

## Barry project delayed

Lee Stubbs  
Editor

The Platte County R-3 School District's most recent building project — a \$13 million endeavor which will result in a new 50,000 square-foot elementary school at its Barry campus and a classroom wing addition to Siegrist Elementary School in Platte City — is barely under way. In fact, as the R-3 Board of Education heard at its meeting last week, the work at Barry has been delayed by more than one month. But, that did not keep the R-3 Board from discussing, albeit briefly, the district's next building project. Platte County Superintendent Dr. Mark Harpst told the board that it was not too early to discuss a possible bond issue for April 2008, targeted to fund the construction of a new elementary school in Platte City in 2008-09.

"While nothing has been decided, it is certainly prudent to begin talking about it," Harpst said. "By the time the current building project is complete, Rising Star will be full; Paxton School is already at capacity." Harpst said the new building would likely be built on 70 acres of property the school district owns between the Platte Valley Plaza commercial district in Platte City and Fourth Street/N Highway. He said the board would discuss the issue further at its July meeting.

Of more concern to the Board in the meantime is the delay in the Barry School project. Ground was scheduled to be broken at the campus - as it was with the Siegrist classroom addition - in mid-May. To date, no soil has been turned.

Harpst said the hold-up - which could potentially throw off the construction schedule and affect the completion date of August 2008 - is a result of delays in obtaining building plan permits from the City of Kansas City by the architectural firm handling the project, ACI/Frangkiser-Boland.

ACI spokesman Bill Mankin said his firm was tardy in obtaining building plan and land development permits partly because they did not have the building plan ready as soon as it should have and also because of what he said was a change in Kansas City procedure.

"It's my understanding that Kansas City now requires building plan permit approval before approving land development permits; that's not the way it used to be," he said. As a result, Mankin said, the mid-May starting date has long since passed.

"All things considered, with the benefit of hindsight, we should have had the building permit plans ready sooner," Mankin said.

He added that he is expecting permit approvals this week and that the time lost will be made up.

"It's my opinion that the building can still be constructed in the allotted time frame and the school district will have its new school when it wants it," he said.

The current R-3 project is the third in the past 12 years that ACI has worked on, including Siegrist Elementary, a past Barry School addition and the new Platte City Middle School.

School district tax levy set  
for 'significant' drop

The Board also reviewed a preliminary 2007-08 budget report.

Harpst said the total budget - which includes the \$13 million building project - will probably top \$40 million. He also said that a \$71 million increase in Platte County property assessment will likely lead to a significant drop in the district's operating tax levy.

"With the assessment increase and the requirements of the Hancock Amendment, we're talking about a decrease of between 17 and 23 cents," Harpst said.

Whenever property assessment increases, the Hancock Amendment requires school districts to "roll back" their tax levies to help offset the property tax increase. Currently, the R-3 operating levy stands at \$3.41 per \$100 of assessed valuation. Harpst said the rollback could drop the levy to the \$3.17-\$3.20 range. While theoretically the increase in tax revenue the district may see from the reassessment could offset the tax levy decrease, Harpst said the levy decrease would still represent a significant reduction in potential revenues for the district.

"That decrease essentially amounts to \$800,000 less revenue," he said.

In other business the Board:

- Approved a multi-function copier systems bid of Toshiba Business Solutions for \$384,179.04 over four years. It also approved numerous technology equipment purchase bids, including a \$173,987 bid from Dell

for 144 desktop computer work stations, 36 laptop computers and accompanying licenses, hardware and accessories.

- Accepted the resignations/retirements of Platte City Middle School secretary Mary Morrison, PCMS assistant secretary Jill Johnson, PCMS science teacher Linda Palmer and bus driver Lou Aziz.

## **R-3 superintendent 'definitely' done in '09**

Lee Stubbs  
Editor

During the past few years, Platte County R-3 Superintendent Dr. Mark Harpst has vaguely hinted at retirement. The longtime face of the school district recently removed any doubt about his intentions, however, when he put a time frame on when he will step aside.

"Here is something you can put in print," Harpst said. "My current contract expires in August 2009. At that time, I will definitely no longer be a full-time employee of the school district."

Harpst said that while he reserves the right to possibly retire earlier, he anticipated fulfilling the contract. "At this time, I look forward to working the next two years, but I might decide differently," he said. "All I can say with certainty is that I will not work past the end of my contract in 2009."

He said he has stated his retirement plans in a letter to the R-3 School Board. The Board held discussions on the issue at its recent retreat earlier this month.

