

Mary Birks
Board President's Report
November 20, 2017

Extra Mile Awardee

I am pleased to announce that our Extra Mile Award for this month is Jefferson Middle School counselor, Allison Levison. Nominated by JMS principal Kelly Szesterniak and Assistant Principal Jeff Zeiders, Ms. Levison's presence in the guidance office and the building has had an impressively positive impact on the students, parents, staff and school culture.

According to their nomination, "Ms. Levison's dedication to her students and colleagues is unmatched. Both students and staff members seek her out for advice, assistance with problems, or just for someone that will listen. She is always an advocate for what is in the best interest of her students. Parents count on Allison for timely advice or a word of reassurance. Even in the most difficult or complex situations, she maintains a focus on the positive. Her kindness and positive energy is felt whenever she is in the room. She is loved by students, parents and the teaching staff."

Frequently, administration has heard comments from parents such as, "Mrs. Levison is the best thing about JMS. We cannot overstate the amount of effort she puts into this school and how very lucky JMS is to have her."

I am pleased to introduce our Extra Mile Award winner, Allison Levison.

Meritorious Budget Award

The Association of School Business Officials International awarded the Mt. Lebanon School District with the Meritorious Budget Award for the 2017–2018 budget year. The MBA promotes and recognizes excellence in school budget presentation and is conferred only to school districts whose budgets have undergone a rigorous review by financial professionals and have met or exceeded the program's stringent criteria. This is the 23rd year the District was selected for this award.

Developed by the Association of School Business Officials, the selection criteria for the Meritorious Budget Award were developed to help guide the clear and transparent development and distribution of relevant budgetary information for district and public consumption. The MBA promotes and recognizes excellence in school budget presentation and enhances school business officials' skills in developing, analyzing, and presenting a school system budget. After a rigorous review by professional auditors, the award is conferred only on school districts that have met or exceeded the program's stringent criteria.

Congratulations to Mt. Lebanon District Business Director Jan Klein and her staff for meeting the rigorous criteria for this award.

Coach Black and Hall of Champions Events

Please join us as we honor Coach Dick Black and his legendary career as basketball coach of the Mt. Lebanon Blue Devils on Saturday, November 25. The event will begin at 10 a.m. with a tour of the new Hall of Champions in the Athletic Wing followed by the Plaque Dedication at 11 a.m. in the South Gym.

Coach Black was the head basketball coach at the high school beginning in 1960 and continued to coach the Blue Devils for more than 37 years, winning the first WPIAL basketball championship for the team in 1961. Coach Black produced numerous winning teams. His overall record of 620-251 ranks him as one of the top coaches in Pennsylvania basketball history.

In the evening of November 25, the Blue Devil Club is sponsoring a ***Celebration of the Mt. Lebanon High School Hall of Champions*** at 7:00 p.m. at the Circuit Center in the South Side. The event will highlight over 80 years of Mt. Lebanon athletics. The Hall of champions includes WPIAL and PIAA championship teams; individual WPIAL and PIAA champions; All-American and All-State athletes. Tickets will be sold at the door.

While the first Thanksgiving Proclamation was signed by George Washington on October 3, 1789, we now celebrate it on the last Thursday in November thanks to Abraham Lincoln. Actually, it was not his idea; a 74-year old magazine editor, Sarah Josepha Hale, wrote a letter to Lincoln on September 28, 1863, explaining, that "You may have observed that, for some years' past, there has been an increasing interest felt in our land to have the Thanksgiving held on the same day, in all the States; it now needs National recognition and authoritative fixation, only, to become permanently, an American custom and institution." Lincoln immediately responded to her and issued his Proclamation on October 3, 1863, 74 years to the day of George Washington's. Our national holiday of gratitude seems an appropriate setting for this evening's president's report.

For 8 years, I have been grateful and privileged to serve our students and this community as a board member; for Mr. Remely, who will be reading his own statement, it has been 12 years. We've accomplished a lot in the 8 years I've served alongside Mr. Remely, as well as the last 4 along with Mr. Moorhead, who will also be sharing some reflections.

I will begin at the very beginning for my own comments, with the search for a new superintendent. I was honored to be a part of the Superintendent search committee and to interview the final candidates for the position. It was during this process I was considering my run for school board. I was pleased to be able to work with Dr. Steinhauer as a board member, and have learned a lot from him along the way. Patience, data-driven decision making as well as listening, rise to the top of his laundry list of talents.

