

LOCALNEWS

Seven-period day still on negotiation radar

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

Officials say progress has been made in negotiating a labor contract this week by Falls School Board members and representatives of the teachers union Local 331.

“I wouldn’t say we’re close (to settling a contract) but progress was made,” said John Sandberg, teachers Local 331 president and FHS social studies teacher. “There was some good open and honest discussions.”

The district’s about 70 teachers are working under a 2011-2013 contract that expired June 30.

Monday’s meeting included continued discussions regarding the district’s pro-

posal to increase the number of class periods during a school day from six to seven periods, Sandberg said.

“The district clarified that (a seven-period day) is still part of our proposal and that it be included in any settlement,” Superintendent Nurdy Nelson told The Journal Tuesday.

Sandberg said there are pros and cons to the proposal including more electives for students, but an added workload with less preparation time for teachers. He said union leaders will have conversations with other districts that have made a similar transition.

“We want to go talk to some of these schools to find out if (increasing class periods) solves problems they’re

looking to fix,” Sandberg said. “We don’t want to leap into it and be in the same place we were before.”

Nelson, who is expected to leave the district when his contract expires June 30, 2014, has been adamant about offering a seven-period day to students.

“It offers more electives for the students,” he said. “It opens up the possibility of a broader curriculum with different offerings the district doesn’t presently carry... Basically, it boils down to opportunities for kids.”

He said some 12th-grade students are satisfying their graduation requirements early with a lack of electives to choose from their senior year. Having one more period is something

the board is pushing for; the teachers, Nelson said, want to see what is available to them before they agree to anything.

“It’s a concern for the teachers union on the total number of prep minutes with the possibility of added time to prepare another hour they have to teach,” he said.

Meanwhile, Sandberg told Journal staff both sides also discussed teachers’ salary and benefit packages, but wouldn’t give specific details.

“There is a request for a salary increase,” Nelson said. “That’s always on the table. Whether that will be (decided), I’m not sure.”

District and union leaders also addressed the loss of students – especially at

the elementary level.

“We aren’t losing so many kids at the high school, but in the elementary school, we’ve lost a lot,” Sandberg said.

October enrollment figures for all three of the district’s schools showed 67 fewer students than in May. Fifty one of those students are at the elementary level.

Sandberg said the groups are hoping to administer an exit survey to parents who have pulled their child out of the Falls district.

“Is it a Boise issue or is it something we need to fix?” he said referring to the 265 jobs lost by October at the local paper mill. “Our assumption is that it isn’t all Boise related.”

The challenge, he contin-

ued, will be getting parents to be honest.

“We need some honest answers,” he said. “We need to find out what is going on.”

Nelson said a survey would give the district insight to what areas are in need of improvement.

“If we need to make changes, we need to find out what areas we need to focus on,” he said.

Fewer students will result in less funding from the state and Sandberg said the reality is cuts will need to be made.

“It won’t just be staff, it’ll be all areas,” he said. “We’ve got some tough decisions coming up this year... At least both sides are looking at what’s best for the district and what’s best for the kids.”

Logging Camp themed fundraiser returns Dec. 6

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

It’s time again to dust off your plaids and suspenders for the Logging Camp Christmas, a fundraiser benefiting Koochiching Aging Options.

The Dec. 6 event will offer a casual evening of old-time entertainment, good food and good cheer, according to Douglas Skrief, executive director of Koochiching Aging Options.

“The sold-out success of the last two years has inspired us to bring back this fun evening,” said Skrief.

“The dinner not only supports the organization and senior services, but also is

a fun, casual way to begin the holiday season — with lots of laughs,” noted board member Julie Lepisto of Big Falls.

Honorary co-chair of the event is Agnes Henrickson, an Indus native with deep ties to the pioneer and logging traditions of the county.

“Agnes baked many a pie for lumberjacks at Camp 2 of the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company and took many orders for logging equipment parts at the family’s John Deere dealership,” Skrief said.

The stage of Backus Auditorium will be turned into a logging camp by the partners of No Place Like Home

Again. Area chef Cynthia Warren and her sisters will be preparing the traditional meal. A large number of local businesses and individuals have donated items for auction.

“A number of surprise guests are scheduled to attend,” Skrief said, referring to what he called humorous skits that are expected to occur throughout the evening. Sloughgrass, the Indus-based bluegrass group, and music director Jessie Laurion will provide music during the evening.

Funds generated by the event will go towards supporting the activities of Koochiching Aging Options,

a four-year-old nonprofit dedicated to helping all of Koochiching County’s older residents and their families. Programs of Koochiching Aging Options include the Koochiching Caregiver Consultant Program, Senior Companion Program, Senior Wheels and Groceries to You!

Limited tickets need to be purchased in advance. They are available at City Drug in the Falls and the Koochiching Aging Options office.

Doors will open at 5:30 p.m. with dinner to follow at 6:30. For more about the event and KAO, visit the website KoochichingAgingOptions.org or call 283-7084.


**BIO BOX**

Agnes Henrickson, the honorary chair of this year’s Logging Camp Christmas event, was born on the banks of the Rainy River where her family had settled at the turn of the last century. Her family maintained a large farm near Indus. She graduated in 1940 from Indus High School, when the school had only three teachers.

Henrickson pursued adventure in California during World War II, settling in San Diego where she helped the war effort by becoming a riveter on B-24 aircraft. She can still recall where the rivets were placed to produce one plane on every shift.

Henrickson met her future husband, Elmer Henrickson, at a dance in Indus before heading west. After she accepted his proposal of marriage, the two moved back to Koochiching County. Elmer took work with the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company, working as a contract logger, first on the Holsum Spur and then at Camp 2 near Big Falls. Agnes cooked for a bunk house of lumberjacks while raising her growing family. The couple would have six children.

The couple may be best remembered as distributors of John Deere equipment to local loggers. Agnes ordered and sold parts before eventually returning to school and then working as a social worker at Koochiching County Family Services. Elmer died in 2005. Agnes now lives on the banks of Rainy River at her daughter Kathi’s home in Ranier.



**Agnes Henrickson**

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