

Fairley Wants To See Brunswick Students Excel

BY SUSAN USHER

William Francis "Bill" Fairley has the distinction of being the only member of the Brunswick County Board of Education with children enrolled in the public schools.

That gives this busy Southport attorney at least four good reasons to want the Brunswick County Schools to offer the best education possible: Rhyne, 13; Laura, 10; and twins Jack and Emily, 7.

Their education is a responsibility this 39-year-old Charlotte native doesn't take lightly and a concern that helps him stay focused on the true business of the school board.

"Part of my parental obligation is making sure my children are responsible adults at age 18, that they are capable of being adults when they grow up," he said. "That is as significant as feeding them, as far as I'm concerned."

That parental concern may have made the difference in his campaign last fall, when Fairley was the only Republican candidate elected to local office. He defeated former county manager Billy Carter for the District 3 seat, and has been focusing on school system needs ever since.

Fairley believes that the five members of the board—three Democrats and two Republicans—all want to help local public schools change for the better and will support recently-hired Superintendent Ralph Johnston's efforts to help make that happen.

He wants the board to get a handle on why county schools aren't performing as they should and set about fixing the problems as quickly as possible.

"It's pretty clear-cut that it is not just money," he said. "Brunswick County's per student expenditures are not miserably low; they are, in fact, above average. Yet performance is below what most parents want."

He's seen several patterns since moving to Brunswick County, finding many county high school graduates who don't want to leave the area but cannot find choice of employment here.

"For the most part, from what I can see, they are not exceedingly well-educated, even for a high school graduate. I didn't want that for my children."

That observation may be related to another pattern he's seen here that's typical of rural areas in transition: a number of people who feel the education they had was satisfactory and have no "burning desire" for their children to excel.

Sparkling that desire to learn, to excel, said Fairley is the job of the school system. No more simply "settling for" second best or cast-offs.

Fairley believes a more demanding curriculum, one that challenges students, is a good place to start. "Brunswick County Schools don't seem to push as hard as other school systems," he observed.

He believes setting higher goals for performance—and expecting people to achieve them—could be the keys. His philosophy is reflected in the county's new performance-based accountability plan.

Fairley, with most fellow board members concurring, has said he would also like to see merit pay for teachers tied directly to student performance, to students achieving the goals set by their schools in their three-year Performance-Based Accountability Plans now being considered by the board.

The county plan also includes another item Fairley has advocated strongly—pre- and post-testing at every grade level to determine how students are progressing, so that they will not be prematurely advanced before they have the skills needed to do that level of work. Test



SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER Bill Fairley is deadly serious when it comes to improving the county's public schools; however, a sense of humor helps keep a busy schedule in proper perspective.

"You have to lock in on priorities. You can't teach everything about everything."
—Bill Fairley

data can also be used to help identify individual teachers' strengths and weaknesses, in order to tap the former and improve the latter.

Education is a subject Fairley warms to easily, leaning forward at his desk in an airy, second-story office on Southport's Moore Street. On one side wall hangs art, including a clever piece by his son, Jack. On the wall behind him, sunlight streaming in a side window accents his state license to practice law and diplomas from the University of North Carolina.

His father, Jack Fairley, also a Southport resident, had graduated from UNC in 1941 and, Bill Fairley admitted, "I grew up wearing a Carolina sweatshirt."

Though he'd never really been away from home before, he didn't hesitate when it came time to leave

Tacoma, Washington, for Chapel Hill in 1971.

Seven years later he didn't hesitate again when it was time to leave Chapel Hill in the summer of 1978 with bachelor's degrees in economics and history, a law degree, and Tedi, his wife. An education major and former teacher, she shares his interest in quality education and is a school volunteer.

He also left UNC with a job awaiting him in Southport, doing trial work with none other than former Judge Ray Walton.

"It happened through an incredible stroke of luck," Fairley recalled. He had learned of the opening through Michael Isenberg, a recent UNC Law School alumnus and occasional tennis partner who had gone to work in Southport. Today Fairley and Isenberg share a law prac-

tice with Elva Jess, another Walton protegee.

On a week-to-week basis, Fairley juggles school board responsibilities with those of his personal and professional lives. Serving on the board requires much more than the time allotted to the regular monthly business meeting. There are special meetings, committee meetings, a steady deluge of invitations to attend events sponsored by individual schools or other agencies, and phone calls and meetings with parents and others.

After a month in office, however, Fairley was surprised at the calls he was receiving; he had expected more. Most have been non-policy issues, questions better referred to the professional staff.

"I can't get into whether a teacher is adequate to take care of her class on a given day," said Fairley. "That's not my job."

The board's job is setting policy, setting the direction for the system and overseeing the superintendent to make sure that policies are put into action in keeping with the board's intent.

From his 1½ years so far as a director of the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, Fairley has learned lessons he thinks could apply here.

When he joined that board, the Raleigh school had just experienced a series of administrative and personnel problems and its mission had gradually expanded to include service to children with multiple problems, many of them unrelated to vision concerns. It was a situation that required making drastic changes, in leadership, focus and operation.

"When in a given institution you have to define and limit what you do," he said. "When you're able to focus well on a specific thing, you can make strides."

"That experience helped me see the need for definition of purpose. You have to lock in on priorities. You can't teach everything about everything."

He's concerned that the county schools aren't spending enough time teaching critical areas such as math and science, which are important to key career areas of the future and which showed up as areas of weakness on the system's state report card.

Along with a solid core curriculum, he wants graduates to be able to think critically and solve problems, to have the skills they need to take their place in the community as adults.

"There's a fundamental difference between what we had to learn to get by and what children today have to learn to get by," he said.

