

Menominee schools save on bond interest

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MENOMINEE — When the words “school” and “money” are used together, the results are not always favorable to taxpayers. However, that was not the case for the Menominee Area Public School District Thursday night.

“By taking the action to reduce the interest on our bonds, it’s resulting in a reduction in the amount you have to pay to support those bonds,” said board president Ken Pulver.

Because of the bond refinancing in March, the rate paid by taxpayers will go down half a mill. The district can only collect what is owed, so lower interest for the district means lower tax rates for residents. The reduction should already be noticeable on the summer tax bill in July.

The board also approved to continue the contract of Michael Catanni for one year as interim superintendent at his current salary.

Although the district is saving money on interest payments, there’s a long road ahead when it comes to balancing the budget and keeping programs and curriculum in place. To help pave the way, the district has secured the help of

John Hofer of Bay Area Medical Center to develop a strategic plan.

“The hospital recognizes the tremendous value in providing help and assistance to not only the school districts in our market area, but other non-profits,” said Hofer. “It’s part of our way to give back to the community.”

Hofer offered up a thumbnail sketch of the working plan that would begin June 5 with a board retreat.

The plan is divided into three main categories, “Where are we now?” “Where are we going?” and “How do we get there?” Each of those has sub-categories dealing with internal and external assessment, stakeholder input, evaluations, development and more.

The short-term goals are on a very aggressive schedule with a report on the current situation expected in mid-July, a strategic framework by August and a plan review for board approval by October.

“I think a process like this has to stay aggressive to stay effective,” said Hofer. “It’s a fairly aggressive time frame but I think it’s one that is accomplishable and at the end will put you through a process that is valuable.”

TEACHERS:

“The hiring once again of a person who calls himself a professional negotiator, yet could not and did not settle the last contract, and a year into it, has still not settled this one,” she said. “How much will you spend on him and on bargaining this time? Why not just talk to us?”

The board did not respond to Flores’ comments but did hear from another MCDEA member. Gail Everhart focused her comments on class size and insurance costs.

“I hope that the board will properly and in a timely manner address class-size,”

she said. “This can be your opportunity to make it publicly known that you care and understand the concerns of the parents, the teachers and the public in general.”

Everhart said if just 10 students came back to the district, it would pay a teacher’s salary. And if half the students who left were to return, the district could receive more than \$300,000 in state funding.

On the issue of health insurance, Everhart questioned why the district failed to look into the proposed health saving account that could have saved union members a lot of money in premiums.

FRANCOUR:

days while recovering.

“I’m more humble now,” he said. “Things are still the same in that I’ve always wanted to be in a profession helping people, but things are different now. Anything you can think of, I had to battle through all of that. I’m very grateful I can do what I do. It has also given me an understanding of people’s attitudes in Marinette toward disabled people. It was something I even did a presentation on.”

His mother, Lynn Francour, said she is also very grateful for how successful her son has become.

“I have been his No. 1 cheerleader from the start and he was always a very gifted student,” she said.

She accredits his success to strong family ties.

“We lived through his accident and I think that Chad has gathered that strength by being on the other side of it,” she said. “It really made us closer as a family to rely on each other during that difficult time.”

We never gave up, though.”

Dave and Lynn are the parents of four adult children — Angie, Ryan, Chad and Katie.

Lynn, a teacher at the Marinette Middle School, said it came as a surprise to her as well when she heard about Chad’s awards with Hospice Advantage.

“I had no idea how much he was involved,” she said. “He would always be telling me that he was driving to see a client. He would always take clients that no one else would and he was happy to go that extra mile for them.”

She added that tradition has helped Chad connect to his clients.

“I heard from some of his clients and their families and they said they liked his sense of humor,” she said. “He’d share some of his grandpa’s jokes and his father’s stories he heard from that handing down of tradition. He’s become a most admirable young man.”

ARIAS:

life, looked visibly upset about the mistrial and sobbed before it was announced. Her family didn’t attend Thursday but has been present for much of the trial.

Family members of Alexander also cried in court.

The same jury on May 8 found Arias guilty of first-degree murder in the death of Alexander, who was nearly decapitated in the bathroom of his Mesa home. The jury later determined the killing was cruel enough to merit consideration of the death penalty.

Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery thanked the panel in a statement after the mistrial was announced: “We appreciate the jury’s work in the guilt and aggravation phases of the trial, and now we will assess, based upon available information, what the next steps will be.”

He said a status hearing has been set for June 20, “and we will proceed with the intent to retry the penalty phase.”

Under Arizona law, a hung jury in a trial’s death penalty phase requires a new jury to be seated to decide the punishment. If the second jury cannot reach a unanimous decision, the judge would then sentence Arias to spend her entire life in prison or be eligible for release after 25 years. The judge cannot sentence Arias to death.

A new jury would have to review evidence and

hear opening statements, closing arguments and witness testimony in a condensed version of the original trial. Attorneys will also have to find prospective jurors willing to issue a death verdict.

As the proceedings continue, Arias will remain in the Maricopa County jail system, where she has spent the past five years. Sheriff Joe Arpaio said Thursday she will be confined to her cell 23 hours a day and not be allowed to give interviews.

The mistrial came two days after Arias spoke to jurors and pleaded for her life. She said she “lacked perspective” when she told a local reporter after her conviction that she preferred execution to spending the rest of her days in jail. She also told jurors she could bring about positive change in prison by teaching inmates how to read and helping launch prison recycling programs.

That night, Arias gave a series of media interviews from jail, telling reporters about her many fights with her legal team and her belief that she “deserves a second chance at freedom someday.”

