

## Crowd hears from Dist. 15 hopefuls

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With none of the incumbents seeking re-election and three new members set to join the Palatine Township Elementary District 15 school board this spring, residents Thursday got their first chance to hear from the candidates.

The Northwest Suburban Council, along with the League of Women Voters of Arlington Heights - Mount Prospect-Buffalo Grove and the Palatine area, hosted a forum for the six hopefuls seeking three 4-year terms on the District 15 school board.

All of the candidates, except Gerald Chapman, former superintendent in Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211, were in attendance to answer questions from residents about why they are best suited to be elected. Chapman did have a representative read his opening statement.

After seeing numerous District 15 staff members leave over the past several years, one of the more discussed issues Thursday was how the district can attract and retain quality teachers and administrators.

The candidates pointed to better communication and improving trust in the district, among other things.

"We need to have them (staff members) feel respected," said Lisa Neal, a 10-year district resident who works in the business office of an Arlington Heights orthopedics office.

Rich Bokor, a former District 15 and Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211 teacher, said he believes the recent teacher contract negotiations, which turned contentious at some points, hurt the district and are partially responsible for people wanting to leave.

"The morale is very low in this district," Bokor said. "The wounds have not healed."

Family physician James Ekeberg, who is running with Bokor and Chapman, said the district needs to do a better job of making its employees feel secure in their jobs.

"They feel uncertain about their futures," Ekeberg said. "They are looking for more stability."

Sue Quinn, a stay-at-home mom and former scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado, agreed, and said the previous years of deficit spending have left doubt in some staff members' minds.

"That sort of environment is very difficult to live in," Quinn said. "We need to ensure that, going forward, we have financial stability."

Mary Vanek, an attorney from Palatine, said if morale is indeed why people are leaving, it can

be fixed.

"If it is purely an issue of money, there is nothing we can do about it," Vanek said, "But, if it is an issue of morale, we can address that."

The election is April 17.

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