

Gardiner to leave board after 11 years

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After retiring from teaching in June 1995, Gardiner was first elected as Halton Hills trustee that October.

"I had been involved in education all my life. To me it was just an opportunity to keep involved and be supportive of kids and public education."

In 1997, Gardiner was elected by the other trustees to serve as the board's chair, a position she held for six consecutive years until 2003, earning her the distinction of being HDSB's longest-serving chair.

While she said it was an honour to serve as chair, "my work in Halton Hills was more near and dear to my heart."

Gardiner said she remembers when she started as a trustee it seemed like there were 85 different boards of education in Halton with the schools all on different pages.

She said today, the strength of the Halton board system is that "we're all focused on the same thing"— numeracy, literacy, school culture and improving student achievement."

She has had many highlights over the past 11 years.

"Anytime I could get into a school to see the great work that's happening or attend some event that the school was presenting those were always highlights," she said.

An achievement she is proud of has been seeing an elementary school built in Georgetown South and another in the planning stages.

"There was a lot of advocacy for that," she said.

The fact that a study process for a proposed renovation at Georgetown

'It's a school board that does not work together and does not serve school children.'



ETHEL GARDINER

District High School has been initiated, Gardiner said is something she was very pleased to see.

Gardiner is also proud that the board was able to maintain the property behind McKenzie-Smith Bennett School for community and school use.

"That was one of the biggest fights I had. I think it was important to be able to do that."

Another major highlight for Gardiner came in 2004 when she received the Dr. Harry Paikin Award of Merit (a provincial award) for outstanding service as a public school trustee.

Other memorable events she said were Ethel's Run in which she did a lap around the track and, through staff and student pledges, raised \$15,000 for Variety Village West, and annual events that highlight the exceptional work of staff and students such as Halton Music Festival and the Skills Competition.

Along with the high points, Gardiner said there have also been

some lows over the years.

She said the current composition of the board tops that list.

"It's a school board that does not work together and does not serve school children."

"A low point for me was Dr. Dusty Papke leaving as director as well as two other key staff who provided much direction to our system."

She also remembers the "mold crisis" that resulted in a lot of upheaval to Halton schools as portables had to be torn down and rebuilt.

"I've not always been patient, it was a low point to see how slowly we were able to move to start to build schools," said Gardiner.

An incredible low Gardiner said is "the loss of students and staff to illness or accidents," which she experienced numerous times over the past 11 years.

Gardiner plans to continue on as trustee, attending every meeting and event that she can, and supporting parents and students until a new trustee is elected.

And she has a recommendation for the community on who she believes should be the trustee for the (Wards 3 and 4) Georgetown area.

"It is my opinion that Mike Parkhill will work tirelessly for all families in Georgetown. He is a man of integrity and wants to be a trustee for all of the right reasons."

She said he's been attending most board meetings over the past year and understands the educational issues in Georgetown.


"The community will be well served if he is elected."

(Lisa Tallyn can be reached at ltallyn@independentfreepress.com)

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