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Embree, Caruso vie for Shaker Board spot

BY GAIL OBER
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BELMONT – Six-year incumbent Sean Embree is being challenged in his re-election bid for the only open spot on the Shaker Regional School Board by parent and building manager William Caruso.

Caruso said his desire to serve on the school board stems directly from his being a working and actively involved parent who is committed to help in “shaping the education of our children.”

As a building manager, he said he would bring a fresh set of eyes to the table. He said he is a particular support of special education and supporting families who are faced with challenges.

Embree said that there are a number of changes occurring within the district and it is his desire to “see those changes through ... because I believe experience is important for the board right now.” He said he has been a dedicated member of the board who recalls missing many family activities but only two meetings in six years.

Professionally, Embree is the information technology director at of the Manchester campus of the University of New Hampshire.

Both have direct connections to the school district. Caruso has a child who attends school and Embree has two children in the district and his wife teaches there.

Each was asked five questions that are identified as “hot” topics in both communities.

Embree said he doesn't support SB2 because Belmont and Canterbury are still small enough that the traditional Town Meeting works. He said board has prepared a fair budget that is less than any default budget that the district would have had to prepare if it were an SB2 district.

Caruso supports SB2 because it gives voters an inside look at spending. He acknowledges that many communities, including Belmont, have very poor attendance at SB2 hearings and that he think more people should take the time to come should SB2 pass.

As to the Gale School, Embree supports saving parts of it, meaning the bell and the bell tower. He said he understands the nostalgia people feel and why they want to save it, but said no viable use for it has been brought forward. He added that overall trends show declining enrollments and he fears that if the district spends any money restoring it, by the time it's done, the district won't need the space and

he want money spend on existing facilities.

Caruso said he would need more specific information but said he heard that it could cost almost \$80,000 just to renovate the exterior. He said he thinks the district should spend that money on upkeep of its current buildings.

Changing to competency-based grading was something that happened under Embree's watch as board chairman, and he says he will continue to support it. He noted many colleges and universities are moving in this direction.

Caruso said the grading system should be what is best for Shaker students. He is neither for nor against it, but thinks that other area schools should be polled and that there should be adequate input from



Sean Embree



William Caruso

teachers and administrators.

As to the culture survey, he said he understands that a survey has been done but said the answers, to the best of his knowledge, have not been released. He also said that, until he sees those results, he wouldn't want to comment further other than he would like to see them released as soon as possible to the community.

Embree said he hopes the culture survey will be used to attract and keep the best possible teachers and administrator at Shaker. “As a taxpayer and someone who has children in the district, I want the best school district we can offer,” he said.

Caruso didn't answer the question about additions or deletions to the curriculum because he said he needs more information but Embree said that, as a board member, he constantly to “add value” to Shaker education but within budgetary restraints. He cited the recent STEM and engineering program being taught at the high school as an example.

Shaker Regional School District elections are on March 4. The polls are open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., after which the annual School District Meeting will take place.