

4 compete for 3 LMC board seats

Terms are for six years

By RALPH HEIBUTZKI
HP Correspondent

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Two incumbents, a recent appointee and a newcomer are vying in the Nov. 4 election for three seats on the Lake Michigan College Board of Trustees.

The candidates for the nonpartisan positions are board Vice Chairman Paul Bergan, Secretary Mary Jo Tomasini, Trustee Debra Johnson and Covert area blueberry farmer Barbara James Norman.

Bergan and Tomasini are hoping to return for new six-year terms, while Johnson — appointed in June — is seeking a first full six-year term.

Norman is making her first try for an LMC board seat, but has served on the Covert School Board.

Under LMC's rules, board members serve staggered six-year terms, so only two or three are up for re-election at any time. The board members also rotate among the various positions.

Paul Bergan

Bergan, 71, of 6158 Sandy Hill Drive, Eau Claire, is seeking his fourth term on the board. He has served for 18 years and every position except chairman.

Bergan and his wife, Linda, have three sons and one daughter.

He spent 17 years as the Berrien Regional Education Service Agency's career and technical education director be-



BERGAN

fore retiring.

Bergan also coached football for 40 years, including stints at Benton Harbor and Eau Claire.

When asked why he's running again, Bergan responded: "I'm just so proud of what we've accomplished, all of the growth we've had, and where I've come from, since I've been on the board."

As an example, Bergan mentioned LMC's promotion of partnerships with K-12 districts, which enable students to earn college credits while they're still attending high school.

"We were the first in Michigan to do those kinds of things, and I've been very, very proud of that — how much money that has saved the people in Berrien County," he said.

Bergan is also a 30-year member of the Workforce Development Board in all its incarnations, which reflects his passionate interest in vocational education, he said.

"Sometimes, our early college (students) make up 10 percent of our enrollment. It goes without saying that Lake Michigan College is the key element of workforce development," Bergan said.

If re-elected, Bergan expects to keep doing all he can to promote LMC's role in boosting workforce development locally.

"The role of the community college is to help the community raise their skill levels to get the good-paying, high-paying jobs, and help employers get a trained workforce," Bergan said. "Our role is to serve the people of this community that want to better themselves."

LMC also needs to pay attention to the bottom line while advancing its goals,

Bergan believes.

"We are the stewards of the taxpayer's dollars, and we need to be aware that, as we go forward,

we keep the college on a sound financial basis," he said.]

Debra Johnson

Johnson, of 757 Tucker Drive, St. Joseph, was appointed in June to replace longtime board member Renee Williams. She served from 2004-05 on the St. Joseph School Board.



JOHNSON

Johnson is an administrator for Lakeland Regional HealthCare, in Niles. She's been with Lakeland since 1983 and previously served as its director of nephrology, and psychiatric and support services, and executive director of its acute care unit.

She holds an MBA from Indiana Wesleyan University and a bachelor science degree in nursing from DePaul University.

Johnson is also a member of the Niles Chamber of Commerce, the Niles-Buchanan Rotary Club, the Niles Downtown Development Authority, and several professional nursing organizations.

Like the other candidates, Johnson sees herself as a passionate believer in education, and LMC's role in promoting its benefits within the area.

"I'm passionate about education because, without education, I wouldn't be here today," Johnson said, at the time of her appointment. "You never stop learning. As a community, we have a responsibility to

lead and guide young people of tomorrow because they're our future. We have to instill in them high qualities, and I believe this is a high quality institution. I believe in the local community college."

Attempts to reach Johnson for further comment were unsuccessful as of deadline.

Barbara James Norman

Norman, 66, of 75127 28th Ave., Covert, said she is running to promote the role of education in improving peoples' lives, and give local residents a voice in LMC policy.



NORMAN

"I'm a community activist. I advocate helping senior citizens, helping students. I feel that I can be of service to students in the LMC community," she said.

One example of Norman's philosophy is HELP (Higher Education Level Program), an organization that she started to assist area students in getting to college.

"We're losing so many students when they finish high school. I have, maybe, 20 success stories," she said.

Norman has three adult children by her late husband, Sylvester.

She attended Western Michigan University for three and a half years and majored in agriculture. She did not get a degree because she had to get involved in running her family's farm.

"I'm a third-generation owner of my blueberry farm, and I'm the fourth generation working the land," she said.

In keeping with her work, Norman serves on various agricultural bodies, such as the Michigan Technical Committee, which makes recommendations on conservation issues and programs.

"When new rules comes down from Washington, we decide whether that's useful or not in that area for us (local farmers)," she said.

She retired after a 22-year career with Covert Public Schools, where she served as transportation director and held other jobs.

Norman also served from 2008-13 on the Covert School Board, and served as president, vice president and trustee. She believes that her experiences on that level will prove helpful if she's elected to the LMC board.

"I'm a team player. Whatever is important to the people (serving on the board), in the goals they need to reach, I can help them reach them," she said.

Norman said LMC would benefit from her managerial, personal and policy-making experiences.

"I'm just really blessed, I think. I'm healthy, I'm active and I think I have quite a few more years (of service left)," she said.

Mary Jo Tomasini

Tomasini, 49, of 5924 Red Arrow Highway, Stevensville, is seeking a second, six-year term. She has served as board treasurer and trustee.

"I'm passionate about education and the role that community college plays in our community, how it affects business, and

how important it is to people's employment," she said.

Tomasini's husband is Fred Malawski. She attended LMC for two years, where her interests shifted from nursing, to marketing, but didn't get a degree.

She's also served on United Way and Junior Achievement in various roles, including campaign manager and board member.

"I'm serving because education is important to me, and a two-year community college has a really important role in our community, and that's why I give my time back," Tomasini said. "Whatever I do, I'm engaged."

She is the CEO of Competitive Edge, which produces promotional products, and is now marking its 22nd year.

Tomasini said she is also running again to give LMC a steady hand and raise awareness of its role in shaping the jobs of the future.

"There's so many jobs that just require a two-year degree," Tomasini said.

"People are starting to realize how important community colleges are, and the role that they play in either preparing people to move on, or giving them the skills to work at a more technical career."

If re-elected, Tomasini hopes to continue promoting LMC's growth in the community with programs that give residents the skills that they need to be competitive, she said.

One example is the nursing program.

LMC would like to offer a four-year degree, "because more and more hospitals aren't hiring two-year (degree) nurses anymore," she said.



TOMASINI