

Notes and quotes

The Rev. Jesse Jackson took a half-hour out of his busy schedule Wednesday afternoon to receive treatment from a podiatrist at the Central Illinois Orthopedic Center.

"I have corns and get treatments that are fairly routine," Jackson said. "Sometimes when I'm on the road I can't get back home in time to get them treated."

The reverend said he wanted his feet to be in good condition for the scheduled march from the Decatur Civic Center to MacArthur High School on Sunday.

MacArthur Principal Ed Boehm said he was saddened that the expulsion issue has cast such a dark shadow on the rest of the student body. He said the MacArthur soccer team's successful showing this past weekend at the state tournament has gone virtually unnoticed because of all the attention being given to the expelled students.

"Their fourth-place trophy is sitting on the (main office) counter," Boehm said. "We couldn't let the kids in the building Monday or Tuesday to acknowledge what they accomplished."

Sharena Harper, a MacArthur sophomore, said the expulsion issue has divided some of her classmates and fears that the tension will escalate.

"I think there's going to be more fights and stuff like that in school."

"I just came today because I was supposed to get my (driver's) permit yesterday but I didn't get it today either," said Richard Maroon, an Eisenhower sophomore. "I felt some-

what like we were in jail and some people were scared."

Both Robert Lee, 18 and 15-year-old Jamel Anderson said the main topics of conversation on Wednesday were not English or mathematics, rather, what was going on outside the school building.

"A lot of people were scared (and) some kids didn't even show up today," Lee said.

"Some people were kind of nervous having all the cops here. It would be better if they had everything at another place and not focused on the schools."

Anderson said, "I understand that they shouldn't have been expelled for that long but all the publicity (from the media) is not needed. I was at the game and saw the fight (and) it wasn't that bad."

Standing outside the Church of the Living God, PCT Temple 3, Floyd Jenkins, 49, of Decatur, said he would be disappointed if the one-year expulsion stands.

"But I won't be disappointed in Rev. Jackson, the Rainbow Coalition or the people of Decatur," Jenkins said. "I'll be disappointed in the fact that the school board hasn't done anything to try and get those kids back in school immediately."

Becky Foley, whose daughter, Amy, attends MacArthur, said she never worried about her daughter's safety Wednesday, but said it's probably good that students aren't scheduled to attend class today or Friday.

"It'll give them a few more days to get things settled and back to normal," Foley said.

Ribbons show support for board's decision

DECATUR — A group of parents is urging Decatur residents who support the school board's expulsion of seven students for fighting to tie royal blue ribbons to the antennas of their vehicles.

"It's a silent statement of support," Migayla Pugsley, one of the parents, said Wednesday.

The ribbon idea came about Tuesday evening after the group of parents saw television news reports that used a videotape of the Sept. 17 fight in the bleachers at an Eisenhower High School football game which precipitated the expulsions, said Pugsley, whose children attend Roosevelt Middle School and Harris School.

"Basically it was just a group of people talking, saying the school board needs

backing and what can we do," she said. "We want a safe environment for our children. Regardless of what the Rev. (Jesse) Jackson says about it lasting only 17 seconds, this was a serious thing. I want to be able to send my children to a game without concern for their safety."

Pugsley said the ribbon idea spread by word of mouth on Wednesday and some of the approximately 15 parents involved in the idea scattered in the bleachers at the Eisenhower High School football game to distribute the blue streamers.

"Once we saw the video and heard the school board (members) had compromised, we felt they needed support," Pugsley said. "The board is getting bullied around."

McGee brings negotiation skills to table

State superintendent known for focusing on 'doing the right thing' for students

By JOHN C. PATTERSON
H&R Springfield Bureau Writer

SPRINGFIELD — As midnight loomed Tuesday, Glenn W. "Max" McGee sat in a back corner booth at the Decatur Holiday Inn Select Conference Hotel restaurant with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, trying to negotiate an end to the two-day standoff that shuttered Decatur schools.

Only hours earlier, McGee, the superintendent of the Illinois State Board of Education, had been in Mount Vernon, 122 miles south, helping Southern Illinois legislators solve a school attendance problem. He traveled back to Decatur for negotiations with Jackson, and as of Wednesday afternoon, McGee's staff believed he hadn't slept.

Those who work with or have worked with McGee said this approach is not uncommon. Behind the boyish, bespectacled education bureaucrat persona lurks a 49-year-old competitive triathlete who last month set a personal record by finishing the 26-mile Chicago Marathon in 4 hours, 18 minutes. McGee's athletic endurance carries over to his job, where he was described as a tireless negotiator and a sincere listener.

Kirsten Gordon is president of the school board in the Chicago suburb of Deerfield, where McGee was superintendent before being chosen for the state education post. Gordon recalled a school bus problem that had parents leaving McGee voice mail messages at 11 p.m.

Gordon said McGee would check the messages from home and get back to the parents that night. She said his philosophy was that if it was important enough for parents to call at that hour, he owed it to them to provide an immediate response.

"He works very hard to try to get people from all different aspects of an issue to come together and try to problem solve and collaborate," Gordon said. "Typically he will look at a situation and say, 'Let's all look at this together and decide what's best for the kids.'"

"Max is a really good listener. He is a real helper in emotional situations, like I imagine the situation is in Decatur, because he is very good at listening to people's concerns and having them leave a meeting or gathering feeling like they have been heard and their concerns have been taken to heart," Gordon said. "Everyone feels they have won talking with Max McGee."

These qualities came up time after time in talking to McGee's former colleagues, legislators, and officials from the Illinois State Board of Education. No one was surprised that McGee is involved in trying to solve the situation in Decatur.

"I never saw Max McGee run from a battle in his life. If he thought it was important and kids were involved he was there," said state Rep. Jerry Mitchell, R-Sterling, a former public school



POWER BREAKFAST State School Superintendent Glenn W. McGee, right, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson review notes at a dining booth before 7 a.m. at the Holiday Inn Select Conference Hotel.

superintendent in Dixon. "That's always been his style. I didn't expect that to change when he became state superintendent," Marilyn McConachie of Northbrook, a member of the state board, said McGee proved himself to be a creative thinker and problem solver during the interview process.

"I think Max is capable of finding solutions that work for everybody even if everybody isn't happy with them," McConachie said. "He's a good guy to have help you sort out your problems."

She said McGee has a "terrific sense of humor" and is able to use it to diffuse tense situations. Yet he has a toughness that surprises many people.

State Rep. Larry D. Woolard, D-Cartersville, chairman of the Elementary and Secondary Education Committee, recalled an all-

night negotiating session regarding laws governing special education students. "Max was there and ready to work with us in whatever way was needed. He stuck it out. He never said, 'I'll see you tomorrow.'"

And state Rep. Julie Curry, D-Mount Zion, chairman of an education budget committee, said McGee has proven to be accessible to everyone, a skill his predecessor lacked.

"Anytime I've had an issue that's come up, he's always taken the time to call me back," Curry said. "I've always felt like I had access to him and I never felt like I had that before."

"I'm glad to know he's spent so much time here and is willing to help us out."

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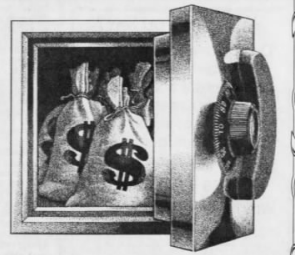
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