

3 principals ready for new school year

Pfaff, Sixth Grade Center and Strayer each has new leader.

By Gary Weckselblatt

The Quakertown Community School District will have new leaders in three schools when classes begin on September 4. All were administrators in Quakertown schools before. The new principals are Dr. Orathia Bradley at Pfaff Elementary School, Dr. Jennifer Bubser at Strayer Middle School, and K. Eric Thompson at the Sixth Grade Center.

Bradley, principal at Tohickon Valley Elementary since 2015, replaces Thompson, who had been at Pfaff since 2014. Bubser takes over for Derek Peiffer, who left QCSD to become principal at St. Thomas More Church in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Allentown. She had been Strayer's assistant principal.

The moves, including the promotion of Kim Finnerty to assistant principal at Strayer, give the district a principal at each school after a year of being short-



K. Eric Thompson, left, moves from Pfaff Elementary School to the Sixth Grade Center, while Dr. Orathia Bradley shifts from Tohickon Valley to Pfaff for the 2018-19 school year.



handed, as Quakertown Elementary principal Anita Serge and high school assistant principal Karen Shanton were not replaced last summer. Peiffer agreed to double up as principal of both Strayer and the SGC, with the aid of Chris Roth, a Teacher On Special Assignment, handling the day to day role of administrator at the SGC.

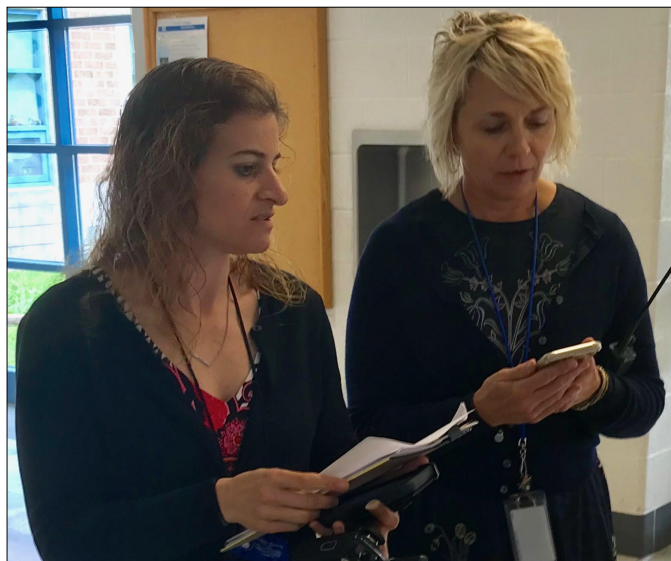
Last year's closing of Milford Middle School and the closing of TVES in June, part of a two-year budget strategy to close the structural deficit, enabled the district to bite the bullet for a year on administrative personnel and work with less than what was needed.

"That strategic plan has worked out perfectly from a financial perspective though the restructuring had an emotional toll," Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner said. "Our community should feel very confident with the wonderful leaders in place at each school to make sure our buildings run properly and help our students succeed."

Besides Bradley, Bubser and Thompson, the district's veteran principals are David Finnerty at the high school, Scott Godshalk at Neidig, Adam Schmucker at Trumbauersville, Michael Zackon at Quakertown, and Nicole Zuerblis at Richland.

With the closing of TVES, Bradley is excited to move to Pfaff, where many of her former students will be attend-

Strayer Middle School will have a new principal this year as Dr. Jennifer Bubser, at left in photo, replaces Derek Peiffer. Kim Finnerty, at right, takes over as vice principal.



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ing. Pfaff, which had 440 students last year, is expected to acquire approximately 135 of TV's 300 students. With that in mind, Bradley said she will be promoting a new theme for the school year: "There's no place like Pfaff!"

"It's nice to be coming to a beautiful school with a history of excellence and a positive school culture," she said. "Tohickon Valley was a really positive place, so this is going to be a happy marriage."

"My goal is to continue the excellence Pfaff has already known, and help facilitate the changes with the addition of Tohickon Valley students. The unknown can be scary, but it can be awesome, too. We'll embrace the changes, and do so in a positive way."

Bradley, who has two master's degrees from Cheyney University and a doctorate from Immaculata University, taught seventh grade English in New Jersey. She has been an administrator at the elementary, middle and high school levels. "It gives me a different lens than some people have," she said of the experiences.

"I'm committed to partnerships with the Pfaff community," she said. "Pfaff will continue to be a wonderful place to live, to work, and go to school."

Bubser, who described Peiffer as a "mentor for life," said she is "blessed" to work with the Strayer teachers and support staff who she described as "top notch."

A graduate of Upper Dublin High School, Bubser received an athletic scholarship to the University of Toledo. She achieved her masters and doctorate at Temple. In QCSD since 1998, Bubser started as a health and physical education teacher at Neidig, and was the district's K-12 department coordinator and Milford's track coach.

When Harner promoted her to principal and said he wanted her at Strayer, "that feeling was pretty special," she



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Dr. Bill Harner,
Quakertown superintendent

said. "Being the principal of a middle school is an absolute bonus. Middle school is the place to be. There's never a dull moment with the kids at this level. They're such unique people. They're going to offer something to this world, and maybe something I say will have a lasting contribution."

She said her focus for students is to help make their middle school time "a positive experience while increasing their academic scores and give them some tools and strategies to help them put forth their best effort. This is a very social and emotional time in their lives, and we're going to help them with that."

Bubser added that she's excited to have Finnerty as her vice principal. "Kim has such a big heart," she said. "For her, it's all about the kids, and building strong relationships. We're on the same page. Our vision is to move Strayer forward."

Before becoming Pfaff's principal in 2014, Thompson had spent most of his career at the secondary level, beginning as a seventh-grade history teacher in the Downingtown Area School District, then as a high school assistant principal in the Warwick School District and as the assistant principal at Strayer from 2011 to 2014. He's excited to be back guiding students at that educational level.

"I love my kids at Pfaff. I love my adults at Pfaff," he said. "Their singular purpose is to meet the needs of the kids sitting in front of them. But I'm excited for the challenge of coming back to this specific middle school situation. I'm aware of only one other place in state that has a Sixth Grade Center. What an opportunity."

The SGC is about to begin its second year of operation. Before then, it was the Freshmen Center. When Strayer added Milford's students last year, sixth graders moved to a different school and the newly renovated high school added ninth graders.

"We need to build a strong parent-teacher organization like we had at Pfaff so everyone can recognize what a special place this is," Thompson said. "This building has an appropriate name, as it's the center of the community. You can call it the bridge to take students from the elementary level to the secondary level, and to achieve at very high levels."

During the spring, fifth graders from all QCSD elementary schools heard from Thompson during a visit to the SGC. "This is the class of 2025," he told them. "You are all together. You'll be together for the next seven years. This is our chance to build this team, build this class. We're excited to welcome these students here, to bring essentially six different communities together into one community here."

Thompson said he is "passionate about supporting kids, helping them to learn and grow. We are in a relationship business. Relationships matter here, staff and students, administrators and students, administrators and families. We're all connected here. I'm looking to earn the trust of these families and students because we are committed to support their students."

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