

Saskatchewan School Boards Association Award of Distinction Nominee: Rod Luhning

Nomination

The Prairie Valley School Division Board of Education is honoured to nominate former trustee and Board Chair, Rod Luhning, for the 2015 SSBA Award of Distinction.

Background

Rod Luhning was a trustee for 18 years. Eighteen years that spanned the course of two decades (and two millenniums) and included terms on three different Boards of Education - two of which he helped to create. His leadership skills were in demand early on and throughout: he was Board Chair for 15 of the 18 years he served. With a clear understanding of what that role demanded and the responsibility it carried, he worked tirelessly and fearlessly in a challenging and ever-changing environment.

Rod was elected to Buffalo Plains Board of Education in 1991. His time in office can be characterized as a period of dynamic changes in the provincial education sector. January 2004 saw the legal establishment of Qu'Appelle Valley School Division - the result of a multi-year process that achieved the voluntary amalgamation of Cupar, Indian Head, and Buffalo Plains School divisions.

On the heels of voluntary amalgamation, provincially mandated amalgamation brought the still-new Qu'Appelle Valley and Aspen Grove school divisions, portions of Prairie View SD and the consolidated school divisions of Gray, Wilcox, Estlin, Pense and Grand Coulee together to form Prairie Valley School Division. Within a five-year span, 12 rural school divisions were reduced to one: Prairie Valley School Division.

The elimination of the ability of Boards of Education to levy and collect local property taxes and the subsequent introduction of a new funding redistribution model occurred within Rod's tenure, as well.

Prairie Valley School Division:

"Prairie Valley is an entirely rural school division. That affects how we deliver our services, but it shouldn't affect how well we deliver those services or how well prepared our students are for future education and career opportunities"

- Rod Luhning, Regina Leader Post Op-Ed, April 2007

At the time of establishment, PVSD operated 48 schools serving approximately 8400 students within its jurisdiction. Today:

- Number of Schools: 39 in 32 school communities
- Number of students: Approximately 8,100
- Prairie Valley spans a geographic area from Regina Beach and Bethune to the west, to Kelliher and Lipton to the north, Milestone, Sedley and Montmartre to the south and Whitewood and Kennedy-Langbank to the east.
- Geographic Area 27,798 sq. km
- School Configurations: two Hutterian K-12 schools, five K-6 schools, one K-7 school, twelve K-8 schools, one K-9 school, eleven K-12 schools, four grade 7-12 schools, one grade 8-12 school and two grade 9-12 schools. Prekindergarten is also offered in certain schools. French Immersion programming is offered and continues to grow in Ecole White City School and Lumsden Elementary School.
- Fifteen First Nations are located within or in close proximity to the division: Piapot, Muscowpetung, Pasqua, Standing Buffalo, Little Black Bear, Okanese, Star Blanket, Peepeekisis, Muskowekwan, Carry-the-Kettle, Sakimay, Cowessess, Kahkewistahaw, Ochapowace, and Pheasant Rump.
- There are two Hutterite schools in the division: Arm River and Lajord
- Prairie Valley offers Prekindergarten at Balcarres Community School, Broadview School, Fort Qu'Appelle Elementary School, Grenfell Elementary School, Indian Head Elementary School, Kelliher School, Lipton School, Lumsden Elementary School, Pilot Butte School and Whitewood School.

Qu'Appelle Valley School Division

Number of Schools: 23 Number of Students: approx. 4,700

Buffalo Plains School Division

Number of Schools: 12 Number of Students: approx. 3,300

Rationale

*“We will continue to focus our energies and choices on
what is best for student learning”*

– Rod Luhning, *InTouch* Prairie Valley School Division Newsletter, Fall 2008

"I have known Rod and his family most of my life. Rod was a passionate defender and advocate for education in the Lumsden district for many years. He always put the interest of students at the forefront. This certainly led to some interesting discussions at the LINC table. Rod played a very prominent role in two amalgamations and all the negotiations around the creation of both Qu'appelle Valley and Prairie Valley School divisions. I always knew Rod had the best interests of students at heart and always knew him to be honest and trustworthy to a fault. Rod has always been a leader, captain of volleyball and basketball teams in high school, long time baseball player and minor baseball coach. A very worthy award recipient for his many years of dedicated service to the various school divisions."

- Verne Barber Vice President PVTA; Past President PVTA; Past PVTA LINC Chair

Service to School Division:

Detailing Rod's committee membership and contribution over his 18 years as trustee is close to impossible; at best, we'll be highlighting.

