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Easthampton School Committee chair steps down

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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Friday, June 5, 2009

EASTHAMPTON - School Committee Chairman Thomas Brown will shake the hands of graduating Easthampton High School students for the last time tonight, a tradition he describes as the "proudest moment" in the eight years he's served on the committee.

"I'm always impressed with the caliber of students," said Brown, 55, who announced this week that he will not seek a fifth term on the School Committee in November.

One message he continually tells students in his graduation remarks is to remember Easthampton and give back to the community.

A 1972 Easthampton High School graduate and Easthampton resident for 47 years, Brown joined the committee in 2001 and was elected chairman in 2003.

As chairman, Brown runs School Committee meetings and is intimately involved in contract negotiations. Two three-year contracts were negotiated for the four school unions during Brown's tenure.

"It's been my privilege and honor to serve on the committee for eight years," Brown said. "But I felt it was time to give the opportunity to someone else to serve in this capacity."

Superintendent of Schools Deborah Carter said Brown brings a strong community connection to the table.

"He's a well-respected employee and very active member of the community," Carter said. "He comes with that level of respect."

Carter encouraged Brown to join the committee when she worked with him on a business advisory committee as principal of Easthampton High School in the late #90s. The committee's goal was to help students gain job-related skills through work study. Carter and Brown were emcees for fashion shows, among other fundraisers.

"He had a passion for the school system - he cared as a citizen that the schools were adequately funded and the school buildings were taken care of," Carter said. "It was easy to carry that passion over to a situation where he would be a decision-maker."

Returning funds to the city last year and creating the Finance Subcommittee are highlights in Brown's tenure, he said. Prior to the subcommittee, school finances were delegated to the business manager.

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"It used to be this big secret," he said. "We basically opened the books and created significant financial transparency with the city."

Brown will continue to serve on the Easthampton School Building Committee.

"I won't be too far away from the schools," said Brown, who has two granddaughters in Center Elementary School and White Brook Middle School.

Catherine Baum can be reached at cbaum@gazettenet.com.

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The title to article in the paper does not match what is published in the article. Did Mr Brown resign? Did he submit a letter of resignation and is stepping down before his term expires? The article seems to state that he has chosen not to run for re-election in the fall but will continue to serve on the school committee until the the new board takes over in January.

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