



Markling has personal stake in schools

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By David George
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For Matt Markling, being part of the school board isn't just community service, it's a personal priority.

"I have two sons and another on the way," he said. "I want my kids to go to Lakewood schools, and I want to make sure they're good schools."

Markling and his wife Kathleen expect their third son in April. He will join the five-member Lakewood school board as its newest member Jan. 7. He was the winner of what has been a rarity in recent Lakewood school board history an open seat.

The seat went up for grabs when Debra Sweeney decided not to run for re-election after a single term. Sweeney defeated Michael Summers, recently elected to Lakewood City Council, in 2003.

The 36 year-old attorney and college professor won a narrow victory, edging out local businessman Martin Lowell by 157 votes. Longtime members Linda Beebe and Charles Geiger were easily re-elected to four-year terms. Along with Markling, they will join incumbents Ed Favre and Betsy Shaughnessy on the five-person board.

The Columbus native cites school performance and safety as among his main areas of concern for Lakewood schools. While some schools have received top ratings in state and federal rankings, the district overall has not been able to achieve elite status in the 10 years since school evaluations began.

Although day-to-day teaching and learning operations are handled by professional staff hired with board approval, Markling believes board members play a necessary leadership role.

"We give the administration direction as to where they need to go," he said. "The school board needs to make it clear that the standard in Lakewood is very high."

The federal No Child Left Behind act has proven vexing to many urban and inner-ring suburban district like Lakewood, but Markling is resigned to the fact that districts must adjust to that system.

"I certainly see flaws in NCLB, but those are the rules of the game," he said.

In terms of school safety, he called for tight enforcement of rules concerning dress codes and student identification. And he also voiced an opinion on a subject many would term controversial school uniforms.

He's open to the idea and thinks many administrators, parents and even students would agree.

"I'm not opposed to uniforms," he said. "Nothing is more important that when kids walk through the schoolyard gate, they should be dress ed ready to learn."

With an additional operating levy request apparently off the table for 2008 elections, Markling said the

district finances appear to be in good shape and praised Treasurer Rick Berdine. But he also noted board members need to "protect the public coffers."

With degrees in law and education from Ohio State, Markling is a partner in the law firm of McGown & Markling and also teaches at Bowling Green State University and the University of Akron.

His law firm specializes in work for public school districts and has provided services to Lakewood schools in recent years. While the firm still has one case pending representing the district, it will accept no other assignments from Lakewood schools while Markling serves on the board.

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