

Shannon saw difficulties from the start

by KAYE BARTON BAKKE
Post Correspondent

The Welches School building project is the first public issue in which Gene Shannon has ever become involved, and he says categorically it will be the last.

Shannon is a 15-year resident of Zigzag, who has been building homes in the Hoodland area for 12 years. It was perhaps his livelihood which drew him into the local controversy over the alleged flaws in the new school building.

Shannon was a member of the original citizen building committee which studied the school district's needs in 1978. Committee members spent their spare time for approximately eight weeks studying the overcrowding at Welches School and district growth projections to formulate a proposal for the district's building program.

The committee concluded that a \$900,000 building would accommodate the district's need for a five-year period. The board later expanded the proposal to a \$1.4 million project.

Because of his involvement in the early planning stages, Shannon kept a close eye on the project as the building began to go up last summer.

Shannon said many other persons observed problems with the building, including unevenness of concrete floor slabs.

"The board received other letters before mine, pointing out serious problems," he said.

But when no action resulted, Shannon said, "I decided I was going to start raising Cain."

Most observers assumed that corrections of the flaws would be made as construction proceeded, Shannon said. But he feared the problems were so severe that future maintenance problems would result.

He has said repeatedly during public meetings that he was unwilling to settle for cosmetic repair of the flaws. A theme of his public presentations has been his insistence on craftsmanship, on "quality workmanship" in the school building.

Shannon believes that such workmanship was lacking on the project, and is particularly distressed by it because of the high wages the laborers were being paid.

"They were paid good money," he said. "I was paying my laborers \$7.50 an hour, but they could go work on the school project for \$17.00 an hour."

The builder said he considers architect Richard Gessford "an experienced man—he's good at what he does. There were not many problems on the blueprint; he did a good job."

But undeniable problems existed, Shannon said, in the area of job supervision. "I believe Gessford did tell the board he would oversee the subcontractors," Shannon said.

"He worded it very carefully, but it appears to me he wanted the board to be its own general contractor without its knowledge."

"But however he worded it, in real fact I think he was the overseer," Shannon continued.



Mary Kuchs



George Eipp



Art Albright



Patsy Edwards



Hank Dalpez

But most back school board

Few residents understand Welches School problems

An informal "person-on-the-street" poll taken in Hoodland last week indicates that few citizens within the Welches School District clearly understand the building problems confronting the school board, that few attend the board meetings, but that most are satisfied with the way the board is handling the situation.

The Post approached shoppers at the Hoodland Plaza shopping center for approximately one hour Jan. 19. About 20 persons were willing to volunteer their opinions on the problems that have developed with the Welches School construction project.

(The \$1.4 million building project was halted for approximately six weeks starting Nov. 17 while the board examined citizen charges that the new building was inferior. An independent engineer was hired to examine the structure for defects.

His report was filed with the board last Friday.)

The board's independent engineer, James T. Merrifield, got a vote of confidence from Kathy Hanlin during the poll. Hanlin said she has attended school board meetings, "and it sounds like Merrifield knows what he's talking about."

Hanlin predicted that problems may arise over the question of who should pay for the corrections to the building, such as leveling the concrete floors.

"When it comes to the money problem, there may be a hassle," she said. "But if we make the architect and the contractor work it out, the board should come out okay."

The board's architect is Richard Gessford of Portland. Contractor for the building is Glynbrook Construction of Salem.

Hanlin's attendance at board

meetings places her in the minority among those polled. Most voiced opinions like that of Hank Dalpez of Zigzag.

"I think it's a mess," he said, "but I don't follow it. All I know is what I read in the mountain paper. I can't make head or tails of it. But I think we've got a good board and they'll work it out."

Mary Kuchs of Wemme said she does not believe the school building is "a serious problem." Kuchs has never been to a board meeting because, she said, she does not have children attending the school.

"But I think the board is aware of the problems and will solve them," she said.

Kuchs' primary concern on the issue was that the "board shouldn't be spending taxpayers' dollars to fix things that were caused by somebody else."

Art Albright of Brightwood was

one of several citizens who attributed the problem to inadequate supervision of the construction project.

"Somebody's not handling it well," he said. "Somebody should've been keeping an eye on the contractor. There's usually an inspector around on a job to make sure things go smoothly."

"I work in construction," Albright said, "and things tend to happen when there's no supervision."

Albright said he had not attended board meetings and was informed by what he read in newspapers about the situation.

Patsy Edwards, a teacher's aide at Welches School, said she had attended board meetings and believed that "right now, the board is on the right track. They need to get the project going quicker."

