continued from Page 1

Peoria and Dysart school tax on the expansion area. They expect PORA, which was aware of the expansion area tax structure to use its clout in support of rescinding the school tax. PORA would lose all credibility should it have supported their cause.

"Most expansion area residents know full well that they were informed of the tax structure and acknowledged it."

Opposed to the tax structure imposed on the expansion area, Citizens for Tax Equity, headed by Bob Koch, emphasized it was very happy if people want to donate to the Dysart School District. But they do not feel these individuals, most of whom do not live in the expansion area, have a right to criticize Citizens for Tax Equity's opposition to the override.

"It's a free country, and we

have a right to speak out as we see fit," added Koch.

He quoted an old Cherokee Indian saying, "Don't judge me 'til you've walked a mile in my moccasins."

Koch went on to say "It is hypocritical on their part when they're not paying our higher taxes. We pay over \$1,000 more in taxes every year. If they want to pay more taxes, they should come to our meeting April 29th and we can tell them just how to go about getting on the Dysart tax rolls."

Eleanor Nelson, a "Citizens" member said, "We have over 50 signatures from our residents verifying the fact that they were not told of the added tax to be imposed on the expansion area."

At a recent meeting, members of the Citizens for Tax Equity voted unanimously to oppose the

override. "I think the position is stronger yet when we're criticized by people. We become more united. They have a feeling of guilt. But why not criticize the legislators instead of us", said Koch.

Bob Sullivan, Head of the Sun City Century Club, and his committee, composed of Sig Sampson, Doris Radick, Carl Lind and Laura Krippachne, according to Sullivan do not want to be confrontational. They are interested only in helping the children of the Dysart School District, and welcome anyone wishing to contribute. "We're not doing any arm-twisting", said Sullivan. "We can select how the

money is to be spent, which is for academic requirements in the school district."

Daily News-Sun

Wednesday, April 16, 1997

Sun Citians show support for district

By ANGELA MULL
Staff writer

Donations for the Dysart Unified School District aren't the only things finding their way into Bob Sullivan's mailbox — so are letters criticizing those who don't want to financially support the district.

"Really, I don't know how some sleep knowing they are going to such great lengths to cheat our children from an education," wrote Sun City West resident Jean E. Smith in a letter accompanying her donation to Sullivan's Century Club.

Sullivan formed the club in March in order to raise money for the district's six schools. So far, the group has collected \$28,000 from 200 donors. Many of those donors — such as Smith — have sent in letters along with their money.

Some of the letters are short and simple. They tell Sullivan he's doing a great job and thank him for giving people who don't pay taxes directly

to the district a way to give the Dysart schools money.

One donor who didn't sign a name on the letter wrote, "I'm sure there are many of us who welcome the opportunity to help our young neighbors."

Another nameless donor drew a smiley face on a piece of paper below the words, "With 15 grandchildren and six great ones, we are happy to help in a small way!"

Others mixed praise for Sullivan with harsh words for Sun City West expansion area residents who are trying to deannex from the district. Those residents don't want to pay more in taxes than the Sun City West residents in the organized school district. Residents in the district pay total property taxes of \$7.32 per \$100 of assessed valuation, while those in the unorganized area pay \$2.20.

Sun City West resident Bill Mortensen was particularly adamant.

"Too bad the simpletons in the

expansion area are so cheap that they can't come up with their share of taxes — which they all knew when they purchased their homes — and now are acting in such a disgraceful manner," he wrote.

Sun City residents Joost and Harriett Van Gelder had similar thoughts.

"It's about time that the residents of the Sun Cities realized that they did not retire from their responsibilities," they wrote.

Several donors had specific reasons for why the district's children deserve their money. Shirley Dechaine wrote that she wanted to support the children in the same way others supported her children when they attended public schools.

Sun City West resident Robert Snyder wrote that, "We must face our responsibilities in educating our leaders of tomorrow."

Not all of the letters were signed, and one donor in the Sun City West

expansion area specifically asked to remain anonymous.

"Please don't use our name as we might get our house burned down," the donor wrote.

The Century Club could do more than financially help the school district, one donor said in a telephone interview.

"This is one way of changing the image of Sun City West," said Sun City West resident Maria O'Leary.

Sullivan said he hopes to raise \$30,000 through the Century Club by April 30. Once he turns over the money to the district, Sullivan and Dysart Superintendent Jesus de la Garza will discuss exactly where in the district the money should go.

Donations are tax-deductible, and checks should be made payable to the Dysart Unified School District and sent to the Sun Cities Century Club, 17403 N. Jasmine Drive, Sun City, 85373.

SCM

Board fears misinformed voters

Dysart officials want record set straight before override

By ANGELA MULL
Staff writer

Misconceptions and lack of information about the Dysart school district's \$1.5 million override are confusing some voters in the retirement communities, said officials at a joint meeting Wednesday.

The El Mirage and Surprise city councils and the Dysart Unified School District Governing Board met to discuss the \$1.5 million override election May 20. Surprise Councilwoman Debbie Johnson was just one official who voiced a concern that some senior citizens don't understand the district's needs. Johnson said some believe that the recently passed ABC bill — Assistance to Build Classrooms — will be sufficient to cover the district's needs.

However, the Dysart district is receiving none of the \$32.5 million the Legislature set aside for construction and repairs.

Senior citizens also need to understand that the money the district is receiving from the Legislature for maintenance and operations is insufficient for its needs, said Pam Justice, a district governing board member.

The Legislature is allotting \$50 million total, and \$170,000 for the Dysart district. The district's maintenance and operating budget is \$15 million.

Dick McComb, Surprise city manager and a governing board member, said another important fact for voters to know is that the district's property tax rate ranks as one of the lowest in Maricopa County. Of the county's 56 districts, four have lower property tax rates than Dysart, according to a letter McComb received from the Maricopa County School Superintendent's Office.

McComb added that he wonders how many people understand what an override is.

Overrides allow a school district to exceed its yearly maintenance and operations budget by 10 percent. None of the money is used to build structures.

Without approval of its \$1.5 million override, the district estimates that it will have to cut its budget by \$800,000. The cuts will affect staff positions and programs. Among a list of possible cuts are the music program in the elementary schools and the district's entire athletics program.

Justice said the results of those cuts would be severe.

"We do away with athletics and we do away with music and we're going to have major flight," she said, referring to the number of students who would leave the district.

Governing board member Rachel Villanueva agreed that

Voter brochures inaccurate

Staff report

A recent property tax rate decrease for Dysart Unified School District residents will not be reflected in the Maricopa County voter brochures that will be mailed out in May.

The new numbers won't be listed because district officials were not notified of the latest increase in the district's secondary assessed valuation for 1997 until last week. That was too late to include the updated information in the brochure, said Alejandro Perez, the district's assistant superintendent for business services.

The latest jump in the secondary assessed valuation — from the \$122 million reported in February to

the \$126 million reported in April — lowers the tax rate effective if the \$1.5 million override passes May 20. If voters approve the override, residents will pay a rate of \$7.46 per \$100 of assessed valuation — an increase of 14 cents for every \$100. For example, a homeowner with a \$100,000 house would pay an additional \$14 a year in property taxes.

However, the brochures will incorrectly read that with an override, the property tax rate would be \$7.50, which means an increase of 18 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation.

Those figures are based off of the \$122 million secondary assessed valuation determined in February.

The correct property tax rate if an override passes is \$7.46.

the district could face some tough times despite some of the good news it received recently.

Last week, district officials learned that the Dysart district's 1997 secondary assessed valuation is at \$126 million — a \$24 million increase over the 1996 valuation of \$102 million. This drops the property tax rate if the override

passes from \$8.32 to \$7.46.

But the valuation increase and tax rate decrease may not be meaningful in the long run, Villanueva said.

Another joint meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. May 12 in the student union teacher's lounge at Dysart High School, 11405 N. Dysart Road, El Mirage. The meeting is open to the public.

Dysart committee rolls up sleeves

Members will audit school district

By ANGELA MULL
Staff writer

Robert Eastman became a school superintendent because he wanted to have an effect on the educational process.

Less than two years after retiring, he still has a shot at doing just that.

