

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

When I recently watched the School Committee meeting, it seemed to me that some people had short memories. A lady talked about how nobody knew what was being used to clean carpets in the schools and the school superintendent said that he didn't know what the contractors use.

Then he admitted that he doesn't have maintenance schedules for any of the schools and he tried to make that sound normal by saying that Reading has never had schedules for the school buildings.

Well, I may be retired but I haven't forgotten Larry Moore, who was Director of Buildings and Grounds ten years ago or so, or Bill Pendergast before him. Both Bill and Larry had detailed maintenance schedules for each school. Larry had the foresight to start training programs for custodians where different people learned special areas of preventive maintenance

- oiling motors before they burn out, catching small plumbing problems before they got big, cleaning univent filters. We used to have 36 custodians back then and a floater custodian who filled in when someone was sick, training or doing maintenance beyond basic cleaning.

Both Larry and Bill worked from the angle that, if you do what needs to be done with the boilers or exhaust fans or univents regularly, then you don't have to replace them. It's just common sense. Larry and Bill treated the schools like they would their own homes.

After Larry and Bill, things changed. The custodial staff was reduced by 13 people. The way I figure it, the School Department doesn't want to spend money on maintenance anyway. It's not a priority any more. Now we have larger buildings and fewer custodians. School Committee lets the building go until things get so bad that they decide to have a feasibility study (or two) to "prove" it would be cheaper to

sell a school or tear it down than fix it up.

Then School Committee goes to Town Meeting and gets them to fund major repairs as a Capital Expenditure or bonds to rebuild the schools. This way, a lot of the true cost to us taxpayers doesn't show up under the yearly School Budget and the School Committee can keep bellyaching that we aren't spending as much per student as the towns around us. The true costs are hidden in the Town side (benefits, retirement) and extra money voted or bonded by Town Meeting. If you look at the whole picture, Reading really does spend a lot on education and pretty foolishly when it comes to the school buildings because they aren't regularly maintaining the systems.

As far as that lady trying to find out what cleaning chemicals were used in the schools goes, I have a hard time believing that a big school construction company would ignore 12 + calls from the superintendent for information about the carpet cleaners if the superintendent really wanted to know it. Material Safety Data Sheets are free from the source. You simply request them. I don't know why the construction company hasn't already been fined for not having that information on site.

And it seems to me that if our "take charge" superintendent really cared about school maintenance schedules, the facilities manager would have gotten them done his first month on the job last year and pushed to increase the number of custodi-



THE ORGANIZER of this spot, Judy Thrasher, re- friends and neighbors (l-r) Midge Lander and Jane Cu Adopt-An-Island spot at the intersection of Gleason and her memory.

ans so that people had time to do preventive maintenance. It may take more staff to do preventive maintenance but it sure costs the Town less in the long run.

When Larry and Bill were in charge of the school buildings, the Town didn't have as much money to spend but at least we tried to maintain what we had. We aren't even keeping up the schools we just finished building! But what the heck, it's only taxpayer money and there's still plenty where that came from.

Retired but still awake!

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neering and construction projects.

Pappastergion attended Northeastern University, where he received his Bachelor of Science Degree in Civil Engineering. He has been a Registered Professional Engineer in Massachusetts since 1984, as well as a Graduated Operator of Drinking Water Supply Facilities.

He has been a member of the Massachusetts Water Resources Institute.

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