Other citizen comments included:

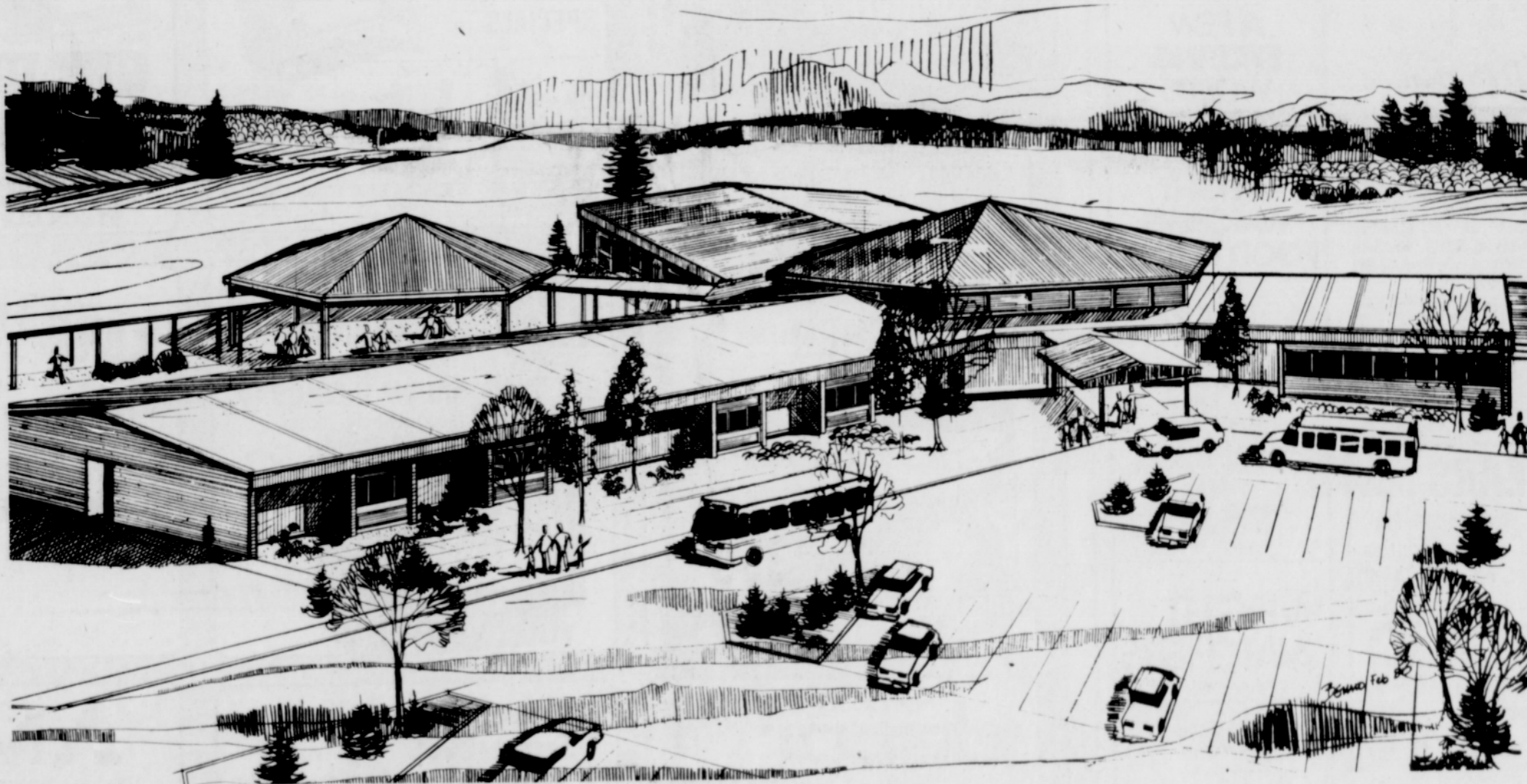
"It's apparent there was very poor supervision; that's where it all starts — poor supervision." — Grover Beckwith, a builder at Rippling River project.

"I feel the board is capable. I don't know who's stirring up trouble. I'm sorry they have to do that." — Emma Wheeler of Welches.

"What bothers the taxpayers is where's the money coming from to make it right." — George Eipp of Brightwood.

"I don't think they needed a new school in the first place. I worked at Firwood School (in the Sandy Elementary District), and when they needed a new school, they needed it." — Mary Phelps.

"I've never been to a board meeting. I would hesitate to offer my opinion without having the facts." — Mrs. Richard Davis of Welches.



