

Honoring the past and celebrating the future

Blind Brook Board of Ed Celebration of Teaching honors retirees and awards tenure

BY JAMIE KERNER

The Blind Brook community joined together on Monday, June 11 for a Board of Education meeting recognizing retirees and awarding others tenure while honoring the district's past and future.

During the annual "Celebration of Teaching" meeting, the school board unanimously confirmed the tenure of one administrator and three teachers and bid farewell to five retiring staff and faculty members.

The board also paid tribute to Daniel Savitt, who served on the Blind Brook Board of Education for six years and decided not to seek reelection. As June 11 was the last meeting of the school year, board members said their goodbyes as they each spoke on Savitt's behalf before presenting him with a gift basket of Blind Brook apparel.

Savitt said being a member of the board has been a good experience, full of many ups and downs. Though he is first allowing himself time to take a break following his



Tenure recipients DJ Goldman (left), Carl Barnes, Jennifer Krill and Jessica Seeger take a break to pose for the camera during the Celebration of Teaching reception before the Blind Brook Board of Education meeting on Monday, June 11.

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departure from the board, Savitt is also exploring some opportunities of helping other communities.

"Actually, after spending six years here, some of the things you notice is that we have it really good here and I wouldn't mind an opportunity to take some of what we have here and bring it to communities where we don't live," he said.

A brief reception in honor of those retiring and those receiving tenure was held in the Blind Brook High School Commons just prior to the Board of Education meeting,

which took place in the George C. Trautwein Auditorium.

Reflecting on the past

A feeling of bittersweetness among the Blind Brook community was a common theme during the Celebration of Teaching, as retirees were honored and celebrated.

"Many of you have taught our children, board members' children, and so these moments become bittersweet for all of us sitting here as each of you leave," Board of Education President

Jeffrey Diamond said in a blanket statement to all the retiring teachers. "And we're all community members, we've all had children, you've done such an incredible job taking care of them, and while we're excited for you and for your futures, we're also very sorry to have to say goodbye."

Those retiring this year are William Santoro, Margarete Goett, Eva Sarli, Brenda Johnson and Linda Greco. Out of the five, only two, Sarli and Greco, were present at the board meeting.

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Santoro has worked for the Blind Brook school district for the last five years as a school monitor at the middle and high school campus. Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Ross recalled Santoro always smiling while patrolling the parking lot and cafeteria and said he will be missed by many.

Margarete Goett is an English language arts teacher who has worked at Blind Brook High School for nine years. According to Ross, following Goett's retirement, she will move up north to Maine.

Eva Sarli, an elementary education teacher, is retiring after working at Ridge Street School for 23 years. Throughout her teaching career at Ridge Street, Sarli has worked with third-graders, fourth-graders and fifth-graders.

Fifth-grader Hayden Cohen spoke before those at the meeting as she read a speech she wrote for Sarli, thanking her for making learning easy, fun and lively.

Following her retirement, Sarli plans to take some time for herself, play tennis and work for her local animal shelter, among other things.

Elementary education teacher Brenda Johnson, who could not make it to the board meeting due to her daughter's receiving a senior award that same evening, is retiring after teaching at Ridge Street for 24 years. During her time at the school, Johnson taught both kindergarten and first grade.

"Now kindergarten and first grade, there's a wide variety of needs, and she met each of them," Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School Principal Tracy Taylor said at the meeting. "Finding students where they were and taking them to where they could be."

Linda Greco was the last of the retirees to be honored. Greco has been working at Ridge Street for the last 30 years; she was first hired to be a permanent substitute teacher for the school before being assigned a probationary position in September 1989. Throughout her time at Ridge Street, Greco worked to instill the importance of giving back to her students, as she organized various fundraisers and drives over the years. Additionally, Greco is the brainchild behind some of Ridge Street's most beloved traditions, such as the Snowball, the Valentine's Day Extravaganza and Wanda the Witch.

Delving into numerology, Taylor said the numeral 30, the number of years Greco has taught at Ridge Street, is associated with being highly creative and social, resonates with optimism and is also limitless.

"Three, the creative digit, followed by the unlimited digit zero," Taylor said. "Mrs. Greco, you are limitless for sure."

Fighting back tears, Greco thanked everyone for being a part of her journey at Ridge Street School.

Celebrating the future

The Board of Education celebrated the future of the district with the conferral of tenure upon Douglas "DJ" Goldman, Carl Barnes, Jennifer Krill and Jessica Seeger.

Tenure is earned, according to Ross, after a teacher or administrator has successfully completed a period of probationary employment, upon the recommendation of the superintendent and the approval of the school board. As of July 2015, the period of probationary employment changed from three years to four.

Goldman, the director of physical education, health and athletics, came to Blind Brook from the Edgemont School District, where he taught physical education and had tenure.

Now with tenure at Blind Brook, Goldman said he does not want anything to change.

"I just want to do the best job I can at all times," Goldman said.



Teachers Eva Sarli (left) and Linda Greco are retiring after decades of service to the Blind Brook School District. William Santoro, Margarete Goett and Brenda Johnson are also retiring but could not attend last Monday's reception and meeting.

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At last Monday's meeting, Ross said the "school district is truly fortunate to employ Mr. Goldman as a district administrator" and applauded his ability to always adhere to high expectations of leadership.

Likewise, Barnes had tenure at another school before coming to Blind Brook.

At Blind Brook, Barnes in a special education teacher, serves as the faculty advisor for the high school's Destination Imagination and bowling teams and is passionate about helping his students with their post-high school plans.

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Harry Burg praised Barnes at Monday's meeting, calling him a "thoughtful lesson designer" and said that he "constantly strives to capture his students' interests and engage them in carefully designed learning experiences."

Krill was next to be awarded tenure.

In addition to her full-time job as an elementary education teacher at Ridge Street, Krill is also studying at Columbia University, where she is working towards her doctorate in curriculum and teaching.

Principal Taylor commended Krill's quality of being a constant learner and her apparent love of learning at the board meeting.

"There is a give and a take and a feeling of mutual respect and admiration," Taylor said. "We cannot wait for the continuous, continuous years and the love of learning that you're (going to) bring us and that you're certainly (going to) share with us."

Similarly, Seeger, a mathematics teacher at the high school, mainly aspires to continue growing as a teacher and educator. She said she also hopes to explore some of the higher level Advanced Placement mathematics classes, as well as the computer science classes, at Blind Brook.

Blind Brook High School Principal Patricia Lambert applauded Seeger and the way she continuously helps her students.

"One size does not fit all in Mrs. Seeger's classes, and as a result, she is able to help students gain confidence," Lambert said.

Lambert added that after students spend time in Seeger's class, they are able to self-identify as being good at math.

As the district said goodbye to the beloved old, it also further welcomed in the admired new. When one chapter ends, another soon begins.



After two terms on the Blind Brook Board of Education, Daniel Savitt celebrates his last meeting.

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