The 63-year-old Sun City West man is one of five Sun City West residents chosen to independently audit the Dysart Unified School District. The committee has been asked to complete its findings by the end of April or in early May. The results will be made public.

Eastman, who was a superintendent

in Iowa and Nebraska for 22 years, said he hopes his recent expertise will help him evaluate the district's \$1.5 million override request that goes before the voters on May 20.

"The charge of the committee is to find out whether or not it's needed and what are the consequences if it does not pass," he said.

The district has been very generous in giving requested financial records to committee members, Eastman said.

Joining Eastman on the committee are George Anderson and James Thompson, retired certified public accountants; Robert Cockle, a retired school superintendent; and Charles

Foster, a retired high school principal.

The committee's purpose was questioned last week by Eleanor Nelson, Sun City West Citizens for Tax Equity vice president. Nelson said the district formed the committee only to "rubber stamp what they believe" and "make the district look good."

Dick McComb, Surprise city manager and a member of the district's governing board, disagrees. Committee members are under no instructions other than to objectively study the district's financial needs, he said.

"We simply told them to let the chips fall where they may," he said. "If the district is doing a good job, they have to say that. If the district is

doing a mediocre job, they have to say that. They are to receive no direction from anybody."

The override has long been a controversial issue for Dysart district officials and the Sun City West Citizens for Tax Equity. The tax group has consistently opposed overrides in the past, and voters have defeated three in the last two years.

Foster said he hopes to cut through some of the strong feelings that accompany override discussions.

"Sometimes, emotionalism gets in the way of the facts of the situation, and I'd like to know the difference between the emotionalism of this and the facts of this," said Foster, who was a high school principal for 22 years in Michigan.

SCW

Group forms to raise funds for Dysart

By ANGELA MULL
Staff writer

Like all Sun City residents, Bob Sullivan isn't paying school taxes.

But that doesn't mean he's opposed to the idea of financially supporting the Dysart Unified School District. If he were, he wouldn't have started up the Sun Cities Century Club.

Sullivan formed the club because he believes that senior citizens should support education. While he's not suggesting that everyone should pay taxes, he is asking that seniors in the Sun Cities consider making tax-

deductible contributions to the district. He wants to gather donations by Easter, which is when most winter residents will leave.

"I think we're ducking a very important issue, and I feel that in the sense of fair play, we should be trying to do something to alleviate the very difficult situation the district is in," he said.

"We can't duck the issue of paying for the Army or Navy or highway patrol. We have an equal obligation to pay for school funding."

Sullivan is hoping to raise as much as \$150,000, although he doesn't know if that's possible.

"It depends on what's in the hearts of the people out here," he said.

Sullivan is asking for \$100 minimum from each person who wants to contribute. So far, he has raised \$1,200 for the district's schools.

"These kids deserve as much as I got or my grandchildren are getting," he said. "They deserve the support of everybody in the community."

One reason Sullivan started the Century Club is because he doesn't think voters will approve the district's \$1.5 million override election May 20. However, he said he will try to raise money for the dis-

trict even if the override does pass.

If voters defeat the override, the district is predicting it will have to cut \$800,000 from its budget. Among the list of possible cuts are the elementary school music program and the district's entire athletics program.

So far, Sullivan is not sure exactly where he wants the money the Century Club raises to go. He and Dysart Superintendent Jesus de la Garza have discussed a variety of financially needy areas at the schools, including the purchase of books and science

► See Donors cite, A5

Donors cite need for schools

■ From A1

equipment and repairing buildings.

Sullivan said no matter what area he and de la Garza discussed, there was a need for money.

Once all of the money comes in, Sullivan and de la Garza will meet and make a final decision on where the money would best be used.

Sullivan is not alone in his efforts. Joining him on the Century Club's committee are Sun City West residents Carl Lind, Laura Krippaehne, Doris Radich and Sig Sampson.

Sampson, who donated money to the school, said he's not participating in the Cen-

tury Club to be a hero.

"I'm doing it because first of all, I believe in public education," said the resident of the deannexed area of Sun City West. "Secondly, I believe that all citizens, if they're alive, ought to support public education, but if they decide not to, that's their decision. I just decided I'm going to."

Sampson, with the help of some Dysart officials, figured out how much money he would have owed in school taxes for the last year and wrote out a check in that amount.

As to his reasons for why people should support education, he said, "I'm here because of public education. If my grandfather and his

neighbors hadn't built public schools when they did, I don't know where I would be."

Krippaehne, a former teacher, said people should support education because the children are the future.

"I feel that by being part of the Century Club, we can donate," she said. "It's not going to solve the problem, but at least we can help a bit."

Krippaehne, who volunteers in a kindergarten class at Surprise Elementary School, has not yet made a donation but plans to soon.

De la Garza said the efforts of those involved in the Century Club are beyond anything

the district could expect.

"These are people who don't necessarily reside in the district, so it's something that comes from their hearts," he said.

"It confirms my belief that not everybody in the Sun Cities area has been totally opposed to paying taxes and being concerned about children and education."

Anyone interested in contributing money to the district can make checks out to the Dysart Unified School District and mail them to the Sun Cities Century Club, 17403 N. Jasmine Drive, Sun City, 85373. Contributions are tax deductible.

Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz. Sat., March 22 and Sun., March 23, 1997

Tax group pickets Del Webb

BY P. SOLOMON BANDA
Staff writer

Potential home-buyers flocking to Del Webb Corp.'s Sun City Grand in Surprise during the weekend were greeted by protesters from the Sun City West expansion area.

A group from Citizens for Tax Equity was at the main entry gate at Grand Avenue and R.H. Johnson Boulevard carrying signs for those entering Del Webb's newest planned retirement community to see.

"We still feel that Del Webb is primarily responsible for some of the problems," said Eleanor Nelson, vice president of the group of about 800 Sun City West residents fighting against the taxes they pay to Dysart Unified School District tax.

Residents in the Sun City West expansion area pay \$7.32 per \$100 of assessed valuation, while those who live in the original Sun City West (the area south of the Deer Valley Road alignment, which follows a wall west from where El Mirage Road curves into Deer Valley Drive) and Sun City pay \$2.20.

Sun City Grand is in the Dysart district.

► See Webb lobbies, A5

Webb lobbies for equitable tax legislation

■ From A1

Over the weekend, Citizens for Tax Equity offered fliers that said "Be fore You 'Move Up To Grand,' Ask the Del Webb Corporation" and listed questions for prospective home buyers to ask their real estate agent.

"We want to be sure Del Webb informs them (prospective Sun City Grand homeowners) they are in a school district," said Nelson, who wasn't at the protest but is the designated spokeswoman for Citizens for Tax Equity.

Members of the group said they were not adequately informed of their tax obligations to the district in comparison to their neighbors in the original Sun City West.

"A lot of us knew there was

a difference," Nelson said. "But they didn't tell us that in the old part people pay less than half."

Webb spokesman John Waldron said a form informing residents there are three school districts in the area — Dysart, Peoria Unified, and the unorganized district — was added two years ago in order to clear up any confusion.

Waldron said a letter addressing the picketers' concerns was presented to people entering the Sun City Grand sales pavilion. It advised prospective home buyers that their homes will be in the Dysart district.

The tax rate in the district may drop as the new homes are added to the tax rolls. Residents in the Sun City

West expansion area saw their rate drop from \$9.49 per \$100 to \$7.32 from 1996 to 1997.

But for the residents, the issue is tax equity with their neighbors to the south and getting Webb to use its corporate muscle to accomplish that.

"They owe people like us some remedy," said Robert Koch, president of the tax group and plaintiff in a lawsuit that challenged a Dysart school board election in November conducted under a new system that doesn't allow residents to elect a member until 1998. "They created this mess," he added.

Waldron said Webb's efforts will remain focused on getting legislation passed that would equalize taxes for residents statewide.

"We believe there are inequitable situations across the state," Waldron said. "To only solve this one is not solving the issue.

"We support the direction of equalized school finance and we're encouraging the Legislature to move forward on a method that would equalize taxes for everybody."

How did this situation arise in this area?

Residents from Sun City were originally in the Peoria Unified School District long before Sun City West and Sun City Grand were on the drawing board.

