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DEBT CUTS DEEP
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Since 2001: A news odyssey

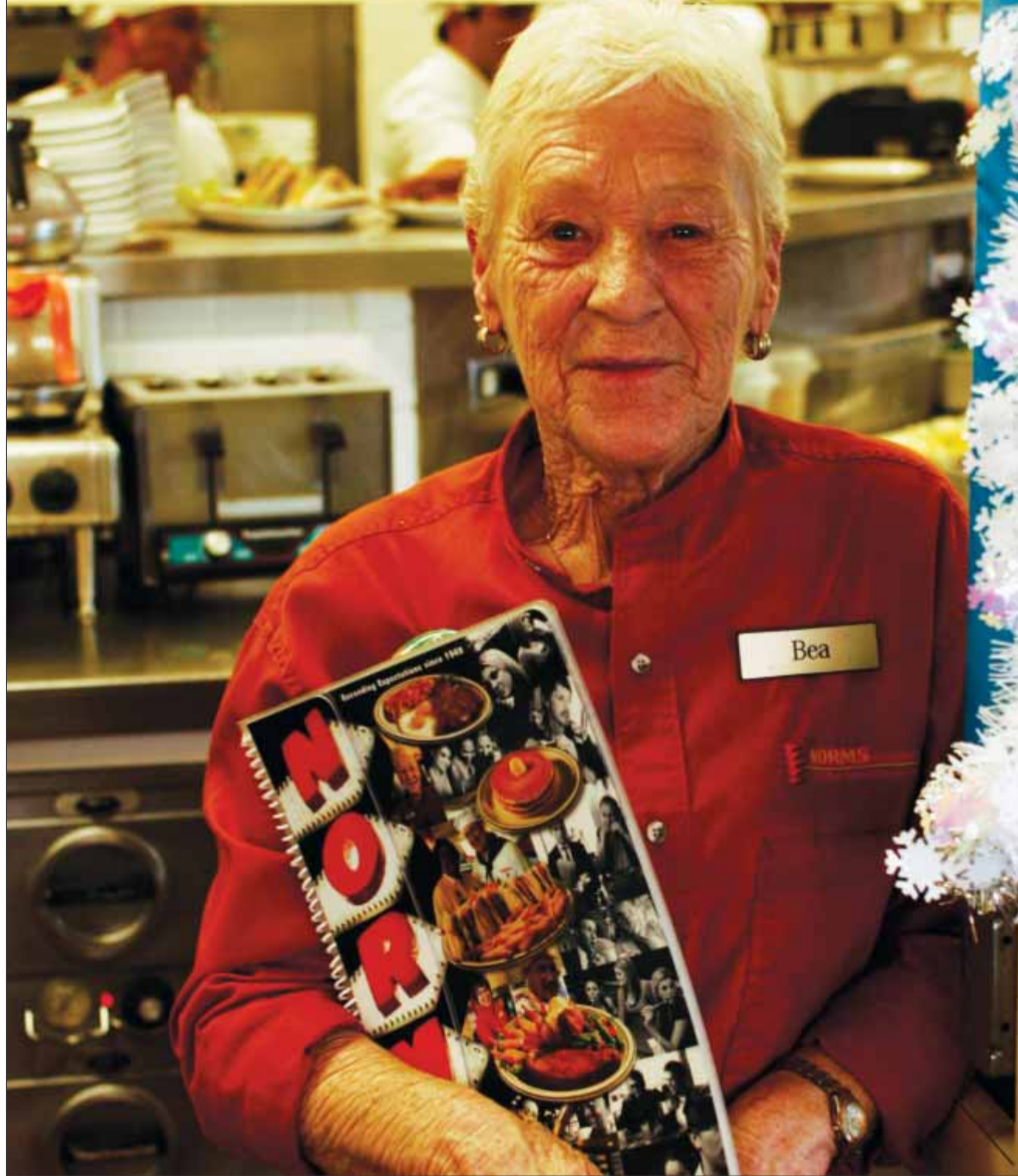
THE DOUBLE TIME ISSUE

COMMUNITY PROFILES

CLOCKING OUT

Local waitress calls it a career after years of service

STORY BY MELODY HANATANI PAGE 12



Brandon Wise news@smdp.com

LAST ORDER OF BUSINESS: Bea Halahan, a fixture in Santa Monica after working 35 years as a waitress, is hanging up her apron Wednesday at Norm's, where her picture appears on the front of the restaurant's menu. Halahan moved to Santa Monica in 1972.

YEAR IN REVIEW



File photo

WAITING TO FLUTTER: McKinley Elementary students line up to perform a butterfly dance on International Day in June. The school marked its 100th anniversary in 2007.

SMMUSD experienced a busy year

District has seen its share of noteworthy occurrences

BY MELODY HANATANI | Daily Press Staff Writer

SMMUSD HDQTRS The year was a roller coaster of highs and lows for the public school district, from Malibu High School's placement among the top 100 high schools in the country to the unprecedented level of public scrutiny on the conduct of district officials.

The year 2007 was marked by advancements in initiatives to renovate the district's aging facilities, fiscal deficit concerns and, much like last year, a revolving door of changes in personnel.


Perhaps one of the biggest issues that captured headlines in 2007 was the departure of former Chief Financial Officer Winston Braham, whose resignation in November 2006 from the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District sparked a chain reaction of events this year, starting with concerns over a non-disclosure clause in the former senior staffer's settlement agreement that kept him tight-lipped for months about the district's financial issues.


That revelation fueled rumors that Braham left after more than two years because he disagreed with the financial


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**ALL PROPOSALS ARE DUE NO LATER THAN
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Changes still in store

FROM YEAR IN REVIEW PAGE 1

direction in which the district was headed, declining late last year to certify a proposed teacher salary raise in the AB1200, a document that looks at the impacts of a collective bargaining agreement on the district's finances. A financial management team subsequently reviewed the district and found it could sustain a 5-percent teacher salary raise.

