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Town loses third principal this year

By Grace Rubenstein

Staff Writer

NORTH ANDOVER -- Middle School Principal Lou R. Reste surprised parents and students by announcing he plans to retire at the end of this school year.

Reste's departure is the third this year for the district, which has already begun its search to replace retiring principals Bette Ann Coyle of the Atkinson School and Joan Shea-Desmond of the Kittredge School.

Reste, 56 -- who came to North Andover in 1999 from a job as principal of Timberlane Middle School in New Hampshire -- said he is retiring to move back to the South Carolina shore where he and his wife lived for 10 years.

He and his wife always intended to go south again, and when his wife's parents recently agreed to go with them they decided to take the opportunity while her aging parents are still well enough to move. On his desk is a photograph of the dock -- stretching out into the ocean -- outside the back door of his home in South Carolina.

Reste, who began his career 35 years ago as an elementary, middle and high school teacher, said he will miss North Andover Middle School -- especially the children -- but he is happy.

"I'm excited," he said. "To me, this isn't an end, it's a beginning."

Superintendent Harry K. Harutunian said Reste, Coyle and Shea-Desmond are all "good principals," and all have chosen to leave of their own accord. He said all three retirements have stemmed from the principals' personal life choices, not any quarrel with his administration, which began last July.

Harutunian plans to start advertising for Reste's position immediately, and said he hopes North Andover's reputation and a salary offer of \$93,000 to \$98,000 -- Reste makes \$92,600 -- will draw strong applicants.

When he arrived in North Andover, Reste came into a school reeling from two student suicides the previous year and put his energy into healing the social environment, he said. He focused less on academics because he felt they were already strong, although he thinks the school still needs to improve its math program.

Gregg Pascoe, who teaches sixth-grade science and math, said Reste has succeeded at healing the school and making it a place people are happy to come to each day.

"When you walked down the hall (before) you could feel the tension in the air," Pascoe said. "Since (Reste) has been here, it's like sunshine."

Ann M. Lu, who has had four children go through the school, said Reste has "the emotional interests of the kids at heart," and parent involvement has grown significantly during his tenure.

"Many people do say -- and they're probably right -- that we should be a little more academically rigorous in our middle school, but I think he was working on those things, too," Lu said. "As far as making that middle school a more parent-friendly place and a more kid-friendly place, he's done a lot."

Reste said he hopes to keep working a bit, possibly teaching courses in education and school administration at the Buford campus of the University of South Carolina. Then again, he said, "I could also sit at the end of the dock and shrimp and crab and fish."

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