



Open for Lunch 11:30AM-3:00PM Tuesday through Friday
 •• **Join our LUNCH CLUB... Call for details** ••
Lancaster Opera House Dinner Theatre performance at the end of May -
check our website for more information.
 4218 Walden Avenue • Lancaster • 684-2418 • Visit www.ripas.com for menus and events



Depew Bee

2015-03-19 / Front Page

‘Once a great school, always a great school’

Students will help select new mascot

by MARY BEST Reporter



School Board Vice President Patrick Uhteg, left, and President Kenneth Graber cast their votes to drop the district’s mascot of nearly 70 years. Photo by Chuck SkipperPurchase color photos at

Lancaster students will have a say in the choice of their new mascot, after the old nickname of nearly 70 years was dropped in a unanimous vote of the Lancaster Board of Education on Monday night.

After more than a year of discussion and deliberation, the board called a special meeting on short notice to address the mascot topic, drawing an estimated crowd of 650 to 700 people to William Street School.

Board President Kenneth Graber read the resolution written by Superintendent Michael Vallely, which resolved to immediately retire the current mascot and allow Vallely to lead a student-centered initiative to choose a new mascot. When the new logo is formally unveiled, the former mascot will be “honorably and respectfully retired.”

Where's the story?



2 Points Mentioned

Until a new mascot is named, the district's athletic teams will simply be referred to as "Lancaster."

Graber asked each of the board members to make a statement about their decision prior to voting. Before Trustee Michael Sage could begin speaking, the crowd erupted, urging the mascot's supporters to "turn their back on the board." Audience members also spent roughly two minutes accusing the board of bullying them.

"Are you all done acting like children now?" said Graber.

The jeering and interruptions continued throughout the meeting, although the board hadn't yet adopted the resolution.

Mary Jo Monnin and Karen Del Carlo, Lancaster alumnae, sat in the front row and immediately stood to face the back of the room, turning their backs to board members for the duration of the meeting.



Mary Jo Monnin and Karen Del Carlo stand with their backs to the board, a posture which continued for the duration of the meeting. Del Carlo made a crying gesture when Trustee Marie MacKay talked about how the mascot was hurtful toward Native Americans.



Hoyendahonh, whose English name is Al Parker, shakes hands with Trustee Bill Gallagher after the board unanimously voted to immediately retire the district's mascot. Photo by Julie HalmPurchase color photos at www.BeeNews.com

Trustee Bill Gallagher said he felt he couldn't tell his own children that skin color doesn't matter and then endorse a mascot that says otherwise.

"Some have said that we need to let the public decide on whether we are not to change the name of our sports and athletic teams," Gallagher said. "I would ask these people how the civil rights movements of the 1950s and '60s would've worked if we asked residents of the southern states to give equal rights to minorities."

Kim Nowak, the only trustee who is an alumna of the district, said that throughout the debate, the children were the forgotten party.

“Our days have come and gone while theirs are just beginning,” Nowak said. “This is about them, not about you.”

Nowak and fellow Trustee Wendy Buchert both acknowledged threats the board has received prior to making the decision, including not passing the budget and capital project.

Buchert said hurting the budget only hurts the district’s children and no good can come from them being in the center of the controversy.

“Let us move on and focus on more important things, like rallying together and getting proper funding from the state to support our teachers with fair, acceptable teacher evaluations,” Buchert said. “Please stand up in this unity and tell Gov. Cuomo enough is enough.”

Buchert’s comments received only silence from the crowd.

Trustee Marie MacKay, a 13-year veteran of the board, was unpopular with the crowd. She noted that keeping a mascot that isn’t favorable with neighboring communities can hurt the image of [Lancaster](#) and keep people away.

“The change is a correct decision, recognizing human rights and decency to all races,” MacKay said. “Once a great school, always a great school. We are proud to stand together for what is right.”

“The name of a school mascot shouldn’t be offensive to anyone,” said Patrick Uhteg, vice president of the board. “We are an educational institution and not a billionaire run football team. We have an obligation to set an example for the students of our school as well as the larger community of people who are looking in.”

Graber said the now-former mascot had been chosen by [Lancaster](#) football coaches in the early 1950s and was never officially adopted by the board.

“That was then, and now is now,” he said. “People, ethics and perceptions evolved. What was acceptable 70 years ago is clearly not acceptable today. It does harm people.”

He also spoke passionately about the threats the board received.

“If you want to harm the children of this district with a negative vote, that does not say much for



A police officer confronts a rowdy member of the crowd at Monday night’s special School Board meeting, which retired the district mascot.

you or your claimed love of this district,” Graber said. “I urge that you all, regardless of your opinion on the motion, join with us for the betterment of our district.

“This issue has diverted us from the real problems we face. We all respect traditions, spirit and pride, values that were proudly instilled in all of us regardless of who we are and where we come from,” he said. “It is Lancaster that deserves pride, not a particular word or symbol. Our history will never change.”

At the conclusion of Graber’s statement, he called for a vote by a show of hands in favor of the resolution. Thirty-six minutes after the meeting was called to order, the district’s mascot of more than half a century had been eliminated.

The loud displeasure from the mascot’s emotional supporters dissolved into an orderly exit, and various members of the community came forward to shake hands with the board.

Two Lancaster police officers were also present throughout the meeting and occasionally addressed and quieted members of the crowd.

As the meeting dispersed, Hoyendahonh, whose English name is Al Parker, the appointed Tonawanda Seneca Nation representative, said he felt good about the decision but the issue is far from over.

“Nobody wins here,” he said. “It concerns the kids here and at the boycotting schools. They’re all affected by this. Now we’re in the reconciliation.

How do we bring these kids back together since they’ve been separated and divided?”

Hoyendahonh also mentioned that he is glad the board didn’t put the issue to a public vote.

“We were outnumbered 20 to 1, but that’s not the point. Voting, polls and surveys don’t count,” he said. “You’ve got a population here in Lancaster with 0.2 [percent] native representation. How do you vote in any fairness?”

“We came here in peace,” he added. “We came in and quietly talked with the people, we sat down at the table to discuss these issues. We simply sat here, and we listened. And they listened to us, and I am most thankful for that.”

John Kane, a Mohawk and a resident of the Cattaraugus

Reservation, said he was proud of the board’s decision.

“I don’t think the vote was tough; I think the circumstances were tough,” Kane said. “They all voted their conscience. I think they knew what they had to do, and many of them have known for a while.”

No timeframe has been announced in regard to when the committee to choose a new mascot will be formed. Graber said it could be six months, even up to a year, before a new one is chosen. He believes letting the students decide will be a great way to bring the community together.

“I don’t think after tonight there’s going to be problems,” Graber said. “I know people are very passionate, but I think after it’s done, it’ll all come together. It’s not the word or the symbol that made this district, it’s the people and the things they did.”

(Editor Julie Halm contributed to this story.)

[Return to top](#)