Analysis: Welches School a series of errors

by KAYE BARTON BAKKE
Post Correspondent

The new school building under construction from Welches Elementary School District has been, almost from the first, a near-tragedy of errors.

Considered singly, most of the mistakes have been inconsequential. It is their composite effect which has aroused citizens to heated participation in school board meetings and given headaches to district administrators, board members, architects and contractors.

Construction on the building, a three-winged free-standing addition to the existing facility, began in June, 1980. The district planned to occupy the building when classes opened for the current school year.

In January, 1979, the board retained the Portland architectural firm of Richard L. Gessford and Associates to design the new structure. Gessford's design carried a cost estimate of \$1.4 million.

District voters in September, 1979, approved a \$1.8 million bond issue to build the school. The

amount of the levy was based on the construction estimates, with architectural and legal fees and a contingency reserve tacked on.

SUPERVISION ASKED
Last summer, within two months of initial site excavation, board members were aware they had problems. In a memo dated Aug. 14, 1980, the school board complained to Gessford about "the apparent lack of supervision (of the building project) from your office."

The memo concluded, "It is hoped by the board that your offices could provide regular on-site supervision."

Many of the Welches constituents may have been unaware of the construction problems until November, when Zigzag homebuilder Gene Shannon approached the board and asked them to investigate what he saw as construction deficiencies. Shannon presented a written memo to the board during a special meeting Nov. 17.

Shannon told the board that floors in portions of the new building were settling, and charged that the site was not properly compacted as specified

in building plans.

In addition to the settling of the floors, the uneven surface was of concern to Shannon, and he told the board that they did not meet the architect's specifications of one-eighth inch variance within 10 feet of floor surface.

His memo also called attention to exterior walls made of gypsum material which were applied outside the foundation and thus exposed to water. Shannon said the gypsum would act like a wick and draw water up inside the wall.

PROBLEMS COMPLICATED

Other concerns outlined in the Nov. 17 memo were the installation of vents in the otherwise-soundproofed music room, which eliminated the soundproofing effect; what Shannon believed was the improper alignment of two of the three wings in the building; and the inadequate fire safety features of the classrooms, including exit doors which opened into the classroom rather than outward.

The board's problems were complicated by a Nov. 21 fire in Wing C of the new building which

caused \$270,000 in structural damage and which pointed out further deviations from the building specifications.

It was at the Nov. 17 meeting that the board voted to stop construction while the architect investigated the alleged deficiencies. Gessford was given a week to report back to the board with proposed solutions.

Also during the Nov. 17 meeting, the board voted that when construction resumed a "clerk of the works", or construction supervisor, should be on the job. One of the most frequent complaints made by citizens who attended the meeting centered on the lack of day-to-day supervision and coordination of the various contractors.

In the ensuing weeks, the matter of job supervision has emerged as a major point of confusion and controversy.

Board members believed they had retained Gessford in that capacity when they agreed to pay him, in addition to his \$165,000 architectural fee, an additional 25 percent of whatever remained of the project's contingency fund when the building was com-

pleted.

Gessford contends that the additional percentage was to cover his administration of change orders, to free the board from the necessity of calling special meetings whenever the inevitable deviations from specifications and contracts became necessary on the job site.

MEANING DEBATED

The misunderstanding resulted from a contract amendment which the board signed with Gessford in October, 1979 — after the levy was approved by voters but before bids on the project had been solicited.

During the Oct. 11, 1979 board meeting, Gessford proposed to the board that they officially act on some earlier, informal proposals of such an arrangement. Board members had said to Gessford earlier, in his words, "We don't want any extra bills, we don't want a bunch of change orders. We want you to cover the whole Mary Ann."

What "the whole Mary Ann" was supposed to encompass has repeatedly come up for question. Board members understood that it involved supervision of the

project. Gessford said last November that it meant contract administration, not project administration, a distinction he considered significant.

The contract amendment itself, dated Oct. 10, 1979, stated that the 25 percent would be paid "to the architect as a bonus for services and project control."

That the board understood "project control" to mean supervision is evident from the complaint in their memo of last August, which began, "The Welches Board has become concerned about the apparent lack of supervision from your office in its role of 'Clerk of the Works'."

When the problems began to surface in the fall of 1980, a month-long series of public meetings was held in November. During one of the meetings, Gessford was asked, "would we be here today with these problems and deficiencies" if there had been day-to-day supervision on the job?

When Gessford was asked if he had not previously agreed to act as clerk of the works or general

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