Residents in Sun City voted down 16 successive bond and override requests by the school board during the late '60s and early '70s. Through a mutual agreement with the

school board, an election to get out of the district — deannex — was held in 1974. Those still in the district and residents in Sun City agreed that retirees should be out of the district.

When residents moved into Sun City West in the late '70s, they discovered they were in the Dysart district. Residents ran and were elected to the school board, eventually becoming the majority on the five-member board.

Residents in El Mirage and Surprise balked at the prospect of having residents who did not have children in the schools running the schools.

They requested that Sun City West be deannexed. An election was conducted and Sun City West, not including

the commercial core at R.H. Johnson and Camino del Sol boulevards, was deannexed in 1981.

The undeveloped desert north of Sun City West was left in the district. Webb acquired the land that is now the expansion area in 1992 and started construction in 1993. As residents moved into the area, they discovered their taxes were higher than their neighbors. They formed Citizens for Tax Equity in 1995 to defeat a bond and override measure proposed by the district.

Residents have been fighting against the higher tax since then, defeating a total of three funding measures proposed by the district.

Judge rules residents' rights violated

Sun City West voters win suit against Dysart

By BOB BUSHNER
Staff writer

PHOENIX — Residents in the Sun City West expansion area should get a chance soon to vote for Dysart School Board members, a Maricopa County judge said Friday.

Superior Court Judge B. Michael Dann declared unconstitutional a portion of Arizona law used to establish

the order of the November election because residents in two of the five wards, including the expansion area of Sun City West, were not allowed to vote.

Dann ruled that the constitutional rights of Sun City West residents Robert Koch and Rose Parker were violated because the selection of the three wards for the November 1996 election was based on which areas contained the largest percentage of minorities.

Implementing a vote based on racial or ethnic population as outlined in the law "vio-

lates the fundamental understanding of what this country is supposed to be about," Dann said in his ruling from the bench Friday morning in the Maricopa County Courthouse.

"Equal protection under the law governs the rights of not only the minority members but the majority members (of the district), and it protects the rights of citizens, be they white, black, red or brown," the judge ruled.

"For the state to say that election in the wards be in the ascending order based on the percentage of minorities as it

did is unconstitutional and an equal protection clause violation."

Dann said his concern was for the citizens of those wards (4 and 5) that did not vote and were made to wait two years, until 1998, on "race-based criteria.

"It separates the races for the purpose of voting, and the government can't do that," Dann said. "It was not actually the school district here, it was a state agency that tripped over what should have been a very easy equal protection impediment.

"This statute simply does

not pass muster."

The judge ordered the district to hold an election for Wards 4 and 5 "at the earliest possible moment," but he left it up to the board how that would be accomplished.

Dann stopped short of declaring the November election invalid, indicating that the three board members elected — Rachel Villanueva, Mary Johnson and Richard McComb — would retain their seats.

Parker, Koch and Betty Gilomen of Surprise had challenged that election in the lawsuit filed in late November

by Phoenix attorney Donald Peters.

Peters said he was pleased with the judge's ruling, which he said came "obviously after a lot of thought."

The plaintiff's attorney said the ruling would be "refined" during post-judgment proceedings.

Koch was also pleased with the ruling.

"I'm glad our basic argument prevailed," Koch said. "We'll have to see exactly where this takes us."

Charles W. Herf, the Phoenix attorney who repre-

► See District derides, A6

■ From A1

sented the school board members and the school district in the case, said he was "extremely disappointed" with Dann's decision.

"Not just in the ruling but in the lack of analysis of the Legislature's intent in passing the law," Herf said.

But Herf added that he was pleased that the judge allowed the three board members to remain in place.

Herf said it was too early to determine whether there would be an appeal by the district, which he stressed was not at fault in the case because it was following current state law in setting up the election.

Herf said his interpretation of the judge's order to hold an

election at the earliest time was the next scheduled election in 1998, because the law protects the two sitting board members whose terms don't expire until then.

Dann suggested during his ruling that the district consider quickly hold the election in Wards 4 and 5 and expand the board membership from five to seven until the two other board members' terms expire.

Before Dann's ruling, Herf contended that race was a relevant factor in the case and that the numbered districts' election status was necessary "so that minorities in the district have a right to run" for the school board so they could help direct their children's education.

"That's not racial classifica-

tion, it's racial consciousness," Herf added.

The district's attorney also argued that the case was brought by the Sun City West residents because they didn't want to pay taxes in what they claim is "an inherently unfair tax system" in Arizona, Herf said.

But Peters countered that the issue wasn't about taxes; that when Arizona law gives rights "depending on what race" people are, "we say that is invalid."

"According to that clause, someone has to wait to vote and we say that's prejudicial," Peters said. "It's not sufficient justification to use the racial issue here."

Lisa Daniel, director of elections in the Arizona secretary of state's office, had not

heard about Dann's ruling.

Karie Dozer, a spokesperson for the state Attorney General's office, also had not learned about the ruling and had no comment.

Dann's ruling is not the first to question the district's ward system established last June in place of an at-large election procedure.

In late October, an attorney general's opinion said the district's interpretation of the law that Wards 1, 2 and 3 should vote in the November election and Wards 4 and 5 wait until 1998 was flawed.

In fact, the elections should have been in Wards 5, 4 and 3, and Wards 1 and 2 should have waited two years because the higher numbered wards were the low-minority population areas.

Retirees fighting school taxes

By Angela Rabago-Mussi

Staff writer

Carrying picket signs blasting the original retirement-community developer, about 100 irate senior citizens marched outside the Sundome in Sun City West on Thursday.

The residents, who live in the new section of Sun City West, are angry that Del Webb Corp. has not done more to equalize their school taxes with those of their neighbors in the original part of the community.

That area was deannexed from the Dysart Unified School District in 1981. Residents there now pay an unorganized-school-district tax rate of \$2.36 per \$100 of assessed valuation, while their neighbors to the north pay much higher tax rates to the Dysart and Peoria districts.

"We think Del Webb caused this problem, and we think Del Webb should do something to solve it,"

With the Sundome as their backdrop, angry residents of the new section of Sun City West blame the Del Webb Corp. for their school-tax inequity. "We think Del Webb caused this problem, and we think Del Webb should do something to solve it," Eleanor Nelson said.

said Eleanor Nelson, one of the protesters.

But the problem of school financing is a statewide problem

that requires a "lasting solution, not a quick fix," Del Webb spokesman John Waldron said.

"We believe that the problem

needs to be solved at a statewide level."

The slogans on the protesters' signs included warnings to people



Nancy Engebretson/Staff photographer

who may buy homes in Sun City Grand, the company's newest development in Surprise. Signs read, "Grand won't be so grand with Dysart taxes," and "P.O.W. — Prisoner of Webb."

Del Webb should have tried to get the entire Sun City West area out of the school district, said Ruth Locker, a two-year resident of Sun City West, whose name tag read "Mrs. Tax Equity."

But at the time of the deannexation, the expansion area didn't exist, Waldron explained. He said Webb did not buy the property until the early 1990s.

Some of the protesters contend that Del Webb failed to tell them they would be paying taxes to the Dysart or Peoria school districts.

Waldron said every home buyer received a public report showing the estimated tax. Last year, the company began issuing an additional disclaimer to home buyers stating that the area covers several school districts.

10-14-96

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Dysart district retirees seek de-annexation

By Angela Rabago-Mussi
Staff writer

Tired of paying higher school taxes than their fellow senior-citizen neighbors, another part of Sun City West wants out of the Dysart Unified School District.

But the district is vowing not to let history repeat itself, arguing that seniors shouldn't be exempted from paying for education.

A group of residents in the new section of Sun City West has been fighting to get out of the district, using the only tool they have — the vote.

This well-organized group of senior citizens has been blamed for defeating two overrides and three bond proposals in the last two years.

“

I don't know of any other district that has had any community de-annexation from it, especially a retirement community.”

JESUS DE LA GARZA
DYSART SUPERINTENDENT

Now the group has decided to take it a step further and try to get de-annexation on the ballot in the spring, said Jerry Medford, president of Citizens for Tax Equity.

The group will need to collect signatures from 10 percent of the registered voters. They would need a majority of the vote both inside

and outside of their neighborhood.

