



ELECTION 2017



School board challengers want to support a good thing

The Chieftain reviews candidates in Enterprise, Joseph and Troy

By Kathleen Ellyn  
Wallowa County Chieftain

The May 2015 election of school board candidates in Oregon saw the lowest number of school board applicants in a decade, but Wallowa County has eight candidates vying for four open positions in the county this year.

Ballots have been mailed to registered voters and are due back to the county clerk's office Tuesday, May 16.



ENTERPRISE

There are two positions open in Enterprise School District, those of Kelli Christman and Nils Christoffersen.

**Heather Melville and Autumn Wilburn** are vying for Christman's position.

Melville is an at-home mom who does forestry on the side and she and husband, Kurt, run Cornerstone Farms. Melville has been a Wallowa County resident for 17 years and has four children in school.

"I have a pretty good handle on what is going on," she said. "This next year, I'll have a child in each age division. I've tried to keep abreast of school board happenings."

She is encouraged by Supt. Erica Pinkerton and her abilities as principal for the elementary school.

"She's really been an encouragement to the teachers, which has sparked their creativity and excellence

in teaching," Melville said. "We have really good leadership down there. Our current school board has been doing a fabulous job."

Her concerns are that the values of Wallowa County people are honored. "A lot comes down from the state," she said. "If it comes down as a mandate, you have to jump through those hoops, but I'm hoping to be a voice for parents who are raising kids."

Melville is up against Autumn Wilburn, another self-described "mostly been a stay at home" mom with two young children who also works for Building Healthy Families as a special projects coordinator.

Although new to the county, Wilburn grew up in a tiny town in central Idaho not unlike Enterprise, graduating in a class of 23 students.

"I get small towns and small districts," Wilburn said. She also "gets" how the legislature and department of education work, having worked at the Oregon capital for both the state legislature and the state Department of Education, working on policies and budgets from pre-K through higher education.

"Since I became a mom, I've always known I'd run for school board as soon as my children became school age," she said. "Last year I sat down with Nils Christoffersen and talked to him about the Enterprise School Board and what it meant to serve and the pros and cons. I've been attending meetings since January so that if I'm lucky enough to be elected, I can hit the ground running."

She hopes her unique perspective will be a valuable addition to the board, but as a new member she would listen and learn first, she said.

"I'd want to take stock of the current situation. I do have budget experience. I'd like to apply some best practices from some other school districts," she said. "We're one of 197 school districts, and even though we're out here in the middle of nowhere, it doesn't mean that we need to feel isolated and alone. We can learn from our peers and I'd like to use my contacts to help us do that."

**Patrick Patterson and Mandy Decker** are both in the running for Nils Christoffersen's position.

Decker is the director of the Wallowa County Juvenile Department and has lived in the county since 1999. She has twin seventh-graders in Enterprise Schools.

"I care about our kids and I care about our community," she said. "I feel like I want to see a healthy school, and I really like our school, so I want to be part of it. We have really good teachers that care about kids. I think we have lots of good social activities for our kids like FFA and FCCLA and all of our sports."

Her intent is to support the administration while being a voice for teachers, parents, kids and community.

Patrick Patterson is challenging Decker. Patterson, wife Amy and three kids (ages 5, 8 and 11) have been in the county for five years. Their two eldest children are in Enterprise Schools and the youngest is lined up to

start kindergarten next year. Amy volunteers regularly as a classroom assistant.

Patterson is president of Viridian Management in Enterprise where he is responsible for the overall operation of approximately 100 apartment complexes in three states.

Patterson said with three kids soon to be in district schools, he feels "pretty invested in the school."

He thinks that the school is doing a good job and gave Pinkerton high marks for the changes she's made.

"Her monthly award programs are having a very positive impact on kids," Patterson said.

Pinkerton has also tightened down some of the policies, he said, adding screening and background checks to volunteering as an example.

The teachers are "great," he said. "They're part of the community – they're invested in everything that goes on in the county."

He thinks that his background would make him a good addition to the board.

"The State of Oregon is projecting a fairly substantial shortfall — it's likely that there will be a lot more pressure put on schools, and I feel like my financial and management background will be helpful," he said.



JOSEPH

Joseph Charter School has two women, **Kirsten Rohla**

and **Rachel Sykora** as candidates for Chris Bailey's position. Bailey is not seeking another term.

Rohla is a teacher who has taught high school English in South Dakota and Alabama. Although she and her husband are new to the county, she's substitute-taught in "nearly every classroom in Joseph Charter," and has been able to talk to all of the teachers and come to know the students.

"I think I'm in a really good position to see things from both the insider and outsider position," Rohla said. "I believe very strongly that people should give back to their communities. I have a lot of experience in education and I thought it would be something I knew about — a good way for me to give back to the community."

As a board member she would like to look at making the best of modern technology and expanding the library so that students have a wide variety of resources.

"I think technology should always be at the top of a to do list especially in today's day and age when technology is so pervasive. I think there are ways to improve technology without putting a huge burden on the district."

Sykora is president of the Joseph Education Board, has two high school-aged children and helps her parents manage Wallowa Lake Resort and Flying Arrow Resort. She is new to the county and came "because the schools are better."

"I was asked to run, and I said I would do it. I want to do whatever I can to help. The school has been great for

my family so anything I can do to give back."

She likes everything that has been going on in the district and considers the teachers "great" and the school equally "great."

"I like the one-on-one learning students get," she said. "I just want to help, however I can. I want to be a voice for the parents and kids."



TROY

Troy School District has multiple candidates for the open position created when Orvis Moore's chose not to run for another term. **Dustin Dehann** and **Connie Curry** are running.

Curry was a teacher's aid at the Troy School and also worked part-time at the Troy Library. Her interest in the education of children is long-term and she wants to keep helping them.

"I think our future is in our students and children, and I want to help them out and expand their education and make sure it's there for them," Curry said.

She believes the current board has been doing an excellent job and would like to keep that momentum.

"I would like to help out. I don't see anything that's wrong with (the school board). They're a good team and I think I could help as part of the team," she said.

Dustin Dehann could not be reached by press deadline.



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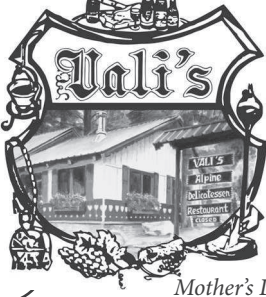
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*Minnie Modrich Fregulia*  
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