

Trustee Bowes' talk enlightens students

By KATE GILDERDALE
Orchard Park Public School's Grade 6 students were an interested and enthusiastic audience during school trustee Harry Bowes' presentation on the election process last Wednesday.

The two classes, under the guidance of teachers Todd Bright and Steve Rensink, have been learning about government. To make the subject more relevant, the teachers have staged elec-

tions in each class, with the students forming parties based on the federal system.

They results have paid off handsomely, with students learning to canvass, debate with the opposition and expose flaws in their opponents' reasoning.

"They discovered quickly the importance of researching the issues thoroughly," stressed Mr. Bright.

Party leaders gave their final speeches to the junior grades, who then voted for their chosen candidate.

During his presentation, Mr. Bowes told students how he became a trustee, the qualifications required and the difference between running for office and being acclaimed.

"People seek office for many different reasons," he noted, citing in his case, it was the teachers' strike in 1974. However, among other candidates, priorities have ranged from the extension of junior kindergarten to concerns over increased use of portables.

He also talked about the money and time involved in campaigning, pointing out a trustee has to cover the entire area, not just a single ward as a councillor does. He estimated he and his campaign workers would cover close to eight or nine thousand homes.

"You have to make sure you cover all the territory and all the people," said Mr. Bowes.

He claimed he prefers to do as much campaigning as possible himself, rather than using other people.

Replying to a question from the audience, Mr. Bowes acknowledged decisions made by

trustees can be very difficult. He recalled a case where the board was asked to pay school fees for a gifted athlete who had to move to another board to receive the training she needed.

"She wanted us to pay for her schooling in Toronto," he said. "After she was narrowly turned down the first time, she was supported on appeal. Because of our budget limitations we're trying to save money, so it becomes very difficult in cases like this."

When asked how it felt to be told no one was running against him, Mr. Bowes replied that as a trustee who also serves on two provincial associations, it was a joy not to have to campaign.

However, he admitted he wouldn't want to do it if he had a full-time job.

"You have to work part time or be retired," said Mr. Bowes. "Otherwise, you have to have a boss that lets you have a lot of time off. I enjoy it because I have the time."

When asked by another student how many meetings he is expected to attend, Mr. Bowes replied although there are only four meetings a month he is expected at; he attended 320 last year. However, he thought the average for most trustees was between 60 and 80 annually.

He pointed out trustees could serve their boards for as long as they were elected.

"We had someone in Etobicoke who was trustee for 49 years."

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"Because my time is pretty well taken up with meetings, I don't know how I would have had time to go to them and still campaign."

"What's it like doing what you do?" queried a student.

"At first they had to twist my arm because I didn't want to run," he claimed. "But in the next two elections, people ran against me who I felt had conflicts of interest so it was my obligation to run against them. After a while it gets into your blood. I really enjoy it."

Another question posed hopefully was whether they had had any complaints against principals or teachers.

"We do, but there are very few," he replied. "They're handled confidentially."

If the interest shown by the Grade 6 classes at Orchard Park is anything to go by, we won't have to worry about who'll represent the next generation in the political arena."

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