Successful and high achieving boards recognize that we are a team of 10, partnering with our superintendent to carry out the mission of our district: To provide the best education possible for

each and every student. Annually, Goals are developed alongside Dr. Steinhauer utilizing the following principles: 1) Student Growth and Achievement; 2) Organizational Leadership; 3) District Operations and Fiscal Management; 4) Communications and Community Relations; 5) Human Resource Management; 6) Professionalism

During my time on the board, Dr. Steinhauer's goals were expanded to include comparing our district's accomplishments to others across the country, not just in the state or local area. We've continued to show exceptional outcomes within the state and across the nation. We all saw that strength displayed last week in the Student Outcomes Report, and understand that our leadership team will be digging deep into the data at the teacher and student level to ensure success for every child. Empowered by a supportive Board, Dr. Steinhauer embarked on his own continuous improvement plan, and encouraged his leadership team to seek out professional learning opportunities which they now bring back and infuse into the culture of the district, Universal Design by Learning, being just one.

Early on in my service, we heard from and listened to parents concerned about the math curriculum, and focused efforts on piloting new resources to support our teachers. Those resources are now district-wide for every teacher to utilize to the benefit of each and every student. On my watch, we saw the creation of the STEM Academy and the Global Studies initiative at the high school, preparing our students with skills to be the global citizens they will need to be in order to compete in the rapidly changing world. We have heard of Parkway's success from Mr. Remely.

Social Emotional Learning is another initiative supported by the Board. Looking not just at academics, but the WHOLE child. There is an understanding that test scores only tell part of the story, and have their place in the narrative which includes the arts, athletics, service to the community and other philanthropic endeavors; we are a school community that now recognizes a place for resiliency and grit in our students; use of technology through the LUCID app in our student athletes; increase in positive psychology classes. Our students know that there is more to learning than what happens in the classroom.

While on the board, we embarked on and ultimately completed, a complicated renovation of a deteriorating high school building which now reflects the 21st Century needs of public education. The new building is one of my proudest achievements, for it was not accomplished easily. There were 82 public meetings leading up to the moment those shovels first hit the dirt.

Some other highlights include successful contracts with no labor unrest; Moody's rating Aa1 leading to highly beneficial bond financing and refinancing. These savings permitted the board to consider and move forward with the installation of air conditioning in all 7 elementary schools and both middle schools, over a summer break, with no tax increase

During my tenure on the board, we saw a 63% increase in female administrators. This was not accidental, but strategic. I see challenges ahead for the team to also reflect the changing

demographics of our community; I'm certain that Dr. Steinhauer will be successful there as well, bringing in the best candidates for each position.

As for taxes: 09-10, went from \$56 million in tax levies to \$64 million this year; average millage increase was 1.8%, while at the same time, PSERS went from 4.75% of salaries to 32.57% of salaries, an average of 27% over the past 8 years. We have managed to keep our programs strong, and not to furlough teachers with the budgeting process utilized by the administrative team, looking at those line items farthest away from the classrooms. Even with a \$2B cut to public education from the previous state administration, MTL was financially positioned to weather the storm and continue to serve the needs of our students and the expectations of parents and the community.

As State funding continued to waver, we launched a Capital Campaign as a vehicle through which donations could be used for innovative programming that could otherwise not be considered by the board with a limited budget. Enter Matt's Maker's Spaces at all 7 of our elementary schools, the Technology Student Association at the high school, new athletic and fine arts equipment and technology tools, including the 3-D printer used in creating the prosthetic hand for one of very own students just last year. We have only just begun to see how this Campaign can positively affect the learning of our students.

According to the municipal CAFR, for FY 2016, "Since the housing crisis of 2008- 2009, the average sale price of residential homes has increased 26.8%, with the average price of a residential property increasing 9.7% compared to the prior year. The housing stock is varied in style and price. In 2016, the average sale price was \$285,383 on 593 properties sold." These statistics run parallel to the district accomplishment of building and completing a 21st century high school, maintaining and enhancing programming, and an increase in our student population.

I came into this position at a time of great unrest; with the high school project looming large, there was concern about taxes, and how the project would be managed. These challenges brought the board together as a group. I spent many Sundays reviewing board packets with my fellow newbie, Dale Ostergaard, from whom I learned so much. We didn't always approach an issue the same way, but we were always respectful of one another as we researched and responded to the challenges in front of us. This was the sign of a board operating at the highest level; members disagreeing with one another, utilizing compromise and conversation to get to consensus, and then supporting the majority's decision. Back at the beginning, with residents calling for us to be tarred and feathered and driven out of town on a rail, I came upon a powerful quote from President Theodore Roosevelt which I tucked into my binder as a reminder. Entitled "The Man in The Arena":

We have experienced great enthusiasms and devotions and I cannot think of any more worthy cause than the education of our children. This will ensure the survival of our republic; we will rely on our students to be engaged in intelligent discourse in a civil society; challenge the status quo

with facts and data, utilize science to come to conclusions; and rely on teamwork to solve problems that move the needle of progress and innovation.

So I leave our students with this: Dare greatly, do not fear failure. Our world needs you more now than ever before.

And with that, let me wish each and everyone a very happy and healthy Thanksgiving holiday!