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Not so wild about Harry

By **Barbara Taormina**
Friday, April 14, 2006

Sure, he can smile about it now, but late last month Rick Smith, the superintendent of schools in North Attleboro, wasn't laughing when a Boston TV news station reported he had been disciplined for having an affair with a school secretary and giving her a 29 percent pay raise.

Morning news anchor Ed Harding accidentally slipped. The story actually belonged to Harry Harutunian, the school superintendent in North Andover.

Harutunian, a Beverly resident and former assistant superintendent in Beverly, quit this week after the North Andover School Committee agreed it was best to make the scandal drift away with a \$187,000 payoff, or buyout of his contract. And people in North Andover weren't too thrilled with that decision.

"I think he should have paid us, just like he paid the secretary," sniffed one North Andover High student on her way to school the morning after the decision was announced.

"He's getting a \$187,000," moaned a customer who happened to catch the headline in a local paper in the downtown supermarket.

Former longtime School Committee member Diane Huster took a more practical view of it all.

"The School Committee absolutely did the right thing," says Huster. "It's settled, he's going out the door and we can move onward."

The reaction isn't much of a surprise, since a wave of anti-Harutunian sentiment has been building in North Andover for the past year or so. Although Harutunian managed to balance some tough school budgets over the past three years, talk off an override was starting to make its way around town. That had some of North Andover's anti-tax crusaders on edge.

Harutunian had also alienated some parents and school advocates by streamlining school meetings and debates. Some parents who actually enjoyed discussing issues like the school attendance policy for several hours on a Tuesday night felt they were being cut out of important school discussions and decisions.

And even the School Committee, which gave Harutunian a \$10,000 pay bonus last year, started backing away from the embattled super after theEagle-Tribune reported that he had racked up around 900 calls to the secretary on his school-issued cell phone from last August to December.

Some North Andover residents were peeved that the School Committee members chose to keep its talks with Harutunian under wraps. Members say they had no choice because it was a personnel issue.

"He doesn't want a lot of this stuff released," said School Committee Chairman Al Perry, who has recently taken some heat for rubber-stamping virtually everything Harutunian proposed. "He doesn't want any further disruption in the future."

That didn't seem to sit well with North Andover residents, who will probably be seeing some significant disruption to their school district as they try to hammer out a school budget without a superintendent, and as they join the race with dozens of other communities as they begin a search for Harutunin's replacement.

As for Rick Smith in North Attleboro, he was grateful that a lot of people called to say they knew it was all a big mistake.

Still, Smith didn't take any chances. He used the school district's reverse telephone system to leave a message with every parent that the television station had the wrong superintendent.

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