

# Dispute causes teacher to examine career

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Post Correspondent

After a 13-year career at Welches Grade School the recent contract dispute is forcing Jeanine Boldt to make a decision concerning her future as a teacher.

Boldt, who admits she's generally not much of a talker, reflected back on her 13 years with the district, during which time she has taught fifth grade, as well as art, drama and English.

She spoke fondly of how the school has grown as the quality of curriculum improved, about the dedication and professionalism of the staff, as well as the increasing support of the community in the educational process.

There were times of tension, she remembers, like ten years ago when the teachers underwent their first major contract dispute with the district. After months of negotiations, communication between the superintendent, the school board and the teachers broke down.

One former board member recommended firing all the teachers and starting from scratch, recalled Boldt. Another wanted each to be paid on a merit system, even though he realized it would have been illegal.

Finally, shortly after the desk of the chief negotiator for the teachers had been ransacked and papers stolen, a settlement was reached. It was only by chance, said Boldt, that things settled down and a contract was agreed upon.

Boldt also remembers the lighthearted times, like when some people in the community thought the school was being taken over by communists, something that can only happen in a unique and special area like the mountain.

Boldt's 13 years in the district also encompass some bad memories. Most of these are from the past year, she explained. She is on the Welches Education Association's negotiating team, which is attempting to get a two-year contract signed.

To date negotiations are still in progress, and considering the uncertainty of the situation, Boldt is seriously thinking about making a career change.

Quitting is a thought she and most who know her would never believe could cross her mind. But as Boldt explained, watching

the negotiations with the school board from a front row seat as a participant in the proceedings has given her "an eyeful and an earful." The result is decision time.

"The problems with contracts that are going on now are a result of five years ago," said Boldt.



Jeanine Boldt

"The real issues were never dealt with back then, so we are faced with dealing with them today."

Admitting that the teachers may have been a little naive in dealing with the school board in regard to contracts, Boldt said today's bargaining sessions, in spite of the problems, are far more professional than in the past. Up until ten years ago, the teachers and board members would have an informal meeting and discuss a contract. It usually took about a half an hour to reach an agreement.

Later, the law changed and the negotiations became more complex, said Boldt. This is about the time when the teachers lost ground in respect to salary increases, and began agreeing to contracts that were different when they were put in writing, she said: What the teachers believed they were getting did not materialize, she said.

"A lot of the problems were our own," said Boldt. "We just went along. We didn't want to rock the boat."

Boldt said the school board today has placed her and the other teachers in a position where their time is spent in negotiations rather than concentrating on teaching and investing a good portion of their free time in preparation, which is an unofficial requirement of the job.

With the contract

negotiations dragging on, Boldt said the greatest disservice is being done to the students.

"We should not be in this position, where we are having to spend as much time as we have in salary negotiations," said Boldt. "Instead we should be talking curriculum, goals and evaluations."

"We should also be exploring innovative ways of educating students and getting new programs appropriated for our students. But that doesn't mean spending a lot of money."

Sept. 7, the first day of school, marked the teachers' 69th day without a contract. The old con-

tract expired on June 30, and Boldt said the recent course of events, related to the negotiations, have taken their toll on she and other teachers. Morale has been affected and teachers are being forced into a situation where they can only afford to give between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. This, she said, is unrealistic since most teachers were contributing a lot more time than just eight hours.

"It's not so much what the job demands, it's what you (as a teacher) demand of yourself," explained Boldt. "I guess a teacher could work 8 to 4, but I don't know that many who do."

Now, with so much time and effort having been invested in negotiating with the school board and still no contract signed, Boldt said it is time for she and every other teacher to make a decision about their careers.

All the effort it has taken to negotiate with the school board has created so many distractions that the time and effort required to do the job, which is beyond the eight-hour workday, is beginning to turn an ideal job into just the opposite, Boldt said.

She said she first started to realize this when she returned to school for teacher in-service. She said she walked into her room

and started to feel sick. There was no contract signed for the coming year and the offers the school board had brought to the bargaining table "were insulting."

"They (the school board) do not encourage quality teachers to stay at Welches," said Boldt. "They would just as well hire someone at a lower salary than at a higher salary, no matter how qualified they are."

"Over the past few years (because of the low salaries) they have lost a lot of good teachers, who have said, 'Heck, I'm not putting up with this any more.'"

Boldt said the 6 percent increase the teachers were

originally seeking was not asking too much of the school board for the quality of education they are providing.

Boldt said the factfinder's recommendation, which was a compromise package that included a 4.8 percent salary increase, a two-year contract and increments, was much lower than what the teachers were originally willing to accept. She said they did so because the recommendation was from an independent third party. However, she said she can't understand why the school board won't agree to even this lesser amount.

"We feel we are worth the increase, but apparently the people who are running the district, the school board, do not feel we are worth very much," said Boldt.

No time limit has been made concerning Boldt's decision about whether to continue teaching. She said she'll make the decision at the appropriate time. Currently her house is up for sale and she is checking in to returning to school, and moving to Portland, as a couple of options.

"Teaching is my life," said Boldt. "To me there is nothing more exciting than to see someone learn and do something they thought they couldn't do."



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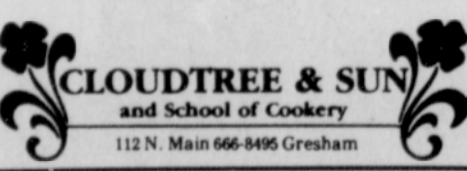
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