

## **A newsmaker you should know: North Strabane man knows courtrooms, classrooms**

November 29, 2012 5:01 am

By Dave Zuchowski /

As part-time assistant district attorney for Washington County and a part-time attorney with a private practice, Joseph M. Zupancic is familiar with courtroom proceedings.

But as a member of the Canon-McMillan school board as well as a board member of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, the North Strabane man is also familiar with what goes on in the classrooms across the state.

On Oct. 17, he and two other Southwestern Pennsylvania educators were honored by the PSBA with the Master School Board accreditation at the organization's conference in Hershey.

Mr. Zupancic, 43, along with Tom McGough of the Plum school board and Maureen Grosheider of the North Allegheny school board, were three of only seven recipients to receive the accreditation in Pennsylvania this year and three of only 30 individuals to have received the honor since the PSBA initiated the accreditation in 2007.

About a dozen years ago, Mr. Zupancic first got involved with public education when he worked the law firm of Bassi McCune & Vreeland, solicitors for Charleroi Area School District. In 2007, he got even more involved when he was elected to the Canon-McMillan school board.

In January he became a member of the PSBA and is responsible for coordinating the legislative and advocacy efforts of the school boards in the organization's Southwest Region Three, made up of Washington, Westmoreland, Greene and Fayette counties.

"One of the issues I've been a very vocal advocate for is legislation governing cyber charter education," he said. "Another issue I'm concerned about is making the school boards more transparent and having everything we do come under the scrutiny of the media and public."

Last year, he considered making application for the master accreditation, but was too busy with his law practice. But in May, he initiated the application by writing eight essays and submitting four letters of recommendation from three school board members and superintendent, Michael Daniels.

"The application process is very lengthy and involves a lot of essay work," said Shauna D'Alessandro, a member of the West Jefferson Hills school board and PSBA member who won the master accreditation in 2007, the first year it was initiated.

Among other qualifications, applicants have to demonstrate they've put in 100 hours of professional development in many areas of education and show how they've used the training. At the time he made application, Mr. Zupancic had already accumulated 137 hours of professional development.

Part of his work as assistant district attorney involves going out to schools to make students, teachers administrators and law enforcement officers aware of prescription drug abuse.

"About 90 percent of those who get hooked on hard drugs start off with prescriptive drugs," he said.

A Harvard university graduate, Mr. Zupancic said he graduated on the same day in June 1991 that President Barack Obama graduated from Harvard Law School.

"I remember asking myself at commencement if any of the graduates would ever go on to become president," he said.

Currently, most of Mr. Zupancic's time is taken up with his work, his family and attending "every school sporting event." He also likes to fish, especially for halibut in Alaska. He and his father, Joseph Sr., have made two fishing trips north, and their exploits were featured in a two page spread in "Alaska Magazine."

"My future goal for the Canon McMillan School District is to have it become the premier district in the region," he said. "When I first came on the board, we had a lot of fiscal problems, which have since been addressed.

"Up until last year, we were the only school district in the county to be recognized nationally as a Blue Ribbon Elementary school [for First Street Elementary in 2008 and Wylandville Elementary in 2010]. I recently saw a sign near the entrance to a new housing development that mentioned its inclusion in our school district. I was proud to see that our schools are a selling point for the developers."

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First Published November 29, 2012 5:00 am