In 1981, the original Sun City West forced a de-annexation from the district after seniors took over a majority of the school board seats. Before that, Sun City defeated 16 bond requests, forcing the Peoria Unified School District to vote them out in 1974.

Those two retirement communities now pay an unorganized-school-district tax rate of \$2.36 per \$100 of assessed valuation, compared with the Dysart district tax rate of about \$7.32 per \$100.

Despite this historical precedent, the district has vowed it will not give in as easily this time.

“Our people cannot afford to pay for their taxes,” Dysart board member Rachel Villanueva said. “That happened before. They pulled out and we were left to take up the burden of higher taxes. We can't let that happen again.”

Superintendent Jesus de la Garza said he

questions the constitutionality of de-annexation.

“I don't know of any other district that has had any community de-annexation from it, especially a retirement community,” he said.

Officials at the American Association of Retired Persons had not heard of the phenomenon, Tom Otwell of its communications division said. But he said the group conducted a study in 1995 that showed that age is not a good predictor of who supports or opposes increased funding for public schools.

The district has had to cut almost \$1 million from its operations budget in the last two years because of the failed override. An increasing number of residents are moving into the district, but without a bond, there's no money to build or renovate schools.

Members of Citizens for Tax Equity deny that they are against education, but say they believe all Sun City West residents should pay the same school taxes.

“They accuse us of not being in

favor of education, but we just believe that we should be paying on the same basis as the people in the rest of the community that we live in,” said Eleanor Nelson, vice president of the group.

She said the ideal would be for the money that the Sun City communities pay go to the Dysart district instead of county coffers and said the community has actively been lobbying the state Legislature for equalized funding of schools.

The district's recent change from at-large elections to a district system shut down the group's attempt to get three members elected to the board this fall. This move seems to have cemented the retirees' resolve.

“Many of us fought for the right to have a voice,” Medford said. “I pleaded with them not to polarize the community with this proposal.”

The district fears this latest de-annexation attempt will cause a domino effect with the growing number of retirement communities in Surprise.

SCW

SC
SCHOOL DISTRICT
DYSART
VF

Homeowners rail SCW tax inequity

By P. SOLOMON BANDA
Staff writer

Seventy-five residents protested in front of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts at Del Webb's Sun City West residents meeting Thursday.

The residents, some carrying signs that read "P.O.W. Prisoner of Webb," and "P.O.W. Pawns of Webb. Dysart School Tax Victim," and "Del Webb You Divided Sun City West. Make us Whole. Make Taxes Equal," wanted to inform residents of their plight.

The protest also served to warn would-be buyers of homes in Sun City Grand, Del Webb Corp.'s new master planned retirement community in Surprise, that their tax rate will be higher than that of their neighbors.

At issue is the difference in school taxes from one district to another. For instance, the owners of a \$160,000 home in Sun City West north of the Deer Valley Road extension pays \$1,171 in taxes vs. the \$377 owners south of there

pay for a similarly valued home.

Residents think that's unfair.

Sun City West expansion area residents say they should have been told they were in a school district and were going to pay more in taxes than their neighbors in the original Sun City West and Sun City to the south.

They say they weren't.

Now they want Del Webb Corp. to use its corporate muscle to fix this problem.

"We believe Del Webb Corp. is the organization that created the situation and they should be the ones to fix it," said Robert Koch, one of the protesters.

Many protesters from a group calling itself the Committee to Inform the Public of the Del Webb Corporation's Role in our Tax Inequities say they were bargaining chips when Sun City West deannexed from the Dysart Unified School District in 1981.

"They actively designated a particular part of land as a

► See Dysart boundaries, A5



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Homeowners from the Sun City West expansion area protest Thursday afternoon outside the Sundome before Chuck Roach of Del Webb addressed the audience. The residents are upset because they pay higher taxes than the other Sun City West owners.

Dysart boundaries irk residents

■ From A1

carrot," said Ruth Locker, one of the protesters, referring to how district boundaries were drawn when the retirees placed the issue on a ballot to vote themselves out of the district in 1981.

Sun City West resident Robert Williams, chairman of the PORA ad hoc committee Dysart School District Committee that helped draw the new boundaries back then, said the only part of Sun City West that was left in the district was the commercial core near R.H. Johnson Boulevard and Camino del Sol.

"We didn't want to totally drop the Dysart district," Williams said. "We thought we'd leave the commercial core as a tax base."

The land where the Sun City West expansion area is now, was undeveloped desert, separated by a drainage canal and a brick wall.

"That's (the expansion area as a carrot) is totally out of focus," Williams said. "Webb didn't own the land back then."

Del Webb Corp. acquired the land for the expansion in 1992 and broke ground in 1993, said John Waldron, Webb spokesman.

But what irks the residents is that some were told their taxes would be higher, others were not.

"It was the luck of the draw," Locker said. "It depended on the salesperson."

What adds to the confusion is the number of school districts in Sun City West, Chuck Roach, senior vice president and general manager of Sun City Grand, told the 4,100 residents inside the Sundome.

"There are three districts in Sun City West and all have different tax rates," Roach said.

Peoria Unified School District, Dysart and the unorganized school district are all within both parts of Sun City West. Dysart's secondary rate is \$7.32 and the unorganized district's rate is \$2.36.

Residents were told before they bought their homes what their total tax rate would be as required by the state Department of Real Estate, Waldron said.

There has never been a question raised by residents on the accuracy of Webb's tax estimates.

Webb added another disclosure form about a year ago in response to customers' complaints, Waldron said. The new form, which will also be used in Sun City Grand, informs residents that there are three school districts in the area in addition to the legal requirements.

"I think they knew this when they bought their homes," said Bob Otto, a resident of the original Sun City West. The pair went to the meeting to keep up with what's happening in Sun City Grand. They say they have no desire to move.

"From our vantage point, the entire school finance system is broke," Roach said. "It's the responsibility of the (state) Legislature to recognize the problem and two, to solve the problem."

It's the one thing both sides agree on.

"This is a state problem and it needs to be resolved as such," Koch said. "It needs to be resolved in a rational and constructive way."

Waldron said Webb Corp.'s lobbyist will continue to follow the issue, as the company has in the past.

Group mobilizes against Dysart bond

Citizens for Tax Equity sets sights on de-annexation from school district

By PAUL DAGOSTINO
Staff writer

1-24-96

SUN CITY WEST — Sun City West expansion area residents turned out by the hundreds Tuesday night to discuss ways to defeat a \$55 million bond and override issue proposed by the Dysart Unified School District.

The issue, on the March 12 ballot, has prompted leaders of the Citizens for Tax Equity to mobilize its membership to convince neighbors and other retirees in the district to vote the measure down.

One of the more than 400 members at the meeting in the R.H. Johnson Social Hall suggested running for seats on the school board in an effort to gain control of the district's decision to approve bond elections.

Bond money goes for capital costs and override money goes for salaries and programs.

The group's first order of business was to elect officers for the purpose of preparing to force an election to de-annex from the school district.

"One of our eventual goals is de-annexation from the Dysart Unified School District. If we thought we had the votes to do it now, we would do it," said Eleanor Nelson, the organization's secretary.

Nelson said by law the organization needs to be registered with Maricopa County in order to gather the required signatures — 10 percent of the district's more than 7,000 voters — to get its proposal on the ballot. Residents in the expansion area then would have to out-vote the rest of the district to disassociate,

which is unlikely, Nelson said.

In the meantime, the strategy is to vote down bond issues, she said.

Citizens for Tax Equity is a group of homeowners who live in the Sun City West expansion area, a 1,200-acre parcel north of Deer Valley Drive, in Del Webb Corp.'s last phase in the development of Sun City West, scheduled to be completed by October.

The group opposes paying more in school taxes than other residents who live in the district.

Public school taxes are based on the assessed valuation of property, and expansion-area residents own some of the most expensive property in the district. Consequently, they pay more than most other school district residents. But they also pay more in school taxes than other Sun City West residents.

"Why should one side of Deer Valley Drive pay \$900 (annually) and the other side pay nothing?" asked one woman who would not give her name.

The commercial core of Sun City West and part of the expansion area are in the Dysart Unified School District. Another portion is in the Peoria Unified School District. The rest of Sun City West de-annexed by vote from Dysart in 1981.