A few months later, after the cloud of suspicion over the district had thickened, the so-called gag order was lifted and Braham spoke at a City Council meeting about the circumstances surrounding his departure, the long-awaited disclosure revealed very little.

"The accusations with our CFO ended up nowhere," said Board of Education President Oscar de la Torre last week. "It was a lot of wasted time and energy dealing with issues not related to our core mission of providing a quality public education to all."

WHAT A SUCCESS

District officials were all smiles when Malibu High School was named as one of the best high schools in the country by U.S. News & World Report late last month, ranked 98th in the publication's inaugural high school rankings.

"It's recognition of work everyone is doing here at Malibu and how hard everyone is working," said Malibu Principal Mark Kelly, when the rankings came out on Nov. 30.

The high school was recognized for the student body's overall achievement in state testing, its efforts in closing the achievement gap between the most and least disadvantaged students and success rate in Advanced Placement courses.

The report by U.S. News & World Report, known for its annual list of the top colleges and graduate schools, found that 66 percent of the senior class at MHS has taken at least one Advanced Placement course in high school, while more than 55 percent has passed at least one AP test.

School administrators attributed the success to the parents and the teachers.

In February, five elementary and middle school teachers in the district received certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards — the highest such honor that a teacher can receive. The inductees included two science teachers at Lincoln Middle School, a social studies teacher at Malibu High School, a kindergarten teacher at Point Dume Marine Science School and the principal of Will Rogers Learning Community, Irma Lyons. They joined the 49 other teachers in the district that have gone through a rigorous program to receive the certification.

"I felt validated that I am doing good things," said Ken Harris, a kindergarten and first grade teacher at the Point Dume school.

The successes were felt in the athletics level.