Board President Bob Shaw said while Harpst's announcement was not a shock, it certainly brought the prospect of his departure more into focus.

"I think the Board recognizes that is fortunate to have had Dr. Harpst's services for as long as it has," Shaw said. "He has done a tremendous job during his time here and we look forward to him continuing to do so for the next two years."

Shaw said while it is "way too early," to begin the search for Harpst's replacement, he said the Board has begun preparations.

"We will do everything we can to make sure there is a smooth transition when he retires," he said.

Harpst, 51, was hired in 1996 and has surpassed both state (five years) and national (3.8 years) average tenures for superintendents. He said the reason for his planned retirement was a desire to move into another phase of his life.

"I've been in the education business for 30 years and I still enjoy coming to work every day," he said. "But, I can feel the time coming when I'll be ready to step back and maybe do something else."

Harpst said that he has no plans right now for life after he steps down from the R-3 helm, but acknowledges he may pursue politics — either at the county or state level.

"I will continue to give that some thought over the next few years, but there is nothing imminent as far as that goes," he said. "I've got plenty to keep me busy here at Platte County and that's what I'm focused on right now."

Much has been accomplished during Harpst's 11-year tenure, mostly in response to unprecedented district growth. School district student population has increased from 1,800 in 1996 to its current level of 2,800 and is expected to crest 3,000 in 2008.

New facilities include Siegrist Elementary, the Wilson Center for the Performing Arts and Platte City Middle School, and he has also presided over additions to Barry School and Paxton School, and renovations to Pirates Stadium and Pirates Field. A new elementary school project at Barry and a classroom addition to Siegrist are planned for the coming year.

Harpst, who was named the Missouri School Boards Association's Superintendent of the Year in 2003, said in addition to growth, technological advances have been the biggest change over the years.

"The district used to have a part-time band instructor handle its technological and computer needs," he said. "Now, we have five full-time people to manage it."

Harpst, who served as superintendent at West Platte before coming to Platte County, said he feels fortunate. "It was tough to leave my hometown and come to Platte County, but I was excited about the challenges here," he said. "I'm still excited about the challenges which lie ahead for us. I have been fortunate to have worked with great school board members in a very supportive community — I often tell people who are

interviewing with us and going through the hiring process that there is no better place to be than Platte County.”

## **Thefts wake up call for residents**

Jeanette Browning  
Assistant Editor

A rash of thefts from cars last week in a residential area south of Platte City has both residents and the Platte County Sheriff’s Department on its toes.

In at least five reported incidents, residents at the Lakes at Oakmont subdivision awoke June 21 to discover items missing from the cars parked in front of their homes.

Captain Frank Hunter said in all but one case the cars were left unlocked overnight.

“Locking vehicles is certainly the first thing you can do to prevent theft,” Hunter said. “You also shouldn’t leave things visible in the car — that invites people to break in for an easy snatch and grab.”

Lakes at Oakmont resident David Huffman said he realizes locking car doors is important.

“I usually do,” he said, “but I don’t give it that much thought. We’ve never had this problem before.”

Huffman has double the reason to be interested in nipping this sort of activity in the bud. He is a board member in the Lakes at Oakmont homeowner’s association, and his car was one of the ones targeted for thievery that night.

Hunter said the shifting demographics of the county are leading to a change in the types of crimes the Sheriff’s Department is seeing in the area.

“Platte County isn’t the rural county it was 10 years ago,” he said. “It’s becoming an urban county, and as it becomes an urban county you start getting these more urban-type crimes.”

One way to curb such crime is by establishing a neighborhood watch. Hunter said Sgt. David Thornburg works to help neighborhoods shape such watch programs.

“Neighbors are the best eyes and ears you can have,” Hunter said. “They know who should and shouldn’t be in the area.”

The Lakes at Oakmont homeowner’s association may make moves to build such a program after the thefts, Huffman said. He said residents are now watching out for continued criminal activity.

“I think this has increased the general awareness,” he said. “If you don’t live here and you’re hanging around people are going to be suspicious and call the police.”

Hunter said in addition to establishing a neighborhood watch, residents should just be aware of the people coming and going in the neighborhood and check out suspicious activity. He suggested residents write down the license plate numbers of suspicious vehicles, and if they should happen to be up late just take a look outside to see what’s going on.

Cars should be locked, but if possible a garage is a better place for the car. If a resident feels something is out of sorts, they may call the Platte County Sheriff’s Office dispatcher and ask for a drive-through patrol.