

Schoonard says he has common sense

YUSD has three board seats available

By Cassidy Smith / Correspondent

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Gregory Schoonard wanted to be involved in his children's education.

That desire prompted him to run for a school board position in 2002, and is the major reason he is seeking re-election to a four-year term.

"I think I have a reputation for bringing a lot of common sense to the board," Schoonard, 47, said. "I like to get right down to what the facts are and look for a common set of solutions for the problems that we face."

The Detroit native came to the Central Valley for employment opportunities after earning a degree from San Diego State. He got a master's degree from California State University, Bakersfield. About 12 years ago, he and his wife of 21 years moved their family to Coarsegold.

Schoonard, a facility captain in the state prison system, says he has a personal stake in the Yosemite School District because both of his children attend Yosemite High School. He believes that the greatest strength the district possesses is its teachers.

"I think that anybody that comes and visits our campuses and meets our staff would see that as far as education goes, this area is difficult to beat," Schoonard said.

One of the biggest challenges Schoonard believes the district is facing right now is declining enrollment due to the economy. He thinks that his ability to look at the big picture is a plus for problem-solving.

"I'm not a person that is a micromanager," Schoonard said. "It's not really our job as a board to be involved in the day-to-day operation of the district. The employees of the district are responsible for that. Our job is to set policy and to just oversee things to make sure that the district is operating within the policies that have been set by the board."

When it comes to the budget, Schoonard said his background helps him make sense of where future cuts could be made.

"The reality of public agencies is that the mass majority of a budget is made up of the salary and benefits of employees," Schoonard said. "The real challenge is to provide the services we've been providing in the past with less money."

The school district is studying the possibility of a four-day school week as a cost-cutting measure.

"I'm very interested in the outcome of study," Schoonard said. "I like to stay open to new ideas as to how we can do things more efficiently and effectively."

Schoonard feels that his accessibility, his passion and his background make him worthy of another term on the board.

"I have a vested interest in the district in that I'm not only a board member but I'm also a parent," Schoonard said. "I can really relate with the concerns people have. I'm very accessible in the community, and with my law enforcement background, I've been working with the state for 19 years."

The No Child Left Behind Act could use some improvement, Schoonard thinks.

"The overall concept is good," Schoonard said. "I think that it's raised the bar for schools and accountability. I think there are some problems with it that will be ironed out in the future. You can actually be very successful and yet not be meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind."

Schoonard's proudest accomplishment on the board was the renovation of Coarsegold Elementary School's multipurpose facility.

"It used to be basically a cafeteria and it was in desperate need of remodeling so that it would have a better use and so that the campus would have a better facility to use for a broader array of services," Schoonard said.

"It really was a very difficult project to get done. There were a lot of challenges that we faced along the way, and now it's got it done and it's just a beautiful facility. It's going to be something the kids and the community will benefit from for many generations to come."

When it comes to the future, Schoonard thinks the challenge comes in refining something that already is running pretty smoothly.

"It's hard to have a vision for change when you look at a district and think things are pretty good here," Schoonard said.

"I look at more of fine tuning some things. I really want to make sure we focus on reaching kids that aren't doing well in school. We have some things in place already to help reach out to those students. I want to see us continue to do better with that population."

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