

# Seven to compete for school board seats

By Brenda Erdahl

Six candidates will vie for four seats with four-year terms on the Maple Lake School District School Board when voters go to cast their vote, election day, Tuesday, Nov. 3.

The one two-year seat that became available with Dave Schroeder's leaving will be pursued by Bill Neumann whose current four-year term on the board expires December 31, 2022. Schroeder announced earlier this year he was giving up his position on the board because he was moving out of the district.

Kaitlyn Helmbrecht, Jennifer Fritz, Stephanie Breimon and Colleen Carlson, along with incumbents Chris Paumen and Joe Paumen have all filed for candidacy.

The Messenger posed a series of questions to each candidate for the benefit of local voters. See their responses below:

## **Stephanie Breimon**

My name is Stephanie Breimon. My husband Scott and I live on a farm just outside of Maple Lake with our daughter Sydney (8th grade) and son Wyatt (7th grade). I grew up in Wright County and my family and I have lived in Maple Lake for the past ten years. I graduated with advanced degrees in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Minnesota, College of Science and Engineering. For the past 20 plus years I have worked for Medtronic and currently lead a large team of researchers, scientists, and engineers in new product development. I have spent the past 12 years working with elementary and high school students advancing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), and also sponsor an internship program for high school students across the twin cities each year.

*Why have you chosen to run for this office?*

I want to be an active member in the decisions made for our district. As a parent, I am passionate about not only the future of my children but

that of every student in our district. I would like voters to know that I am an individual who is dedicated, a hard worker, a team player but I am not afraid to ask the hard questions and seek solutions to unpopular problems. I am here to help solve problems for our district and our students, and I want to hear from parents, students, teachers, administrators, and the community to ensure excellence in our Maple Lake schools.

*What do you feel are the chief issues that will face our residents during your term in office?*

The primary issues that seem to be on everyone's mind are student achievement, enrollment, and facilities development. Many feel that those issues even feed into each other, with seemingly more students leaving the district for schools with more offerings or where "achievement is higher".

*What would be your goals during your time on school board?*

I hope to bring a fresh perspective to our school district and help facilitate meaningful community discourse to arrive at a shared vision of education in Maple Lake. In order to ensure that every student is career and/or college ready, we need to continually improve student achievement, narrow the gap for our at-risk students, maintain high graduation rates and pursue program excellence. My primary focus would be on ensuring that all Board decisions are supported by analysis, backed by sound principles, and focused on academic achievement.

*What, if anything, would you change about our schools/school board?*

I would encourage the school board to continue to try new things and implement new ideas. I would also like to see increased communication from the board so that parents and community members can remain engaged.

### **Colleen Carlson**

I started teaching in Maple Lake at the high school in 1998. I was a special education teacher for 17 years. I then left the district to pursue leadership opportunities with the St. Cloud School District and currently with Minnesota Connections Academy. I have two children, Emma is a member of the class of 2017, starting her senior year as an education

major at Moorhead State University. My youngest, Claire, has just started her junior year.

I believe I am qualified to serve on the school board for a number of reasons. I understand the perspectives involved in making decisions for a school community. I know school finance and I know which questions to ask.

*Why have you chosen to run for this office?*

I believe in Maple Lake Schools. Our community is centered around the good that happens in our schools. I believe in the people and the process.

*What do you feel are the chief issues that will face our residents during your term in office?*

Obviously, our health and the decisions being made regarding our health is top of mind right now. I am also focused on supporting an educational experience that promotes equity and an extracurricular experience that is focused on teamwork and growth.

*What would be your goals during your time on school board?*

I will be a student-centered board member. I will advocate for the kids...the actress, the athlete, the academic. I will work to see that every child will have access and opportunity.

*What, if anything, would you change about our schools/school board?*

I will need to spend time learning about why certain directions were taken before I can say what I'd like to help change.

## **Jennifer Fritz**

My husband, Steve, and I have lived in Maple Lake with our two daughters, Gabby and Grace, for 16 years. While the girls were in the elementary school, I was the treasurer for the PTA. I helped to chair the Halloween Carnival and facilitate the Family Game Nights.

I currently teach 3rd grade at Big Woods Elementary which is part of the St. Michael-Albertville School District. I believe being an educator in a local school district gives me a unique perspective and insight to the workings of a school.

*Why have you chosen to run for this office?*

I love being a teacher and working in education. I value collaborating with others, I am continually seeking out professional development

opportunities, and I am acutely aware of the impact I have on students and families. I imagine serving on the school board to be very similar. Being a part of something bigger than one's self and working together with others to help the ML District be even better is very appealing. *What do you feel are the chief issues that will face our residents during your term in office?*

Attracting and retaining highly skilled teachers and staff, keeping and attracting families, maintaining and keeping our building safe, and the funding to do these are going to be the main issues our district and residents face.

*What would be your goals during your time on school board?*

Students are at the center of every goal. With that in mind, we know that highly effective teachers and staff have a great impact on the emotional and academic growth of students. Therefore, one goal I have is to explore what ML can do to attract and retain such teachers and staff along with providing more professional development for our current teachers and staff. A second goal would be to explore how ML can keep and attract more families. Parents have more options when it comes to deciding where to send their children to school. We need to ask, what is unique to ML that we can build upon, what community resources can we utilize, what is ML lacking that we need to improve upon, and what classes aren't being offered that should? A third goal is to look at building improvements. What repairs need to be made and what technology needs to be added so that our students' physical and academic needs are being met?