He's working to make sure students get the skills they need, all the while trying to maintain a low profile on the board.

He routinely examines ideas and proposals presented to the board in terms of their practicality and how they relate to the board's vision for education, always pressing for higher expectations.

Quiet spoken but determined, Fairley isn't afraid to ask questions. However, unlike predecessors on the board, he promises "no screaming or yelling, no fist fights."

A typical Fairley question is an intense "Why should we settle for less?"—as when only half the money needed to finish stocking Supply Elementary School's library was first included in the first budget draft for next year.

A member of the budget committee, he was concerned last week by a proposal to split the \$50,000 for book purchases over a two-year period.

"It seemed absurd to me for a school to have half a library," he said quietly, yet forcefully the night the full board met for their first look at the budget. Heads nodded. Who could disagree?

West Spanish Teacher Accepts Fulbright Exchange To Chile

BY SUSAN USHER

After four years of encouraging her West Brunswick High School students to participate in a foreign exchange program, Spanish teacher Beth Feller Pupp is going to do it herself.

The Shallotte Point resident was recently selected from a field of more than 1,200 applicants for 220 slots in the prestigious Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program operated by the U.S. Information Agency.

It will be quite different from her first exchange experience more than 20 years ago. This time Pupp will be swapping teaching posts with a public school teacher in Chile, a long, narrow, mountainous country on the west coast of South America. She's brimming with excitement and bubbling with ideas as she begins planning for the year ahead.

Pup will be on her own in Chile, an adult with no host family to feed and house her; but with fellow faculty members and perhaps the United Methodist Church as part of her network of fellowship. A member of Seaside United Methodist Church's missions committee, it seems only natural that she already has names and addresses so she can contact churches and missionaries in the area.

She'll be shopping for size 39 shoes, counting money in pesos and mileage in meters, and mentally converting Centigrade to Fahrenheit when checking the weather. But those cultural differences will make up only a tiny part of her experience.

On paid leave as a Brunswick County Schools employee, she will travel in July to San Felipe, a city of about 30,000 people in central Chile north of Santiago and east of the resort area of Vina Del Mar. She will be switching jobs with Olga Elizabeth Alvaros, who is the head of the English department at her liceo (lee say' oh) or general secondary school. After exchanging letters and phone calls for several months, the two will meet in Santiago during orientation.

Alvaros will arrive here in August to teach at West Brunswick High School, in the first teacher exchange ever for the 20-year-old school. Part of Pupp's commitment to the exchange program is to return to West Brunswick once her year-long assignment ends.

Pupp's first exchange experience in 1970 required giving up her senior year of high school in Philadelphia, Pa., and graduating with the next class. She's never regretted the decision.

She had applied to the Rotary International Exchange program expecting placement in France or a French-speaking country. Instead, she got Mexico. Always open to a new experience or adventure, she accepted.



FULBRIGHT EXCHANGE TEACHER Beth Feller Pupp shows senior James Bellamy, a Spanish II student, where she'll be stationed come July: San Felipe, Chile.

"It was wonderful. I didn't know a word of Spanish, but you learn quickly. It was survival," she recalled. During that memorable year she relied heavily on gestures and on an English-Spanish dictionary that was torn and tattered by the end of the year. She stayed with two host families in Chihuahua and also took Spanish language courses at the local university.

This time she again didn't get exactly what she asked for, but has no complaints. "I had wanted six months in Argentina and I got a year in Chile," said Pupp.

The Fulbright program takes its name from the late Sen. J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, sponsor of the 1946 act which provided for the exchange of students and teachers between the United States and many other countries. Participants are screened rigorously for professionalism, adaptability and flexibility in handling cultural and economic differences, language proficiency, seriousness of purpose and commitment, and for their ability to represent the United States.

"You are an ambassador for the United States. That's the big thing here," said Pupp. "For the people in the

community where you are assigned, you are the United States."

Her screening included an interview conducted in Spanish and English in Charlotte last Nov. 7 which she apparently passed without difficulty.

"I think my having been an exchange student before, having already handled all those things, made it so I didn't have to hesitate at all when answering," she said.

As part of the U.S.-Chile agreement, Pupp will receive round-trip transportation and a \$1,000 allowance for purchase of classroom materials that will be donated to her host school in Chile.

Instead of Spanish, she'll be teaching another subject in which she has an interest, English as a Second Language (ESL). She'll conduct classes for ages 11 through 18 in an all-girls' school.

Arriving in Chile during the middle of the school year, she will remain through the December-March summer break, then teach the first half of another school year before returning stateside.

Along with a new subject, she may also have to adopt a new approach in the classroom. While Chilean schools often rely heavily on lecture, she has emphasized student participation and hands-on learning and a multimedia approach in her language classes.

Her students may practice their oral Spanish playing a game of "telephone" or their written skills penning teasing messages to fellow students. They learn about Mexican culture and occasionally eat together at Mexican-style restaurants or prepare their own Mexican menu.

Pupp's enthusiasm and successful techniques helped her earn recognition as West Brunswick's Teacher of the Year two years ago.

When she came to West Brunswick four years ago, Pupp had not taught since 1975 and had been employed with private businesses as a translator and in sales.

That first year enrollment in the foreign language program was so low she taught an English class in addition to four Spanish classes. She's achieved both her initial goals, which were to expand the department and to establish a foreign exchange program.

This year West has 10 Spanish classes and two full-time Spanish teachers. Pupp's former students are earning good credits on college placement tests. Next year the school plans to offer Spanish III for the first time and to sponsor its first outbound American Field Service exchange student—and Pupp won't be here to share in the excitement.

"For me this is going to be another adventure," she said. "But I'm really going to miss my students."