

League of Women Voters of Edwardsville area hosts school board candidates

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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The League of Women Voters of the Edwardsville area hosted seven District 7 Board of Education candidates at a forum Monday night at Wildey Theatre in Edwardsville.

The candidates presented were Greg Roosevelt, Terri Dalla Riva, Paul Pitts, Vince Ojeda, Maurice Laurent, Jill Bertels and Lucas Siron.

The candidates provided an opening statement with information about themselves, then the public asked questions.

Meg Oberlag of Edwardsville has been a member of the League of Women Voters since 1968. She served as one of the timers in the event. Rachel Tomkins is chairman of the League of Women Voters of the Edwardsville area.



She described the candidate forum as one of her favorite things that the League of Women Voters do as an organization.

“We were very appreciative of having this at the Wildey,” she said. “We are a non-partisan organization that never supports any candidate,” she said. “We do support issues after we have studied them and come to a decision. We have done the candidate forums so many times we all have the hang of it.”

Oberlag said the key service the forums provide is seeing the candidate and hearing them in a personal setting up close and getting to talk with them.

She also pointed out that school board and other city, village and county elections seem to draw more attention than others because they are close to home.

Alison Lamathe, another League of Women Voters Edwardsville member, is on the services committee for the group. Lamathe grew up in New Hampshire and she said that state has a rich voting tradition, which is one of the reasons she joined the League of Women Voters.

“All my family votes,” she said. “The League of Women Voters adds light, not heat, to public discussion. We are non-partisan and try very hard to remain neutral.”

“The whole reason I joined the League of Women Voters is I have always taken voting seriously,” she said.

The candidates provided an opening statement which is summarized below with background information about each person.

These are listed on the ballot in the order they will be, with each race separated out.

Terri Dalla Riva, Greg Roosevelt

Terri Dalla Riva

Dalla Riva said she has been a parent of children in the school district for more than 20 years and she wants to provide a voice to the community. She added her goal was to keep the district with the changing times in regard to technology and the financial budget would be her top concern. She has been president of her neighborhood homeowners' association for over 15 years. She is a property manager, and a realtor with Coldwell Banker Brown Realtors.

Greg Roosevelt

Roosevelt said he brings a wealth of experience, serving as president and vice president of the board. He talked about the district being one of the most successful in the country. With the difficult financial times throughout the state, he said the board had plans to deal with those as it has in the past with critical decisions. Roosevelt is a graduate of the University of Illinois where he earned both a Bachelor's of Science in Business Administration and his Juris Doctorate in Law. Roosevelt practices law in Edwardsville.

Paul Pitts, Vince Ojeda

Paul Pitts

Pitts, another incumbent, also talked of his experience with over 20 years and he welcomed continuing to serve the board. The years on the board provides him with

background and expertise to continue to lead the school board as the district moves into the future, he said. Pitts is assistant chancellor for Institutional Compliance at SIUE, Paul administers the university's Equal Opportunity programs.

Vince Ojeda

Ojeda said he had been involved in the school district for 16 years and he said he loves the district with children involved through high school and grade school. He also said he is CEO of a privately-held health care company - Essential Testing - and he would use his success in growing that to help the district in its financial issues. Ojeda has coached rookie and youth soccer over the years, as well as T-ball and baseball.

Monica Laurent

Monica Laurent discussed her history of involvement with the school district from being a board member and her children going through the schools. She expressed pride in what the board had done in the past and realized there are challenges to face in the future. She said her teaching and experience as a school administrator provides input that helps the board. Laurent is assistant principal at Whiteside Middle School, Belleville, where she has also taught since 2007. As a teacher, Laurent has received the Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award. She has been a school board member for 12 years.

Jill Bertels

Jill Bertels has been a member of the school board since 1999. She is the current president. She has served as secretary, vice president, and president. Bertels owns and operates Bertels Greenhouse in Dorsey. She and her husband own a 2000-acre corn and bean farming operation. She participates in the family-owned business, Raifort Properties. She said her experience in business and with the board shows steady leadership. She said as a board member she plans to look out for taxpayer dollars and she listens to the opinion of all sides and votes in the best interest of District 7.

Lucas Siron

Lucas Siron has coached children for the Edwardsville Wrestling Club, as well as Edwardsville Little Tigers Football. He has been an engineer with The Boeing Company for over 10 years. He said his experience as an engineer with Boeing has given him insight into the financial side of business. He said he is looking at the best way of keeping a mindset of innovation with the school board. He said he would take challenges in regard to the school and school board head on.