

Proposed nursing cuts at private schools off budget table

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

District residents, parents and administrators associated with the private schools in the Amherst Central School District breathed a collective sigh of relief after learning the district will not reduce the number of nursing hours at their schools.

Board President William Blanford said at last Tuesday's meeting that the board agreed not to pursue the cut in nursing hours at the district's five private schools — Sacred Heart Academy, St. Benedict's School, Christ The King School, Park School, and the Kadimah School of Buffalo.

"It was the board's inclination to take the cuts off the table," said Blanford. "We've seen the governor's proposal, and the board feels comfortable that this is an area we don't need to touch."

The proposed cuts would have changed the status of district nurses at the private schools from full-time to part-time status and saved the district \$70,000. The proposed reductions were based on student enrollment. At a past

meeting, Mark Whyte, the district's director of administrative services, said the ratio of students to nursing hours is greater in private schools in the district than in the public schools.

At the Feb. 5 meeting, 34 of the 200 residents in attendance voiced their disapproval of the proposed cuts, citing health and safety reasons. District residents at last Tuesday's meeting had a much different tune.

"Nurses are an important part of our operation," said James R. Dempsey, who represented the five private schools. "Thank you. It's not easy to be up on the firing line."

"All of the years I spent as an elected official I was frustrated because I never felt I could really make a change," said Elise Cusack, a former Erie County legislator. "This was an example of making positive change happen."

Vice President David A. Stocking said the proposal to reduce nursing hours was one of several aspects of the budget that the board is considering.

"We were not singling out one

group, which I think this may be perceived as," said Stocking. "It was only under deliberation. We pulled it forward to provide the schools an opportunity to let them know what we were doing. We were trying to be responsible."

In other matters:

- Erie 1 BOCES Superintendent Donald A. Ogilvie said that based on Gov. Eliot Spitzer's proposal for 2008-09, Amherst's estimated BOCES aid would decrease from \$627,000 in the current year to \$374,300.

- The Amherst boys lacrosse team will hold a spaghetti dinner from 4:30 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, March 19 at Amherst High School.

- The Superintendent's Student Task Force named Brittany Burks and Gabriel Fox as students of the month and social studies teacher Mark Jones as teacher of the month for February.

The next board meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 11 in the district office, 55 Kings Highway.

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Amherst Alumni Foundation to hold fundraiser

The Amherst Central Alumni's annual springfest fundraiser will be held from 6 to 10 p.m. on Friday, March 28 at Sonoma Grille, 5010 Main St., near Kensington Avenue, Snyder.

The admission cost is \$10 and includes cover charge, first beverage and food.

Tickets can be purchased the night of the

fundraiser.

The band "Fools Like Us" which includes Amherst School Board President William Blanford, will be performing.

Proceeds will benefit the Alumni's grant program and special projects fund.

For more information, call 362-8259.

SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

Man dedicates time as role model

by JESSICA L. FINCH

Joseph J. Abdallah is very dedicated to helping local youth. In fact, he's made it his career.

The Greater Niagara Frontier Council of the Boy Scouts of America named Abdallah chief development officer, an appointment that brings "critical expertise" to the Scouts' mission to serve and mentor the next generation of young leaders in Western New York, said Patrick Coviello, council executive director.

"He shares our vision to help prepare young people to strive to their fullest potential and become contributing citizens," Coviello said.

Abdallah, of East Amherst, said it has been a passion of his to encourage leadership development and character building in youth.

"It comes from my childhood and upbringing. Growing up in the lower West Side of Buffalo I was probably one of the very few that had a father in his life," he said. "I came to understand the value of an adult-male role model by having one in my life when many did not."

Abdallah said he believes having a father in his life directly led to the choices he made — finishing high school, receiving a bachelor's degree and master's degree in business from the University at Buffalo, getting married and raising a family.

"I learned to be a good father and citizen," he said, adding that youths in poor communities often model bad behaviors, and unfortunately those behaviors are often accepted as part of their lives.

By having a strong role model in youths' lives, the cycle of bad behavior can be broken, he said. That is why when he was offered the opportunity at the Greater Niagara Frontier Council of the Boy Scouts of America, it was an easy choice. Abdallah loves what he is doing. He is involved with all facets of development — from financial to programming.

One of the programs is Scout Reach, which offers youths in low income areas, many from single-parent homes, the opportunity to be involved. This program has allowed youths from the same type of neighborhood where Abdallah grew up to break out of the mold and develop good characteristics.

Abdallah said he has been volunteering with the Boy Scouts for the past eight years, and next month, his son, 5, will join the Scouts. There weren't any Scouting troops where Abdallah grew up.

Working as an administrator, Abdallah said he feels he can do more for an organization he has great admiration for.

Prior to joining the council, he served as deputy commissioner of the Erie County Department of Probation and Youth Services; executive director of Erie County Youth Bureau and Youth Services Board; and coordinator of Erie County Runaway and Homeless Services for Youth.

Abdallah has served as an officer or board member of several community service organizations, including the Independent Health Foundation, University at Buffalo Alumni Association and the United Way Campaign Committee, as well as the Buffalo and Erie County Youth Development Partnership, where he was a founding committee member and former chairman.

He currently serves as the vice president of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, president of the Arab-American Federation and as a director for CEPA Gallery and People Inc. A member of Leadership Buffalo's class of 2002, he is a past-recipient of numerous awards, including "Person of the Year" by both the Boys and Girls Club of Erie County and the Arab-American Federation, "40 under 40" by Business First of Buffalo, as well as other mentoring and community service awards.

He became a mentor to young men at the age of 20 while attending UB. And today, a father of six, he continues to teach his children about volunteering and service. Two of his daughters have received the Silver Award as Girl Scouts and are working toward their Gold Award, volunteering at pantries and soup kitchens.

"I have always introduced my children to serving, giving back ... and it shows in a lot of things they do every day," he said about his children's character.

If you have a suggestion for someone to feature in this column, send it to Jessica L. Finch, Amherst Bee, associate editor, P.O. Box 150, Buffalo, NY 14231-0150, e-mail jfinch@beenews.com or call 204-4917.



Joseph J. Abdallah

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