Jerry Medford, newly elected president of the organization, said Citizens for Tax Equity is not against education.

He said the group would consider supporting a bond issue if there was more evidence of the expected

growth district officials anticipate which is based on projections by the city of Surprise and developers.

In Surprise, 13 residential and commercial developments are either proposed or under construction, and request for building permits have increased dramatically in the last six months. Since July 1995 the city has issued 508 building permits, a majority of which are residential, according to city records.

Medford said, however, that growth will be slow.

"There will be expansion, but there will be very slow expansion," Medford said. "They're (the school district) way ahead of where they should be."

He called "asinine" the "wish list" of repairs, renovations and new facilities the school district has prepared with the help of architects. He pointed out certain items of the district's needs assessment and implied district officials were asking for unnecessary improvements.

Medford also said rates of tax increase for school district residents published in local newspapers were much lower than what they would be. He did not give a figure of what he thought the rates would be.

Alejandro Perez, the district's superintendent of business affairs, said the figures are accurate. If the assessed valuation of the district as a whole remains at \$92 million, a person with a \$100,000 home would expect to pay \$67 more per year, Perez said.

Kathy Sysak, vice president of a company that handles the district bond sales, agrees. She said that the same figure she gave to several members of Citizens for Tax Equity over the telephone.

The district is banking on population growth. If the total assessed valuation increases to \$106 mil-

OVER

SCW

'One of our eventual goals is de-annexation from the Dysart Unified School District. If we thought we had the votes to do it now, we would do it.'

Eleanor Nelson,
Citizen's for
Tax Equity

in the district, as is projected, the tax rate on a \$100,000 home would be \$47, because more people are paying for the tax increase.

Perez cited construction in the expansion area and Surprise as evidence the district's valuation would increase as it did last year.

Last year, Citizens for Tax Equity took the lead in mobilizing the expansion-area and Surprise retirees to vote against two successive Dysart school bond elections. Both issues failed.

Those defeats have taken their toll on the district, school officials said. In the first election, an override was defeated, as well as a \$25 million bond issue. As a result, the district had to trim almost \$500,000 from their maintenance and operation budget and froze teachers' salaries, which are already low compared to teacher's salaries in surrounding school districts.

If the bond and override fails again, the district would have to cut \$1 million from its budget, district officials said. That would mean no new schools, cutting a host of student programs, continuing the salary freeze and possibly going to double sessions for students.

Dysart gets lots of advice, no answers

By Betty Reid
Staff writer

EL MIRAGE — Dysart Unified School District leaders say they've picked up plenty of advice about how to win a bond election in general, but none offer suggestions about how to convince retirees to vote for the bond.

A Valley consultant, who worked on a report about how to win a bond election in Chandler, sent a free copy of a study to Dysart board members.

But no one, not even in the report, has suggested how the board should deal with Sun City West retirees, said Macario Garcia, clerk of the Dysart board.

The retirees who live in the new Sun City West expansion area

torpedoed two district bond elections last spring.

"I just hear that people here are angry with them (retirees)," Garcia said. "The image appears to be that they really don't care, and they don't care to educate children."

During the election, new Sun City West residents say they are not opposed to education but want to pay the same taxes paid by residents living in the original Sun City West. In the early 1980s, the retirees and the local community agreed to vote Sun City West out of the Dysart district.

Other school districts stretching from Tucson to the Valley advise Dysart to resort to the grass-roots people to organize a campaign. The

thinking is that not all parents came out to vote, said Alex Perez, Dysart's business manager.

"There's all kinds of stuff; everybody I talked to has an opinion," Perez said, adding that he was given about 10 different ideas.

The board aborted plans to call for another bond election this fall. It is considering another bond proposal in the spring.

Ed Cirillo, president of the Property Owners Resident Association in Sun City West, gave members of his board a report about Dysart on Tuesday. Cirillo gave a report about a trip he took through Dysart district campuses on Aug. 16.

PORA was criticized by Sun City West expansion residents for not

taking a stand on whether or not voters should pass the Dysart bond election. The group asked voters to make their own decisions.

Cirillo, after his trip through the district, said he thought the Dysart district has critical needs, including some buildings which are in poor condition.

He also offered advice for district leaders: Offer a clearer picture about who will pay for the bonds. Cirillo said it is his understanding that over time, it is the new people who move into the school district as a result of growth who will pick up the tax burden.

"They (district leaders) need to give more thought into the financing plan involved," Cirillo said. "They didn't do a very good sales job on that story."

Do your homework

I have been following the Dysart School District bond issue with interest as a taxpayer in the district. There are also landowners, homeowners and other residents in this school district who agree with Mr. Padnick ("Dysart tour helps foster understanding," Community, Aug. 21) and hope he continues to fight the unconscious request for millions of our tax dollars.

Yes, unconscious. This first con-

scious effort to justify any bond for school money was conducted with a tour of six campuses in the Dysart district. The next effort should be a reasonable accounting for planned expenditures, including maintenance, roofs and computers.

If Rachel Villanueva expects to have a bond issue approved, she should do her homework and justify that \$25 million gift to the district. Most of the citizens of this community work for a living and cannot afford to contribute more unaccountable funds to politicians and city officials. We cannot afford to give millions more to a school district that has absolutely no idea of how to manage a budget with an ever-increasing student population.

The "sleepy" little one street-light town of Surprise has annexed more territory (with a substantial tax base) than the individuals in charge of budget (tax and spend) know how to handle. Thinking people are not to be fooled or bullied into approving a huge spending spree for them! They have to go through us before they can lay claim on more tax dollars.

Amy Gelley
Sun City

August 10, 1995

Dysart, groups plot bond strategies

By PAUL DAGOSTINO
Staff writer

Dysart school district officials estimate they will need at least one new school within two years.

David Garcia began working in the fields at the age of 4. Each day he awakened early and tagged along with his parents to harvest crops.

As migrant farmworkers, Garcia and his family traveled from state to state with different crop harvests. Part of the year, the Garcias lived in El Mirage and part of the year they lived on the road.

Eventually, Garcia's parents settled in El Mirage, and Garcia attended Dysart schools from first grade through high school. He always knew he wanted to attend college rather than pick fruits and vegetables.

Education was his ticket out of the fields.

"I was tired of working in the fields and waking up at three or four in the morning," Garcia said.

The 35-year-old considers himself a reflection of the past, present and future. His education at Glendale Community College led him to his job as director of parks and recreation in El Mirage.

His past parallels the future. The future will be different.

Now developers are planning large subdivisions for families in Surprise, which is expected to grow from 7,500 to 65,000 people in 10 years. That means the school district has to

build more schools and hire teachers to staff them.

School district officials estimate they need at least one new school within two years. But it takes at least two years to plan and build one, said Jesus de la Garza, superintendent of the Dysart Unified School District.

He said that data are based on a student growth rate of 5 percent for the last several years.

"If that trend continues, we will be at capacity this year," de la Garza said.

That makes passage of a bond critical, de la Garza said.

One of the problems in the past elections was that not enough parents voted, school officials have said. Garcia confirmed that. He said one of the things the school district has to do is a better job of educating parents and students, he said.

"Maybe they need to educate them as to what a bond election is," Garcia said.

Earlier this year Dysart voters twice rejected a \$25-million bond issue earmarked for construction, expansion and renovation of schools. The district said it needs money to

build and prepare schools for the anticipated growth in Surprise.

That is the plan of school district supporters, who include civic leaders, school officials, developers, parents and teachers. They are meeting in groups and forming plans to reach out to parents and students to build support for future bond and override elections. Bond money goes for school buildings and override money goes for salaries and programs.

"This is the primary goal, to involve as many people as possible," said de la Garza.

Many of the votes against the issue came from residents living in the Sun City West expansion area, which is in the area of Deer Valley Drive. The expansion area and the commercial core are the only parts of Sun City West in the Dysart Unified School District. Other votes against the issue came from the retirement communities of Sun Village and Happy Trails in Surprise.

Retirees who voted against the bond issue said they didn't want to pay more for school taxes. Several retirees said they felt they were paying an unfair amount because of the higher values of their property.

