

Ford

(Continued from front cover)

faculty four years ago. In the same breath, he also told faculty that Smallwood Drive Elementary Principal Barbara Marotto, and high school Dean of Students Jack Koch, and then Amherst High School Principal Joe Podgorski (retired in 2005), would also retire. Marotto, Koch, and Deputy Superintendent Paul Witig are retiring June 30.

"I can't pinpoint one reason to retire," said Ford. "But Amherst can profit by change. You can stay too long and you can subject the school community to a particular way of thinking. I do believe change is good and Amherst is going to have a fantastic opportunity to take a look at what is good

and what needs to be changed." A lot of positive events have occurred in the district under Ford, including a mentor training program for incoming teachers, a model pre-kindergarten, improvements to exterior playing surfaces, lights for the stadium turf field and a new track, but Ford is quick to not take any credit.

"I'm most proud that no single person in this district has accomplished anything but it has been a result of legitimate teamwork," said Ford. "I've tried to make it a practice not to take credit for something positive but always be willing to step forward for a voice when something hasn't worked. I don't believe personally in talking about legacy."

While all of the positives accomplished in his tenure are nice, Ford said his biggest disappointment while in office is the students who have died, whether by illness or accident.

"It sticks out more than any accolades the district has received," said Ford. "It's what really becomes permanently etched in your mind."

Ford said for the district to

continue growing, it needs to use research-based needs to gather information and communicate better, especially with students' parents.

"We have to find ways to have parents more a part of their kids' daily experiences by having them use the classroom setting to provide more opportunities for informative communication regarding programming," said Ford. "I don't think we do enough of that."

Ford does think the district is in good hands with Chabe as superintendent.

"Right off the bat, she strikes me as a solid people person," said Ford. "She's also been working in a smaller school district where she's had to wear many hats. I'm sure she has experience in areas of operating a school district that I never had to personally experience because I've had more people and financial resources."

"But the board is firmly committed to her," Ford continued. "No superintendent can have a remote possibility of success unless you have a kid-oriented board."

Announcer, writer, and athlete

If Ford wasn't set on going into education there were a couple of other occupations he could have pursued.

While teaching in Newark, he was the voice of WACK 1420 sports, covering night high school basketball and night and weekend football games. He even turned down an offer by a representative of the Baltimore Orioles' organization to be the announcer for the team's minor league "A" affiliate in Hagerstown, Md. because he had just become assistant principal of Newark Middle School. Ford ended a nine-year broadcasting career when he became principal of Newark Middle School.

Two weeks after turning down the radio job, he also rejected an opportunity to join the Geneva Times, now Finger Lake Times, as a full-time sports reporter. He had worked two years as a part-time sports writer for the Newark Courier Gazette.

Prior to both possible careers, Ford graduated from Cliffside High School in Cliffside, N.J. and

was awarded a basketball scholarship to Canisius College, playing on the same team with Bob McKinnon and facing national powerhouses like Duke, Wake Forest, Boston College, and Syracuse.

According to Ford, he was a "misplaced point guard" at Canisius and had a "non-illustrious two-year career where I had a phenomenal seat on the bench."

"Whenever I joke with my boys (John, 29, an attorney at Damon & Morey LLP, and James, 22, third year of doctorate program of pharmacy at UB, both Canisius graduates) about my non-illustrious two-year career, I say I went to Canisius when we played a real schedule," laughed Ford.

Ford also has a daughter, Sarah, 26, who is an assistant principal in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina.

Ford graduated from Canisius in 1974 with a bachelor's degree in secondary English education. He went on to receive a master's degree in secondary English education from Geneseo State College, an administrative certification from Brockport State College and was in the doctoral program at Teachers College in Columbia University.

Life-changing year

Ford's final year at Amherst has been anything but ordinary.

Instead of helping high school principal JoAnn Balasz with a transition program for incoming freshmen, his life forever changed when he found out in July that his oldest son, John was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer that attacks one's white blood cells. Ford immediately took a leave of absence and didn't return to work until Jan. 31, transitioning back to superintendent several weeks later. John has been in remission since December and is in the second

phase of his overall treatment.

