

# Board

Continued from Page 1A

tel Corp., and he now farms blueberries and works part-time as a farm safety adviser and project manager in Hillsboro.

His educational background includes engineering classes at Chemeketa Community College and George Fox University.

He's happy with the district's graduation rates, its "high expectation of kids" and its teacher-to-student ratio. On the other hand, he's extremely concerned that Silver Falls' standards-based grading system is unclear and ineffective, and he's unhappy with unfunded mandates being handed down by the Oregon Department of Education.

Among them, he said he's worried the mandated Next Generation Science Standards could water down science education.

He's said he's personally invested in improving safety at the district's campuses, which requires fencing, locks, security cameras and other changes.

He's a regular advocate of local control of community schools. Rather than centralized budgeting, he appreciates the district's practice of letting each principal set his or her school's budget.

At the state level, Lierman said revenues are up, and the legislature has the money to fund public education adequately if it chooses to. Gov. Kate Brown's proposed budget would cut \$1.7 from the Silver Falls School District, an outcome that he said can be avoided if the legislature allocates money to schools instead of other programs.

**Jennifer Traeger, 42**, is a longtime public school teacher with deep connections to Silverton's Montessori community. She teaches at Lincoln Elementary School in Woodburn, where she coordinates the 800-student campus' programs for students who are talented and gifted, and also for those who are learning English as a second language.

In 2008, Traeger started and operated Bluebird Montessori Preschool to serve her daughter and other students; she closed the school in 2015. She also helped establish Community Roots Charter School, a public charter school in the Silver Falls district that instructs its students using the Montessori method.

"School choice is a real strength of this district," she said. "I'm a personal fan of the K-8 system also. It presents challenges, being spread out in so many locations like that, but I think each school brings something unique to the district."

Traeger said she's not a politician but wanted to run for the school board because she can bring a teacher's perspective to its decision-making. After working with students for 20 years, she said she knows how day-to-day operations go in public schools. She also has experience with what she calls "special populations," such as students who are homeless, gifted or non-native English speakers.

While she's never held public office, she does have experience budgeting - for her preschool business and at a local school. Personally, she also holds bachelor's and master's degrees in education, from Portland State University and Willamette University, respectively.

"I want to be a voice for every child, and I think I'm in a good position to do that," she said. "People ask me for advice about education, and they've trusted me with their children. Now I'm asking them to trust me in setting

policy."

**Jim Newkirk** also filed to run against Lierman and Traeger but didn't respond to calls from the Silverton Appeal.

## Zone 5: Central/Southern

**Aaron Koch, 39**, is currently vice chairman of the board. He's been on the job less than two years and said he's just "hitting my stride" when it comes to school district business. After running and securing a vacated position two years ago, he's earned a level of expertise in budgeting and setting policy that he wants to continue offering to voters.

"I want to bring continuity to the board," he said. "I hope that people see that I've stepped up and provided leadership to the board. I'd like to do that for at least another four years."

Koch is former NFL football player - he played three years for the Jacksonville Jaguars - who is now a regional sales manager for a division of Johnson & Johnson that specializes in orthopedic equipment. He's the married father of three children who attend Silverton High and Evergreen School.

"We have so much good going for us in this school district," Koch said. "When you put things in perspective, you see we have such great teachers and staff. We can always do better, but we really have something special here."

Koch is also tracking legislative activity regarding public schools. He advocates the state legislature adopt a budget between \$8.40 and \$9 billion to maintain or increase public school offerings, rather than the \$8.02 billion currently being proposed by the governor.

He said voters made it clear they want to fund education with last November's passage of Measure 98, created to fund vocational training and dropout prevention.

He is encouraging voters to contact their legislators and then getting ready to make decisions for the upcoming school year based on budget projections.

"My passion is to stand for what's right - and stand for what's right for kids," he said. "The kids need to be our No. 1 motivation."

Koch's academic training consists of a psychology degree from Oregon State University, where he also played football.

**Shelly Nealon, 45**, offers voters five years of experience as a classroom teacher and a lifetime of volunteerism in schools and children's programs. She and her husband, a surgeon, own Nealon Medical Properties, a private practice in town.

The couple has lived in Silverton since 2001, except for a two-year period when they moved back to Nebraska to be with family from 2011-13. Two of their children attend Abiqua Academy in South Salem. Their son is a junior at Silverton High School.

Nealon has already started visiting Silver Falls schools; a personal, hands-on approach is something she promises to keep up if she's elected to the board. The district's practice of inviting principals to report to the board every few months isn't enough, she said.

"I want to be present in these schools," she said. "I want to be able to go to the school, talk to the principals and the teachers ... just to be an engaged listener."

Nealon has a bachelor's degree in education from Creighton Jesuit University in Omaha, Nebraska, and was an elementary

school teacher and technology coordinator in Kansas City, Kansas.

Since coming to Silverton, she said she's been "extremely fortunate" to be able to work a minimum number of hours for her family business. Rather than opting to work full-time, she's spent the past years volunteering at her children's school and in the community.

Locally she's served as treasurer, board member and concessions coordinator for Silverton Junior Baseball, as well as helping the YMCA develop a program for K-2 children to play soccer at Eugene Field. She also served on the committee that oversaw the remodeling of the Silverton Pool.