Arias contends she killed Alexander in self-defense when he became enraged after a day of sex, forcing her to fight for her life. Prosecutors say she attacked him in a jealous rage because he wanted to end their relationship and go to Mexico with another woman.

Her case became a sen-

“My insurance went up 336 percent in one year and 500 percent in two years,” she said. “I just don’t understand why (there’s) such a lack of respect when we are trying and you won’t even meet to try to understand what helps us out.”

Again the board sat and listened without response. That’s when Brenda Quaaak, a member of the union negotiating team got up to speak. Again the frustrations over delays were made clear.

“It is now nearly five weeks after we last talked and all seems to be at a standstill again,” she explained. “Are you keeping count? That is one time you

have come to the table, again with no discussion, in five and a half months.”

Quaaak pointed a finger of blame at the person handling the talks for the district.

“Again has come down to the obstructionist negotiator that you have hired,” she said, “whose sole purpose seems to be to effectively work at keeping interested parties, you and us, from getting together collaboratively working to get this done.”

When questioned after the meeting about the union statements, Superintendent Michael Cattani had no comment.

BRIDGE:

Helicopter footage aired by KOMO-TV in Seattle showed several rescue boats at the bridge collapse scene with several ambulances waiting on the shore. One rescue boat left the scene with one person strapped into a stretcher.

A damaged red car and a damaged pickup truck were visible in the water, which appeared so shallow it barely reached the top of the car’s hood.

Crowds of people lined the river to watch the scene unfold.

Gov. Jay Inslee’s office said he was on his way to the scene to assess the situation.

The bridge is not considered structurally deficient but is listed as being “functionally obsolete” - a category meaning that their design is outdated, such as having narrow shoulders are low clearance underneath, according to a database compiled by the Federal Highway Administration.

The bridge was built in 1955 and has a sufficiency rating of 57.4 out of 100, according to federal records.

That is well below the statewide average rating of 80, according to an Associated Press analysis of federal data, but 759 bridges in the state have a lower sufficiency score.

Democratic Rep. Judy Clibborn, who leads the transportation committee in the state House, said the bridge wasn’t one that has been a focus for lawmakers.

“It isn’t anything that was on our radar screen as being an issue,” Clibborn said. “It is shocking that I-5 would have something happen like this.”

According to a 2012 Skagit County Public Works Department, 42 of the county’s 108 bridges that are 50 years or older. The document says eight of the bridges are more than 70 years old and two are over 80.

Washington state was given a C in the American Society of Civil Engineers’ 2013 infrastructure report card and a C- when it came to the state’s bridges. The group said more than a quarter of Washington’s 7,840 bridges are considered structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

Study: No higher cancer rate at Conn. Pratt plants

By STEPHEN SINGER
AP Business Writer

EAST HARTFORD, Conn. — An 11-year study of the incidence of brain cancer at jet engine manufacturer Pratt & Whitney in the state ended Thursday with university researchers saying they found no statistically significant elevations in the rate of cancer among workers.

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Illinois at Chicago said they identified 723 workers diagnosed with tumors between 1976 and 2004 at the United Technologies Corp. subsidiary. The tumors were malignant, benign or unspecified and included 277 cases of brain cancer.

Researchers examined records such as work documents and cancer registries of 222,123 men and women who worked in one or more of eight Connecticut Pratt & Whitney plants between 1952 and 2001. They also reviewed 11 chemical or physical agents on the basis of known or suspected carcinogenic potential that could affect the central nervous system or other organs.

The \$12 million study, commissioned by Pratt & Whitney, was overseen by the state Department of Public Health. William Gerrish, a spokesman for the state agency, called it a “comprehensive study that has met its goals,” and the project’s principal researcher said the results were positive.

“The news is good,” said Gary Marsh, the University of Pittsburgh researcher who led the study.

Employees can be reassured that working at Pratt & Whitney before 2002, the start of the study period, “does not increase your risk of developing brain cancer and does not increase your risk of dying,” Marsh said.

The son of a Pratt & Whitney worker who died at age 46 was not so certain, though.

“It leaves a lot of questions unanswered,” said Todd Atcherson, whose father, Charles Atcherson, died in 1998 after working at Pratt & Whitney for about 25 years.

Workers and the union expressed concerns about several workers who died of brain cancer within a few years of each other and the study became too large, “losing sight” of individuals, he said.

Paul Dickes, chief health and safety representative at the Machinists union, which represents Pratt & Whitney workers, said he’s reassured that the study determined it’s safe to work at the two remaining Connecticut plants.

“It doesn’t bring closure to people who had illnesses,” he said. “I’m disappointed it doesn’t resolve those issues.”

Pratt & Whitney spokesman Ray Hernandez said: “We are pleased that employees have answers to their questions and there is no correlation between cancer and the workplace.”

Comparisons among Pratt & Whitney plants showed a slightly higher incidence of tumors and cancer among workers at the North Haven plant, the researchers said. But further evaluation found no association with estimated workplace exposures.

The slightly elevated cancer rates at the North Haven plant may reflect external occupational factors that researchers did not measure such as other companies where employees worked or factors unique to North Haven, Marsh said.

The study is one of the largest and most comprehensive in an occupational setting, he said. It also is the first large-scale study of workers in the jet engine manufacturing industry.

The results echo what was released in the first stage of the three-stage study in 2008. The researchers said then they did not find statistically significant excesses in deaths from malignant brain tumors among North Haven workers.

Workers and their families, joined by the Machinists union, pushed for the study after widows and union officials said they were concerned with what appeared to be numerous and similar deaths at Pratt & Whitney plants.

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