District officials were considering putting another bond election on the ballot in November, but are leaning toward March because they want

more time to reach out to district residents.

"I don't think we can go fast and be comprehensive," de la Garza said.

Included in the comprehensive plan are:

- The formation of a committee to gather information about what the district needs based on growth projections from area developers.

- The formation of school site-based councils after school begins. They are groups mandated by the Legislature last year and are composed of teachers, administrators, students and parents to support and have input in their schools.

Other developments include the reorganization of the Dysart High School Booster Club, which has been inactive. About 20 people attended the club's first meeting last month, said Chuck Hydeman, instructor at Dysart High School.

Hydeman said bond supporters also plan to work through a concerned parents club. Although the groups aren't specifically organized to promote future bond and override elections, they provide a means for residents to exchange information.

"I see more people talking," Hydeman said.

Among Garcia's suggestions is addressing meetings of parent/teacher organizations in the district's four elementary schools.

School finance reform delay irks Dysart officials, parents

By Betty Reid
Staff writer

Officials at Dysart Unified School District had planned to teach state lawmakers the district needs special consideration to ease financial troubles.

But the idea was scrapped this week after Gov. Fife Symington announced last Monday that he will not convene a special legislative session in November to revamp the state's school finance system.

District officials planned to argue they needed help because the district

is located in a retirement community, which continues to vote against bond sales to help finance school operations.

Rachel Villanueva, Dysart board president, said scrapping the plans to lobby lawmakers is disappointing because it will be a year before they learn how lawmakers plan to tackle school financing.

Villanueva said Symington's announcement leaves the impression that education is not a priority.

In addition to losing two bond See FINANCE, Page 7

elections this spring, the district lost an override election in March. One consequence of the failed elections is that the district cut expenditures by 10 percent for the 1995-1996 school year.

Crowding in classrooms also is a concern at Dysart schools.

"It seems like Symington is not listening to the educators," Villanueva said. "I think that the governor needs to know that + Dysart needs relief from growth and we need the funding for incoming students."

During a meeting with the editorial board of *The Arizona Republic* and *The Phoenix Gazette*, Symington said he believed the issue could be taken care of in the main legislative session in 1996. He also said he wanted to allow time for ideas to develop about solving the state's capital financing system for public education.

Bobbi Sparrow, a parent at Deer Valley School District, said she also is disappointed with Symington's decision. She believes one year is enough time for the governor and the state legislature to hammer out a resolution.

"I don't understand a governor who can be so proud of his state's growth and still have no plan to where all these kids will go to school," Sparrow said. "I hope he changes his mind."

Deer Valley voters in February rejected a \$252 million bond issue and an override election. The Deer Valley board shifted \$4 million from the new Mountain Ridge High School, 67th Avenue and Patrick Lane, to put portable buildings at certain elementary schools and provide repairs to meet health and safety needs at

the district's 21 schools.

But unless voters approve more money in bonds, district officials said the schools will become overcrowded because there will be a big increase in student population.

The state's financing system was declared unconstitutional last July by the Arizona Supreme Court because of its heavy reliance on property taxes, which has resulted in wide funding disparities between districts with large tax bases and those with little taxable property.

The court ordered the Legislature to correct the inequities "within a reasonable time."

Macario Garcia, a member of the Dysart board, said he is not surprised by the governor's decision.

"Based on how other states such as Texas dealt with similar issues, why expect something different from the Legislature?" he asked.

"The solution that I see is that we have the votes in El Mirage and Surprise, the numbers are there, but the people have to want it bad enough to pass a bond election," Garcia said.

SCW

Dysart approves SCW boundaries

By IAN MITCHELL
Daily News-Sun staff

The Dysart Unified School District Governing Board approved two long-pending matters at its Tuesday meeting: a change of district boundaries in the Sun City West expansion area and an extension of the district superintendent's contract.

The board unanimously approved a change in the district's boundaries in the Sun City West expansion area, an issue which has been on the board's agenda since early March.

Del Webb Corp. representatives met with the board in a study session March 16 to discuss the boundary change, which the developer proposed to keep any lot from being in more than one school district.

If boundaries were left unchanged, 58 residential lots would have been split between the Dysart and Peoria school districts, with part of each lot in Dysart and part in Peoria. The Peoria board approved the boundary change in March, subject to Dysart's approval.

The Dysart board delayed voting on the question until the proposal had been examined by legal and real estate experts.

Under the Del Webb proposal approved Tuesday, Dysart gives up a 79-acre parcel of land in exchange for two parcels totaling 41 acres.

Scott Peterson, vice president of land development for Del Webb Corp., said when all three parcels are fully developed, Dysart will gain

\$47,000 in revenue annually through the land swap; but until 1996, Dysart will lose revenue from property taxes because the parcel being given to Peoria will be developed first. Del Webb Corp. figures project all three parcels will be fully developed by 2001.

Also approved Tuesday, by a 3-2 vote, was a one-year extension of Superintendent Frank Galas' contract and a 2 percent salary increase, bringing his annual pay to \$75,990. His contract expires in June 1995.

Galas' contract and evaluation have been issues pending before the board since February, when the board delayed his evaluation because of objections from some parents and teachers concerning his leadership.

In an April workshop meeting, board members agreed to conduct Galas' evaluation separately from a district dialogue meeting, which was convened May 17. Galas' evaluation was completed by the board in an executive session preceding Tuesday's meeting.

There was no discussion before the vote. Board members Marcario Garcia and Ben Loya voted for the extension and raise, and Pam Justice and Mary Smith opposed it. Board President Rachel Villanueva then cast the deciding vote in favor of extending the superintendent's contract.

SCW

COMMERCIAL CORE STAYS

Disassociation passes

By CHERYL SWEET
Staff Writer

Dysart district voters overwhelmingly approved a measure Tuesday that will separate Sun City West residents from the school district.

The split, effective July 1, will leave the primary business core in the district.

The separation, which required a majority vote from Sun City West residents and voters in the remainder of the Dysart district, received wide support from both sides.

ONE OF TWO PROPOSALS voted on, the measure was a compromise worked out between retirees and the remainder of the Dysart district.

It provides that residential areas of Sun City West will be ousted, leaving key business areas in the district.

Sun City West approved the proposal by a vote of 2,044 to 176, while El

Mirage, Surprise and outlying ranch areas in the district passed the measure, 362-138.

THE ALTERNATIVE proposal, which would have separated the entire retirement community, was defeated, 2,946-266, in Sun City West and 465-34 in the remainder of the district.

A compromise was worked out March 30 after it became evident to Sun City West representatives that district parents would veto separation of the entire community. The commercial core was viewed as a concession by retirees—one which parents hope will provide the district with a large enough tax base for bonding capacity to meet expected future growth.

The election culminated months of resentment that many district parents have felt since three Sun City West residents took control of the board in January.

The outcome of the election, he said, is the result of "somebody stirring people up with the idea that they're being exploited."

Maricopa County Schools Superintendent Richard Harris is expected to appoint three board members to replace Mrs. Ratner, Ingelletta Hawkins and Jack Glerman.

Officials have said that the split will lower the school district's assessed valuation from \$43.2 million to \$16.2 million. But this is expected to be partially offset by an increased state contribution of \$1,026,000 this year.

SEVERAL ACTIONS BY Westers intensified such feelings. Included was a vote by Westers to rescind a \$27.5 million 1978 bond authorization, a decision to delay funds for a vocational facility, a difference of opinion over bilingual education, and an attempt to limit time for public participation at board meetings.

School board president Rose Ratner of Sun City West said she had mixed feelings about the election results. Although she reiterated her past views that Westers could have provided needed educational and financial expertise, she said the split is probably for the best.

Robert Williams, head of the Sun City West Dysart school affairs committee, said, "I think it was the wisest decision. The majority of our system is usually right. This will clear the political air and we can get on with providing volunteer help to the district."

THOSE WHO VOTED AGAINST the separation weren't as optimistic about the district's future.

Board member Sam Openshaw, who led a last-minute drive to keep retirees in the district, said the disassociation will have a detrimental effect on the district.

SCW

PORA will seek revocation of Dysart school bond

5-13-80

by RICHARD MOORE
Staff Writer

Residents in Sun City West are being asked to support the revocation of a \$27.5 million bond authorization in the Dysart Unified School District.

