

# Leadership question still open at Welches

by MICHAEL P. JONES  
Post Correspondent

The confusion over who was the general contractor during the construction of the three-wing addition to Welches Grade School made it the most under-supervised project of its kind, according to a Clackamas County building inspector.

Depending upon who one asks, the general contractor of the \$1.4 million Welches project could be one of three entities—the

Portland architectural firm, Richard L. Gessford & Associates of Portland, Glynbrook Construction Company of Salem, and even the Welches School board.

Confusion developed prior to the construction of the new facility when the school board and its architect, Richard L. Gessford, signed an amendment to the original \$165,000 contract.

This amendment, which was signed on Oct. 11, 1979, allowed his firm to ad-

minister a \$256,963 contingency fund, which was to be used for change-orders, soil and concrete testing, surveying, and other unexpected costs. If Gessford could reduce contingency costs during the course of construction, the money left in the fund would be split, with the firm receiving 25 percent and the district 75 percent.

Confusion developed over the actual role of the firm. School board members believed when Gessford said he'd cover "the whole merryanne," he would be acting as the project's general contractor.

Gessford contends he made no such agreement with the district. He said he was merely going to administer the construction contracts and change-orders.

The school board discussed the role of the general contractor at some length at an Oct. 11 meeting in

1979. A tape recording of the meeting came to an end as the topic was being discussed. The next taped portion of the meeting begins with the signing of the contract's addendum.

Why the second recording does not continue with the discussion of Gessford's responsibilities as general contractor remains a mystery. Former Welches Grade School Vice Principal Earl P. Armbruster, who was operating the tape recorder, could not remember what happened to prevent the rest of the discussion from being taped.

"Maybe Welches has its own 18 and a half minute gap," Armbruster said.

After the addendum was signed the school board had its attorney, Lowell Njust, examine it from a legal standpoint. He reportedly found the 75-25 percent agreement satisfactory.

It wasn't until a year

later, after an uproar from citizens concerning faulty construction and safety, that the school board learned the architect wasn't the general contractor. Actually, no one was.

**ARCHITECT BLAMED**  
Emil T. Fahrenkrug, superintendent for Glynbrook Construction of Salem, blamed Gessford and his partner, Leon Hamblin, for the problems in a 1981 interview. Coordination of the various contractors and sub-contractors was supposed to be the responsibility of the general contractor, which was, according to Fahrenkrug, the architects.

When the construction problems finally surfaced, Fahrenkrug said Gessford successfully got the school board "turned around and buffaloed," making them believe he was not the general contractor.

"From the moment the

school district and Gessford's firm agreed to the 25 percent addendum, the architect accepted the responsibility of the general contractor," said Fahrenkrug.

"That school board up there got screwed," said Fahrenkrug. "They got taken in by that guy and I think the school board's attorney up there was sleeping at the controls. He got suckered into it too."

The majority of the contracts, such as those for excavation, plumbing, electrical, floor covering, surveying and paving should all have been under his control, Fahrenkrug said.

"He was being paid to oversee the whole project," said Fahrenkrug. "I told (Welches School Superintendent Kenneth Blackburn) I thought the school was being ripped off, because they'd (the ar-

chitects) maybe came up once a week for a half hour and that's it."

Gary Yeaman, a Clackamas County building inspector who was assigned to the project, said in a 1981 interview the reason for the construction problems had to do with the confusion over just who was the actual general contractor.

"He (the general contractor) is the commander," said Yeaman.

Yeaman said from the very beginning there was a problem with coordination between contractors and sub-contractors. He said the lack of supervision makes it one of the worst projects he's ever witnessed in Clackamas County.

## Sarah Whisner born July 12

Michael and Rachel Whisner of Rhododendron recently announced the birth of their first child, Sarah Beth.

She was born July 12 at the Portland Adventist Medical Center. She weighed 7 pounds, 8 and a half ounces and was 19 and fifth-eighths inches long.

Grandparents are Larry and Janice Craig of Sandy, Barbara Wing of Baldwin Park, Calif., and Willard Whisner of Hesperia, Calif.

Great-grandparents are Gaylen and Margaret Craig of Milwaukie, Paul and Dorothy Beck of Sandy and Willard and Goldie Whisner of Hesperia.

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