All of the winter teams in the 2006-07 and fall teams in the 2007-08 school year went on to postseason play, including the football team, whose coach, Zach Cuda, took the team to the CIF playoffs for the first time at the helm of the Vikings. The team lost in the first round of the playoffs to Palos Verdes High School, 34-20.

In June, the Vikings baseball team went on to play in the CIF Division IV Championship game against Covina Charter Oak at Dodger Stadium, attempting to win their first title in more than 20 years. The team came up short, losing 7-1.

CHANGING FACES

With the end of one era comes the beginning of another, even though it was short-lived.

Two months after Braham resigned, the former chief financial officer of the Glendale Unified School District was called out of retirement.

Dr. Stephen Hodgson, who was recommended to Superintendent Dianne Talarico by several associates, was appointed to serve as the interim chief financial officer, guiding the district during a time when the budget for the 2007-08 school year was projected to be \$3 million.

"A person of his caliber will be a great compliment to the district's dedicated financial team," Talarico said in January when Hodgson was appointed.

Though his term was effective through June 30, giving the superintendent time to find a permanent replacement, Hodgson stayed on through much of 2007, saying good-bye just a few weeks ago.

He was replaced by Janece Maez, who left the Pleasant Valley School District, where she served as the assistant superintendent of fiscal services, to take on the budgetary duties in Santa Monica-Malibu.

"I'm ready to make a career step that moves me up," Maez said in September.



File photo

ACTIVE: Students from New Roads School take to the streets in January to protest President Bush's plans for a troop surge in Iraq. Protests by students were a frequent occurrence in 2007.

A vacant position from former Superintendent John Deasy's era, the chief academic officer was filled by Dr. Chung "Sally" Chou, replacing Donna Muncey, who left with Deasy in 2006 when he became the superintendent Prince George's County Public Schools in Maryland.

The personnel changes extended to the Board of Education when, in February, Emily Bloomfield, who was just three months into her second term, announced her family was moving to the East Coast, where her husband had just accepted a job in a strategic management firm.

"I feel very rooted here ... it's where two of my three children were born," Bloomfield said in February.

The seventh seat on the board was left vacant for a few weeks until Ralph Mechur, a Santa Monica architect and long-time public education advocate, was appointed to serve until the next general election in November 2008, even though Bloomfield's term will not expire until 2010. Mechur has expressed interest in running in 2008.

The board might have to search for another new face if board member Kathy Wisnicki wins a seat on the Malibu City Council in April. The Malibu resident and former Board of Education president announced last week her candidacy for the City Council. The school board member is up for reelection in 2008.

A DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

After nearly two years of planning and outreach, a draft of the Facilities Master Plan (FMP) — a 20-year outline for the construction, renovation and maintenance of the public schools — was released in June.

The plan was compiled by a project team consisting of consultants from Harley Ellis Devereaux, Concordia and Sidewalk Studio, as well as district staff and members of the community. The FMP includes — on a chapter-by-chapter basis — a specific plan for each school.

Tied into the Facilities Master Plan was a \$268 million bond measure that passed in November 2006, a large pot of money that will enable the community to see bits and pieces of the FMP implemented in the next few years.

But along with money came controversy, when in October, the Samohi community lobbied district staff to increase the Measure BB allocation to the high school from a proposed \$38.4 million to \$57 million. At its October meeting, the board was set to approve a staff recommendation to allocate \$38.4 million to Samohi and \$27.5 million to Malibu High School, but just days before the meeting, the Measure BB District Advisory Committee presented an alternate suggestion to increase Samohi's share to \$57 million, while decreasing Malibu's to \$13.5 million.

The board voted to approve the advisory committee's proposal, angering Malibu parents.

This led to a renewed call to split the district.

"I am cautiously optimistic that the school board will want to do what's right for both cities and will ask the county to do their analysis so that we can find out whether this would be a viable alternative to what we have now in this district," said Malibu resident Laura Rosenthal last month. "We don't want this to happen if it's not good for both cities."

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