A petition to place the issue on the Nov. 4 ballot will be available to sign at 9 a.m. Monday at the Property Owners and Residents Association's general membership meeting, Johnson Social hall.

In addition, petitions requesting that the names of Sun City West residents running for four of the five seats on the school board be placed on the November ballot also will be circulated at Monday's meeting.

"SUN CITY WEST was in an embryonic stage at the time (the bond authorization was approved), and was without representation in the district," says a PORA report. "Thus, we inherited a

financial time-bomb which could have a severe future impact on our taxes. The threat of major expenditures under this authorization...cannot be tolerated."

The report, issued Monday and mailed to PORA members, "said that in 1978, although \$3.83 million in bond authorizations remained from a 1973 Dysart district election, another one was held in which only 190 people voted for approval of the proposition.

"The \$27.5 million bond authorization itself lacked valid justification in view of those Dysart and PORA members who subsequently analyzed it," the report says.

THE REPORT concludes that the possible disassociation of Sun City West from the Dysart School District "will be seriously considered" after the school bond authorization is revoked.

Names of possible school board candi-

dates have not been released, according to one PORA official who added that the prospective candidates are being interviewed by the PORA board.

"It is important to note that PORA cannot...provide financial or political support to those running for office," the report says. "However, PORA can help in the screening and introduction of these candidates to Sun City West residents."

ONE THOUSAND signatures are needed to place all the issues on the ballot.

PORA plans to invite all school board candidates to the September general membership meeting.

Fred Koory Jr., chairman of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors, will be the guest speaker at Monday's meeting.

KOORY WILL talk about the progress being made in replacing the Bell Road bridge destroyed in the March 1979 flood.

He will answer questions about other matters of interest in the county.

Members of PORA's taxation committee will also present information on the June 3 primaries.

PORA is endorsing the passage of eight of 10 propositions on the ballot. The homeowners group is recommending that residents vote "no" on Prop. 104 and 105.

PROP. 104 would permit a school district to increase its bonded indebtedness from 20 to 30 percent of the value of taxable property in the district. Counties would be permitted to increase their indebtedness from 10 to 15 percent of the value of taxable property in the county.

"Because it has not been established that such increases are necessary and because Sun City West does not have representation on the Dysart school board to control unnecessary spending at this time, we strongly urge you to vote no," a PORA taxation committee report says.

Prop. 105 changes the definition of "state revenue" in the constitution which would allow the state to by-pass the seven percent spending limit imposed by the voters in 1978.

IT HAS not been decided whether Monday's meeting will be the last until fall. PORA's by-laws require that three membership meetings be held during the calendar year—in January, May and October.

Officials earlier intended Monday's meeting to wrap up business until September. But because there are still many important matters that need to be presented, a formal June meeting is likely.

"We will definitely hold an informative meeting in June," said PORA president Joe Kelso.

New group forms to fight Dysart disassociation plan

By CHERYL SWEET
Staff Writer

With the Dysart school disassociation election scheduled Tuesday, another group has sprung up to voice its views.

The newly formed Dysart School District Patrons Against Disassociation is busy trying to persuade district parents to vote against disassociation from Sun City West.

Dysart School board member Sam Openshaw, who is a member of the group, said disassociation would be detrimental to both retirees and other district residents. He maintains that things should be left as they are.

OPENSHAW said parents have unjustly criticized the three Sun City West board members performance.

"I don't think they're giving them a fair appraisal. The people of Sun City West are interested in children and ensuring they get a good education. As a board member, I feel they're hard working."

He further said that Parents Organized to Protect Education is responsible for disseminating unfounded rumors. Such misinformation, he said, has caused many parents to lean heavily in favor of disassociation.

"It has seemed to me, that POPE organizers come up with a bunch of 'ifs.' The people need to find out for themselves about such rumors and not depend on what others say."

OPENSHAW said his group was organized about six weeks ago and intends to continue its efforts of convincing El Mirage and Surprise residents to vote against disassociation until election time.

He said the group has had "some very favorable feedback" throughout the community and added that he feels "we will prevail," in opposing the separation.

Openshaw refused to speculate on how many members were in his group.

Lynn Anderson, a local rancher, also is a member of the group opposing the separation. Anderson said disassociation would be unfair, because it would exempt Sun City West from school taxes. "I don't believe in special treatment for anybody," he said.

FORMER school board president Margaret Baker, who is a member of POPE, said she thinks Openshaw's group has

had little support from the community. "Everyone's been watching their efforts very closely. As far as I know, they haven't got anyone to support them."

She added that she doubts if the group's membership is very large—not more than five or six people. At this point, she said, it looks as though the votes for disassociation will far outweigh the position taken by Openshaw and others opposing the separation.

POPE was formed after Sun City West leaders filed a disassociation petition March 2 with the county. The petition advocates excluding Phase I and commercial areas from the school district.

Concerned that the omission of the entire retirement community would lower the district's bonding capacity, a group of parents formed POPE to protest the Sun City West petition.

THE TWO sides eventually got together and drew up a compromise petition which was submitted to the county March 30. This second petition differs from the first in that it leaves the commercial core in the school district.

Robert Williams, head

of the Sun City West Dysart Affairs Committee, said the compromise was reached when it became evident that parents in the district would not support the Sun City West petition.

Without parents' support the separation would be impossible, since a majority vote on both sides is needed for the measure to pass.

Williams is optimistic that voters will show overwhelming support for the separation. "I have no doubts that the people with common sense will vote yes."

On the remote possibility that the measure does not pass, Williams said the result would be a "horror story" for both sides concerned.

5-6-81

Del Webb Funds Dysart School District Volunteer Coordinator Position

As a result of the success of funding the Volunteer Coordinator position in the Peoria Unified School District, the Del Webb Corporation recently announced that it will fund a similar position in the Dysart Unified School District.

The Dysart Volunteer Coordinator position is designed to recruit and organize a district-wide volunteer effort which encourages parents, seniors and the community at-large to volunteer their time and expertise in the local school district. In addition to recruitment, the coordinator will also be responsible for developing a comprehensive volunteer program which will identify district needs and match volunteers to the need. Del Webb is providing \$15,000 per year to fund this position.

"It is important to get seniors in the classroom because their experience can be very valuable to our students. The role the seniors serve in connecting the generations is beneficial both to our students and the seniors," said Jesus de la Garza, Dysart Superintendent.

The school district and Del Webb will be meeting over the next few weeks to identify the skills and requirements needed for the Volunteer Coordinator position. A critical requirement is the ability to recruit both the senior population and the parents in the area. Shortly after identifying the job requirements, the school

district will begin recruiting applicants for the position. The Volunteer Coordinator should be

in place by the fall.

The position will be district-wide, concentrating on developing a strong school-based volunteer effort. Ultimately the Volunteer Coordinator will oversee coordinators at each school where the focus will be on meeting

individual school needs and enhancing district goals.

"Our volunteers have helped us meet district goals. Whether it's to improve reading levels or enhance math and science scores,

Webb

Continued on Page 7

Webb Funds Dysart School Dist. Volunteer Coordinator Position

Continued from Page 6

volunteers can help," said Sandi Hicks, director of community relations and supervisor of the Volunteer Program in the Peoria school district.

"After sponsoring a similar position in Peoria, we've found that it has been a useful tool in introducing or residents to the neighboring school district," said Chuck Roach, senior vice president and general manager of Sun City West. "The program has been very successful in Peoria and we expect it to have as big an impact in the Dysart district."

"We are excited about the opportunity the volunteer coordinator position brings," said Dr. Linda Arrington, assistant superintendent of personnel for the Dysart Unified School District.

"This new position allows us to more actively recruit seniors and parents to the classrooms which in turn can only enrich our students educational experience."

The Peoria Volunteer Coordinator position was the first of its kind in this area. It has been used as a prototype for other school districts since its inception. During the 1994-95 school year, volunteer participation in the Peoria school district increased by more than 85% over the previous school year.