*What, if anything, would you change about our schools/school board?*

Our school's first priority is to educate students. I would like to see academics and student learning take centerstage. I believe by focusing on growing a stronger academic program, we will attract and retain teachers and families.

### **Kaitlyn Helmbrecht**

I have lived in Maple Lake all my life. I graduated from Maple Lake High School. I am married to Billy and we have three children who all attend Maple Lake Elementary - Ethan 4th, Olivia 1st, and Linsey

Pre-K. I am the Director of Operations for Spectra Building Group, a commercial construction company. I am also the Head Gymnastics Coach during the winter season at Maple Lake High School.

*Why have you chosen to run for this office?*

This is something I have thought about for a few years, but the time was not quite right until this year. I am proud to live in Maple Lake and genuinely care about the Maple Lake community, including our amazing schools. My kids attend school in Maple Lake, and I want to help make positive decisions for them and for all students.

*What do you feel are the chief issues that will face our residents during your term in office?*

Enrollment numbers, increasing costs, and technology.

*What would be your goals during your time on school board?*

1. Keeping our students and staff safe
2. Ensuring that each child receives a high-quality education
3. To be open-minded and listen to what is important to our students, staff, and community

*What, if anything, would you change about our schools/school board?*

Good things are currently happening at our schools. It is my hope that as a board member, I can offer a new perspective when ideas and changes are needed.

## **Bill Neumann**

I am married to Renae my wife of 21 years. I have three children, Matt in his second year of college, Adam a senior in high school, and Natalie who is a junior in high school.

I am currently a member of the school board finishing up my fourth year on the board.

*Why have you chosen to run for this office?*

I was encouraged by a lot of people in the district to run for another term on the board. Also, with a new superintendent, I did not want to have a large turnover so that there would be some continuity.

*What do you feel are the chief issues that will face our residents during your term in office?*

I believe that one of our biggest challenges is to stabilize enrollment,

especially in the Covid 19 era.

*What would be your goals during your time on school board?*

As a board we have begun to make some changes in the past few years. I would like to see a continued effort to make this district attract and retain students.

### **Chris Paumen**

I was born and raised in Maple Lake. Graduated from Maple Lake High School in 1993. I am currently finishing my first term on the school board. In the past I have run a private company with approximately 100 employees and I currently own a development/management company. I have vast knowledge in management structure and the ability to solve corporate issues through strong TEAM collaboration.

*Why have you chosen to run for this office?*

As a current Board member, I understand the challenges we have encountered, solved and need to address. I believe I can bring leadership to the Team and would be able to help guide the district through the challenging times ahead.

*What do you feel are the chief issues that will face our residents during your term in office?*

There are two main issues I see. The first is guiding the district through this current pandemic which is filled with many unknowns. So far, the staff has done amazing and I believe together we will get through this troubling time. The second is enrollment. Even before the pandemic, enrollment has been falling. With falling enrollment, the district must come up with creative solutions that solve challenges with a small budget while maintaining an excellent educational system.

*What would be your goals during your time on school board?*

My goal is to strengthen and improve our district. I would like to see our school continue to be the model district for the surrounding area. I always believe we can improve and the “BEST never REST”

*What, if anything, would you change about our schools/school board?*

We just changed many leadership positions, so moving our focus should be on the development of a Strategic Plan. This plan will give the District a guide to develop goals that improve our district.

## **Joseph Paumen**

My name is Joe Paumen. I live in Maple Lake with my wife, Suzie, and my three children, Olivia, Nathan, and Ethan. I have lived in Maple Lake all my life and am a 1991 graduate of Maple Lake High School. Following high school, I pursued my education in Civil Engineering and Business Administration and am now working as a manager in Public Works at the City of Plymouth. Working as a Project Manager, I have had the opportunity to oversee many multimillion-dollar projects, all of which included managing limited budgets while still meeting resident expectations. Successful project management has included continual refinement of processes, and the need to explore new ways to improve efficiency. I believe that as a current member of the Maple Lake School Board I bring a unique perspective in these areas.

*Why have you chosen to run for this office?*

I have chosen to run for this office quite simply because I care a great deal for our school and our community. It is very important to me that we continue to develop a culture at our school that makes it an exceptional place to learn and work. The people of Maple Lake have never failed to step up in support of our school and I want to continue to be a leader in that effort.

*What do you feel are the chief issues that will face our residents during your term in office?*

The most immediate and obvious challenge our residents are facing with regard to our school is COVID 19 and the disruption it has caused. While many of the mandates we face regarding COVID 19 are out of our control at the local level, it is important that we as a school do everything we can to provide a high quality educational experience, and return to normal learning as soon as possible.

*What would be your goals during your time on school board?*

Enrollment numbers are still a challenge for Maple Lake Schools. My goal is to provide an exceptional educational experience at our school and to work with the Maple Lake City Council to ensure we are doing everything we can to entice people to move to our community and to enroll in our school.

*What, if anything, would you change about our schools/school board?*

I will try hard as a school board member to strike a balance between providing a high quality education, while remaining a good steward of the tax payer's dollars. I would like to see more feedback from the community on the areas we need to improve as well as the things we are doing well. There is always room for improvement.