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School board to look very different with three choosing not to seek re-election

by Ted Almen

Four of the seven members of the KMS Board of Education will come to the end of their current four-year terms in office, and of those, three have made it known they will not seek re-election.

Up for grabs this November 3 will be the chairs of Amber Doering, Steve Collins, Pam Mansfield and Jeremy Winter. Of those, Collins, Doering and Mansfield have stated they have no plans to run again this fall.

Not on the ballot this year will be the spots held by board chairman Tom Walsh, and members Harmon Wilts and Todd Rudningen.

During last week Monday evening's monthly board session Wilts, echoing a sentiment expressed at the June meeting by Collins, posed the question of finding new people to run for office.

"Do we run a little advertising campaign in the Banner or do we have people?"

Superintendent Martin Heidelberg encouraged all board members to spread the word around the community about the opportunity to serve



Steve Collins



Amber Doering



Pam Mansfield

on the school board. For those who have never really considered the possibility, "...you are the best resource" for finding out what the job entails. He offered to answer questions too, if asked.

"What would happen if only two

people filed for three openings?" asked Wilts, to which the answer is that the highest write-in candidate would be elected.

Collins, who asked back at the June 8 board meeting that members start thinking about potential can-

didates, told his board colleagues to be up front when they explain the responsibilities of being a school board member. "Explain that it's not just a once a month meeting. Other things that go with it are vitally significant. While members of the board

won't get rich serving, they are compensated. Every January they hold a re-organization session where officers are elected, meeting time is decided, committees are appointed and, among a raft of other mostly mundane decisions, the board salaries are set for the coming year. This time around the board chose to raise board members' pay by \$5 per meeting, bringing it to \$65, other than for the chairman who receives \$75 per meeting.

A rewarding experience

Steve Collins, a farmer, is the longest serving of the three 'retiring' from the board, completing his third four-year term. He has seen his three children all graduate from KMS, the youngest under most unusual circumstances with a pandemic-prompted 'parking lot' commencement.

"Being on the school board is a rewarding experience," Collins said. "You get to make decisions that not only affect the school but also the community, because in the end we all have to work together to keep everything running smooth."

Collins has played a pivotal role

(Continued on page 5)

White supremacists or just a heritage organization?

Purchase of former Lutheran church building in Murdock by Asatru Folk Assembly causing a stir in community

by Jordan Almen

There's been an apprehensive buzz going around Murdock and surrounding areas lately. The purchase of the shuttered Calvary Lutheran Church on Highway 12 has raised questions and concerns alongside rumors about the new ownership. Those new owners are a religious group called the Asatru Folk Assembly.

Matt Flavel is the Alsherjargothi of the AFA. "It's an Icelandic word. Basically it means the priest of all the warriors. It's basically the high priest of our church," he explained. The organization began as the Asatru Free Assembly in 1972, but was disbanded in 1986. The founder, Steven McNallen, brought it back in 1994 under the slightly updated name. "Our mission is to bring our people back to a natural relationship with the gods of our ancestors, and to help our people grow and lead successful lives in a whole and spiritual way," Flavel said.

Who counts as "our people" is clearly laid out several places on the AFA's website, but particularly clearly in their Declaration of Purpose. In declaration II, it states, "If the Ethnic European Folk cease to exist Asatru would likewise no longer exist. Let us be clear: by Ethnic European Folk we mean White people. It is our collective will that we not only survive, but thrive, and continue our evolution in the direction of the infinite... The survival and welfare of the Ethnic European Folk as a cultural and biological group is a religious imperative for the AFA."

Asatru refers to those who worship ancient Germanic or Scandinavian gods — some of these are at least somewhat familiar to most people, such as Odin. "It taps into a religious tradition that goes back to before the ice age," said Flavel. "What people are most familiar with is the Norse mythology."

The church building in Murdock will be the third 'hof' established by the AFA in the United States — the others are in California and North Carolina. It will be dedicated to Baldur, a son of Odin. "Baldur was said to be the most beautiful, perfect of the gods," Flavel said. "He's a solar god.



What would the old Lutherans say? From its founding in 1903 until closing in 2014, Calvary Lutheran in Murdock served Christianity to members worshipping within the walls of this build-

ing. Now residents of the community are wondering if it's a relationship with Germanic/Nordic gods, or obfuscated racism which will be preached from its pulpit.

We often worship him at the summer solstice. He was known to be fair and just, and kind of the example of the best the gods can be."

Flavel estimated that there are AFA members within about an hour of Murdock, but explained that members are willing to drive quite far in order to gather together. At a minimum, they plan to gather and worship in Murdock once a month, but they hope it will really happen several times a month.

The AFA hopes to have the hof in Murdock ready to use by this fall. They are primarily doing routine maintenance-type updates. Once ready, they will have a dedication ceremony. That event, and their other events, tend to be private, Flavel said. If there are community members that are particularly interested in joining, or who members of the AFA have built a relationship with they could be allowed, but, "ceremonies do tend to be private with members or trusted guests."

"Our main ritual is called a blot (pronounced bloat)," Flavel said. "The closest thing I could say is it's a communion with the gods. We share our energy with the gods and ask for their blessings. We'll often do that in a circle. We'll make a toast, make an offering to the gods and hope for a blessing in return." Sharing meals is important for the AFA, and most of their worship is based on that activity.

Other aspects of the AFA are more abstract. "We have our nine noble virtues," Flavel explained. "They're kind of a breakdown of virtues that are valuable for people leading good and noble lives. They are courage, discipline, fidelity, honor, hospitality, industriousness, perseverance, self-reliance and truth." The purpose, laws and ethics of the organization are laid out in detail on their website.

Several items on the AFA website stand out, in addition to the explanation of the Ethnic European Folk stated above, as being more sectarian and aggressive than is typical for a religion. Some examples include:

The Folk Community Principle: A community based in ancestry and (Continued on page 4)

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