More than 2600 volunteers donated their time and experience to the Peoria district in the last school year, saving the district \$1,045,000 in added costs. More than 300 of Peoria's volunteers are from the Sun Cities area. The

volunteers donated more than 96,000 hours during the 94/95 school year, an increase of nearly 22,000 hours over the 93/94 school year.

Volunteers in the Peoria district gave of their time in numerous capacities ranging from participating in music programs to judging science fairs and speech contests to participating in Young Author's Day.

"Del Webb has gone the extra mile to help introduce volunteers into the classroom. Their funding has been critical to the success of our program," said Sandi Hicks, of the Peoria Unified School District. "We are looking forward to sharing our experience with the Dysart district to ensure their success."

July 17, 1995

Dysart may switch to ward system

Change might benefit minorities

By Betty Reid
Staff writer

EL MIRAGE — Criz Urquidez recalls her frustrations in 1981 when Sun City West citizens gained a majority vote on the Dysart School District board.

Urquidez remembers thinking that people without children in district schools were deciding the fate of her children and grandchildren.

"The future of my children was in

their hands," Urquidez said. "The decisions which they made were not aimed at the betterment of my children but for the betterment of a tax base." The retirees continually fought for lower school taxes. In response, district residents voted to deannex Sun City West.

As in 1981, board members are elected by an "at-large" system, meaning they can reside anywhere in the district boundaries. District officials are consid-

ering changing the district's voting system into a ward system, under which population would determine the number of board members to represent an area.

On Tuesday the board's attorney explained how such a plan could work.

The original town of Surprise has a high population of minority residents. New areas under development do not. Several master-planned developments are under construction or proposed targeting retirees or families.

This worries neighboring residents in El Mirage, said Jose Solarez, city

manager of El Mirage. The small community, predominantly Hispanic, straddles Grand Avenue.

Residents want to maintain the small town atmosphere and retain control of decisions made for the community, Solarez said.

If the majority of members on the Dysart board agree to make such a change, then it could become the second district in Maricopa County to do so since 1990 when the U.S. District Court

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DISTRICT

From Page 1

ordered Phoenix Union High School District to be divided into districts.

The order for Phoenix Union was the result of a lawsuit filed in 1990 by a group of minority residents who live in the district against the school board, Maricopa County and, eventually, the state.

The suit claimed that the state law requiring at-large election of school board members failed to give minority voters a voice in a school system where half the students are minority.

Sixty-nine percent of Dysart's 4,000 students are minority.

While Dysart is not under court order, state law permits districts with high minority populations like Dysart to set up an alternative form of elections.

Cookie Pettit-Morris, former school board member for Phoenix Union High School District, said the only drawback to that district's system is that it is difficult to gain a consensus because members focus on their own area's interests.

To prevent such problems, the seven-member Phoenix Union board agreed to have two representatives elected at-large.

The benefit is that local voters are familiar with the faces of their candidates come election time, Pettit-Morris said.

"There are lots of people who have no idea who are members of their school boards or who is a candidate for school board," she said. "They will drive down the road, see a name on a billboard or flyer and vote for that person without knowing them."

Dysart reviews redistricting options

By PAUL DAGOSTINO
Staff writer

It won't be easy for the Dysart School District to go from at-large to single-member wards, but it might benefit the district to try, said a lawyer representing the district.

Attorney Jose Martinez spoke to board members, district officials and the public at a meeting Tuesday about changing to single-member wards in order to better represent residents.

The change would require board members to draw lines for individual wards within the Dysart district. Voters in those wards could only vote for the candidates in their wards.

Martinez said the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits

political bodies from re-drawing voting lines for any reason other than better representing minorities. The Department of Justice has to approve the plan, he added.

To switch to a ward system, the district must have more than 1,000 students and 25 percent of them have to be minorities. Dysart has about 67 percent minority students, district officials said.

The board could create wards on its own without a public vote, Martinez said.

"The district would have to show, if it were challenged, that the district's representation is fair and didn't single out any particular group," Martinez said.

Fair representation is determined by a complex process of analysis of demographics of the entire district. The wards

would have to have similar population bases. Minorities cannot be spread out in several districts to dilute their voting strength nor can they be packed in one or more districts, which could also dilute their voting strength, Martinez said.

Following these general guidelines, political bodies have re-drawn voting boundaries nationwide, he said. But a recent Supreme Court ruling could affect that process.

In Miller vs. Johnson, the court ruled that Georgia went too far in creating minority districts by placing blacks from parts of different cities many miles away in one district.

Martinez called it an example of egregious gerrymandering, and said Dysart would have to be careful not

to do what Georgia did. However, he didn't think the new ruling would stop redistricting in favor of better representing minorities.

"It's intent is not to override the Voting Rights Act," Martinez said.

District officials and board members have said one of the reasons they are considering single-member precincts or wards is because they fear retirees, especially from the Sun City West expansion area, could win a majority of seats on the board and control it.

That fear is based on district history when Sun City West was part of the school district. In order to force the school district to allow them to de-annex, Sun City West residents gained a majority of seats on the board and rescinded a bond issue that

voters had passed. They de-annexed from the district in 1981.

More than 600 expansion area residents live in the school district. More live in retirement communities in Surprise.

Jesus de la Garza asked Martinez if the board would be able to consider growth in areas of the district when creating wards. Martinez said no, that the board had to use 1990 census data to create wards.

Martinez said the district must:

- Define wards with equal amounts of residents.

- Follow existing voting boundaries or voting precincts as closely as possible.

- Start with the district with the most minorities when voters elect board members.

Dysart ponders shift to districts

Move would head off SCW takeover

By PAUL DAGOSTINO
Staff writer

Members of the Dysart Unified School District governing board are considering scrapping its at-large method of electing board members.

On Tuesday, the board will discuss creating five single-member wards in a workshop meeting that begins at 5 p.m. in the Dysart High School Library, 11405 N. Dysart Road.

The change would require the board to draw lines for five individual wards. Residents from those wards would elect board members, school officials said.

Jesus de la Graza, Dysart's superintendent, said one reason for considering the change is to insure minorities are represented equally throughout the district in the future.

"This is one way to simply provide for that," De la Garza said.

About 67 percent of the district's 4,200 students are Hispanic and most of them live in El Mirage or in the original square mile of Surprise, De la Garza said.

If Surprise continues its rapid growth to the northwest, the new residents will eventually outnumber residents in older parts of the district. So board members and district officials want to insure that those residents, some of whom have supported the district for many years, have a chance for a voice on the board, board members said.

Another reason to go to single-member wards is to prevent retirees from winning a majority of seats on the board as they did in 1980, board members said.

School board member Marcario Garcia remembers 1980 when residents from Sun City West, who opposed paying school taxes, gained a majority of the seats on the board in an attempt to force the school district to allow them to de-annex.

"They came in and took over," Garcia said.

Most of Sun City West de-annexed from the school district in 1981 except for a portion near Deer Valley Drive, which Del Webb Co. has expanded into. In the expansion area, residents are threatening to de-annex, which raised fears among board members that they could try to gain seats on the board as leverage to allow them to also de-annex.

Board member Pam Justice

said threat of a hostile takeover still exists.

"I take it seriously because they did take control of our board at one time," Justice said.

"They could become a majority of the board and control the district's decision to even go for a bond election."

More than 600 residents in the Sun City West expansion area live in the Dysart district. Some of those residents, represented by Citizens for Tax Equity, have said they will vote against any school tax increases. Many of those residents helped defeat a \$25 million bond issue twice this year.

But the only reason a school district can change its voting boundaries is to make sure minorities are equally represented according to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, said Charlie Herf, Dysart's lead counsel.

Herf said the district first has to have at least 25 percent minority residents, which Dysart does. Herf, from the law firm Quarles and Brady in Phoenix, said a representative from the firm will present the legal details of creating single-member wards within the Dysart District at the workshop.

Once it is established that the district has at least a 25 percent minority population, then the division has to occur equally. For example, if there are 100 people in the district, each ward would have 20 voters, Herf said.

The board can make the decision on its own to create single-member wards. But the Justice Department has to approve any plans, Herf said.

However, the United States Supreme Court recently decided that some types of minority representation are reverse discrimination. That means a plan do create wards could be challenged and the Justice Department could be forced to review it, Herf said.

"We will be prepared to discuss what that case holds," Herf said.