Her time and availability are commodities that she's offering to Silverton voters, pledging to visit local schools and outside districts to gather ideas for doing business here.

Her concerns about Silverton schools range from the upcoming budget shortfall to classroom populations. (Full classes are the reason she didn't put her kids in school here, she said.) She also is concerned about the turnover among school administrators. (Both the high school and middle school principals are resigning this year.)

"I will be a different kind of board member," she said. "I offer my time, my drive and my research skills."

## Zone 2: Northeast District

**Ervin Stadel, 54**, has served on the school board for eight years. He's a longtime Silverton resident; his ancestors

came to the area in 1902, and he's lived here his whole life, except for a two-year stint working in North Dakota during the Great Recession.

One of eight children, he started his first business at age 19, one year after graduating from Silverton High School. While attending classes in

heavy equipment operation, he started a Grade A dairy on his family's farm. He sold the dairy after four years and bought 40 acres of his own while still in his early 20s.

"Those were some exhausting years," he said. "On my way to class in the Portland area, I'd have to hang my head out of the window to stay awake."

In 1995, he started his own excavating business, Stadel Underground, which he operated until last year, when he sold to K&E Excavating. He now works as a superintendent.

His current project is the new highway interchange in Newberg, which is scheduled for completion this fall.

Stadel said a lifetime in the construction business prepared him to help the board oversee its own construction projects. There have been many in the recent past: the new high school, the old high school's transition to a middle school, and seismic improvements to K-8 schools.

"My daily tasks have involved money and personnel, hiring and firing, and evaluating contracts," he said. "In the next four years, we're going to be making big decisions about our facilities. I'll help make sure we get the best deals."

Stadel's children came up through Silverton schools, and they're all young adults now. But he still wants to serve on the board.

Along with being able to discern the details in contracts, he said he wants to "empower staff, not micro-manage them," because he's convinced teachers are often the biggest influence in kids' lives.

"You see so many kids today who don't have stable homes," he said. "School might be the only

structure these kids will experience."

**Michele Stone-Finicle, 41**, is the development director for NWV Habitat for Humanity with past experience in education. She and her

husband, a high school science teacher in Stayton, moved to Silverton from Idaho four years ago. They have a first-grader in Silverton schools.

Stone-Finicle has the distinction of being the first college graduate in her family. She grew up "extremely poor" in Wimer, where her parents ran a gas station. Later she moved to the Willamette Valley, where she graduated from high school. She attended Chemeketa and Portland State, earning a bachelor's degree in English and a teaching certificate.

She first put her degree to work in Tillamook, where she taught expelled and suspended students for two years before moving on to teaching English at the high school.

She and her husband left Oregon for Idaho to take on the task of helping expand Sandpoint Charter School - an alternative Science Technology Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) school - into a high school.

The couple returned to Oregon to be closer to family after the birth of their daughter. Now, in her job for Habitat, she writes grants, finds funding and connects local businesses to projects related to affordable housing.

Stone-Finicle wants to join the school board to start making the kinds of business connections for the district that she's accustomed to making for Habitat.

State-level funding problems aren't going away anytime soon, she said, so she'd like to partner with local businesses to round out hands-on education offerings.

She said Silver Falls could be more aggressive in its pursuit of grants, from the Meyer Memorial Trust and others, to fund technology training, PE, music and other things.

Silver Falls is doing a lot of things right, she said: "I love the community and the teachers. They work hard, and they do a lot in the classroom."

But she's anxious for the district to make a clearer plan for meeting the mandates now being handed down by the state. Next Generation science standards are due to be adopted now, wants Silver Falls to spell out a plan to make that happen.

For example, she said brand-new curriculum isn't necessary; teachers can simply get trained or be given supplementary curriculum that lays out experiments that go along with existing curriculum.

"I would like to be elected because I think we need someone who's been in the classroom making decisions for our kids," she said.



Koch



Stone-Finicle



Stadel



Traeger



Nealon

## A new player

The school board election is non-partisan, but the race has taken a new turn with involvement from a brand-new political action committee.

Silverton Opportunity - created by women, for women - is actively supporting Traeger, Nealon and Stone-Finicle.

Founder of Silverton Opportunity, Naseem Rakha, said she and the two other women who registered the PAC with the state are "upping the game a little" because they want to see more women in leadership positions in the community. Their financial involvement is beginning in this race for school board, where all seven members currently are men, but their intent is to fund and support female candidates for other community roles in the future.

"We just thought it was a very good opportunity to bring some balance onto a board that obviously is dealing with a lot of issues of diversity in our schools," Rakha said. "Our formation also came out of a national election that was incredibly sobering for women ... we are looking for ways for women to have a voice in politics."

The three incumbents expressed general frustration over the organized political committee but didn't speak directly about Silverton Opportunity. Lierman, who's been on the board for 20 years, did say he's never before seen local PAC involvement in a Silverton school board election. All three expected to spend less than \$750 each, according to their campaign filings.

Politics notwithstanding, the candidates all said they're running separate campaigns, and they hope voters will make decisions based on each person's merits.

**"I love the community and the teachers. They work hard, and they do a lot in the classroom."**

**MICHELE STONE-FINICLE**  
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