



New Dist. 211 board members face contract talks, financial challenges

By Ashok Selvam | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 5/4/2009 12:07 AM

The two new Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211 board members won't have much a honeymoon, as labor negotiations between teachers are slated to take place later this month.

The current deal, agreed to in November 2007, expires at the end of the school year, leaving Theresa Tracy and Edward Yung thrust into negotiations. The 2007 talks almost led to the first strike for the state's largest high school district and its 13,000 students.

Tracy and Yung said preserving the district's economic health and ensuring top-notch programs are their priorities.

While Tracy had already taken her place on the board, being appointed in March, Yung took his seat last week after running unopposed in the April election.

Tracy, who lives in Schaumburg, familiarized herself with District 211 as a freelance reporter for the Chicago Tribune and covered the district starting in 2005. From 1997 to 1999, she was a staff reporter who specialized in covering schools. She grew up in the south suburbs and currently works in the city for the University of Illinois Extension, where she helps recruit and hire, among other responsibilities.

Once she informed her employer that she was in the running for the school board vacancy left by the Valentine's Day death of board member Susan Kenley-Rupnow, Tracy was told she would no longer be able to cover school districts for the paper, she said.

However, she hopes to continue to write on other topics as a freelance writer.

Tracy said she wasn't ready to talk about the labor negotiations, not feeling prepared enough to make a public comment.

Yung knows how potentially grueling negotiations could be, as he served on the Palatine Elementary School District 15 board for two terms from 1997 to 2005.

"I'm hoping both sides will be reasonable," Yung said.

The 58-year-old from Inverness works at his own Chicago architectural firm, and grew up on the city's South side. He said he was approached by various members of community who asked him to run after Bill Lloyd choose not to run. Yung said he hopes his technical experience will be an asset to the board.

Yung added that he moved from Chicago to the suburbs so his children could have a better education. When he attended the University of Illinois, he said he found out that his suburban classmates had an edge over students who grew up in the city. He hopes to keep District 211's elite status.

"I just found that the education I had was inadequate, and I wasn't able to compete with the kids from the suburbs," he said.

Lloyd sat through his final meeting Thursday. He said keeping the district in healthy financial shape was his

proudest accomplishment during his tenure which began in 2005, with the district threatening a series of program cuts if the community didn't approve a tax-rate increase.

"Hopefully I contributed in some way positively," he said.

Lloyd, along with Anna Klimkowicz, were the only two board members who voted against approval of the last teachers contract. At the time, they said granting the teachers raises was reckless, given the dire financial straits the district faced before the 2005 tax increase.

Four years later, Lloyd said one of the board's biggest looming challenges will be to weigh union demands versus the taxpayers' perceptions when it comes to job and salary cuts in the private sector.

Yung, whose parents are from China, and Tracy, who is African-American, add diversity to the previously all-Caucasian school board. Tracy hopes that she could add her own perspective to better help students of color. She also praised the interview process, noting that no one asked her about her race or her gender.

"My intention is to advocate for all people, all children," she said.