"I learned more this year about personally watching him and being with him than I learned at any point in my entire life," said Ford. "John has changed my thought process and has unintentionally forced me to slow down and step back where prior to his illness, I said 'what am I going to do next?'"

Ford said he was overwhelmed by the number of letters, e-mails, notes, and small gifts, not just from staff members but from parents in the community and letters from students in the district.

"They did a lot to raise my spirits as well as John's," said Ford. "It's so nice and positive to feel that support, but it's the kind of thing that you wish you never had to know."

Ford and his wife of 31 years Angela, who he calls "the greatest person he has ever met," were also blown away by the number of students who donated blood at a recent blood drive at the high school (John was one of the people for whom the drive was held), and 600 people who were willing to be bone marrow donors, including members of the school community, parents, and board members. The blood and bone marrow drives were among the largest the area had ever seen, said Ford.

Is it true?

Ford's wife, Angela, is a middle school teacher in the Frontier School District and could retire in October but Ford said she isn't for two reasons.

"One, she loves her job," said Ford. "Two, she's not convinced that I'm really retired so she's not going to retire and have me walk up to her and say 'I've taken a job as . . .' so she said she's going to wait a few years just to see if I really do mean it."

e-mail: pnagy@beenews.com



Dionis Elderberry Quince Products!
25% OFF

3960 Harlem Road, Amherst
located in York Building
839.0791

Hector's Maple Road Service Shop

6 mechanics to get your stuff fixed FAST!

SPEEDY SCREEN & WINDOW REPAIR

2-3 DAY MOWER TUNE-UPS

GAS GRILL TUNE-UPS

Professional Sharpening Specials
Special Pricing 6/13 to 6/20

<p>Saw Chains Off Saw \$4.99 or 2/\$8.00</p>	<p>Knives 3/\$3.00 Regular Scissors \$1.99^{ea} Pinking Shears \$4.50^{ea}</p>	<p>Hedge Trimmers Manual \$3.00 Electric \$12.00</p>	<p>Loppers Pruners Axes Edger Blade \$3.00</p>
---	---	---	---

Oregon Chrome Plated Cutter Chain \$6.99/ft Buy One, Get 2nd 1/2 PRICE
Low Kickback — Made to Order — We Duplicate Your Chain

HECTOR'S SERVICE DEPARTMENT
876 Maple Road • Williamsville • 688-4488

summer extravaganza

Saturday, June 16th, 9 am - 4 pm

One Day Only — Experience an extended selection of Oakley eyewear brought in just for this event!

enter to win a **\$500*** gift card
(*see store for details)



Empire Vision Centers
Focused on You
www.empirevision.com

fashion | fun | prizes

AMHERST • Maple Crossing • 831-8050 | CHEEKTOWAGA • Tops Plaza/Next to Blockbuster • 683-6582
HAMBURG • McKinley Milestrip Plaza • 826-1673 | WILLIAMSVILLE • Lowe's Plaza 8236 Transit Road 639-0847

District stands by field trip decision

by JESSICA L. FINCH
Associate Editor

Since parental outrage over a recent Mill Middle School field

trip surfaced, Williamsville Central School District officials have reviewed the issue and stand by the decision to visit religious places.

Cindy Beeley, K-12 instructional specialist, said a meeting was held on Monday with Mill Middle School Principal Michael Calandra and the sixth grade team teachers that scheduled the field trip.

The concerns were about a trip to the Islamic Mosque and Hindu Cultural Center held last week. Also the short notice given to parents, one day, was criticized. (Read one parent's letter about the issue on page eight.)

Beeley said it is policy that at least 48-hours notice be given for field trips but in this case there was a problem confirming times at each location until the last moment. She said usually the district tries to give one to two weeks notice when possible.

Also according to district policy students can refuse to attend any scheduled field trips. They are encouraged to attend school instead of staying home as activities will be arranged for them.

"Another concern was that many parents felt we were not being fair to other religious

(Please turn to 16)