Voice and Collaboration are important at any time but especially critical in times of change. Rod ensured that opportunities for community, staff and student voice were available throughout the school division's work. Examples: Calendar Review (& the establishment of the 310 Calendar Model used today); the resulting ongoing "Calendar Committee" that sets the annual academic calendar based upon the principles established during the calendar review; Program Review; School Review; Long Term Facilities Renewal Plan; Student Senates; Delegations Policy and Strategic Planning.

Rod was a member of our LINC Bargaining Committee throughout his time as a trustee.

Rod advocated for all students to have equitable opportunities - not just the students from within his home community/subdivision. Rod always advocated for every student to have the opportunities and resources for them to discover their full potential. Equitable opportunities meant access to not only academic programming but to programming in the Arts, PAA, Extra & Co-curricular; Supports for Students with Intensive & Diverse Needs; and enrichment opportunities.

Being a board chair requires dedication, commitment - often putting Board work before your own livelihood (in Rod's case farming), family, and unfortunately sometimes health. Strong leadership skills are essential for a Board Chair and that is especially true when venturing through a difficult period (example: amalgamation or school closure). Always the voice of reason, Rod kept the ship upright and on course in the midst of every storm.

Service to Provincial Education:

"Rod played a critical leadership role in bringing the rural perspective to the formation of the Public Boards Caucus and subsequent Public Section"

- Bert de Gooijer, PVSD Board Member; Chair Public Section, SSBA

Public Section: The road to establishing a "Public Boards Section" was long and at times bumpy. Rod was a critical navigator on the journey. In 2004, rural trustees felt that establishing a **Rural Caucus** would provide a structured opportunity for Rural Boards to discuss their experiences and issues and to support their representative on the provincial executive. Rod was elected Co-Chair. The 2005 amalgamation of boards blurred the lines between the rural and urban caucuses; discussions began about the possibility of forming a Public Boards Caucus. In March of 2006, an organizational meeting of the **Public Boards Caucus** was held and Rod was elected Vice Chair.

SSBA Executive: Rod was elected to the provincial executive of the SSTA/SSBA in 1994-95, 1995-96, 2001-02 and 2002-03. In the fall of 2003, Rod, recognizing the work ahead due to the voluntary amalgamation of Buffalo Plains, Cupar and Indian Head School divisions, decided to not seek re-election and instead dedicated himself to the newly established Qu'Appelle Valley School Division. His support for the provincial association never wavered.

Educations Relations Board: appointed by the SSBA Executive and confirmed by Order in Council as the SSBA representative 2005-2009

University of Regina Senate: appointed by the SSBA Executive to serve as the SSBA representative for two terms.

Various other committees: Rod served on numerous working committees provincially ranging from the 1996 Driver Education Advisory Committee, Policy Guidelines regarding the Administration of Medications and Other Related Services in Schools, to the Education Finance Working Advisory Group in 2010 whose principles remain foundational to education funding advocacy today (Sufficiency, Autonomy, Balance, Involvement, Predictability, Reciprocal Accountability, Sustainability and Transparency)

Other Provincial Education Related Committees:

- Saskatchewan High School Athletics Executive Member
- Saskatchewan Nutritional Advisory Council for Kids (SNACK) Council Member

Other Service to Community:

In addition to his service to school boards, Rod was a councilor on the Rural Municipality of Lumsden from 1991-1996 - serving as Reeve for 3 of those years.

Rod's commitment to ensuring kids have a wide range of opportunities included many years of coaching sports in his community (Softball, baseball and hockey) and passionate community supporter of Band and Music programming.

He was the recipient of a Saskatchewan Commemorative medal (Saskatchewan Centennial) for significant contributions to the province.

The Man - The Leader

Rod, a self-confessed life-long learner, exemplifies the school division's vision - *"Leadership in Learning and Life"*. He received his BScAdv from the University of Saskatchewan in 1974. Rod returned to University - completing his Master's Certificate in Public Administration from the University of Regina in 2010.

Rod leads by example and will not ask anyone to do more than he is willing to do himself. He can be described as unflappable and steady. He is a man of great personal integrity and commitment. He excels at governance - understanding the delicate balance between the role of the board and that of CEO; seeking consensus while honouring differing opinions and positions; and being guided by sound data and fair policy.

Rod is a leader of leaders - encouraging fellow board members to participate in professional development opportunities and get involved in committees, showing them how to advocate for and help to shape the education sector locally and provincially, and challenging them to embrace new leadership opportunities locally, provincially and nationally. Three of Rod's PVSD colleagues have accepted that challenge and have / are leading provincially.

"Without Rod Lunning, I would not be the trustee I am today."

- Sandi Urban-Hall PVSD Board Member; past President SSBA and CSBA

Many trustees share the importance of Rod's mentorship on their own journey as a trustee. Rod's convictions that the position of School Board Member is one of trust; the importance of maintaining that public trust; of dedicating yourself to the role; of always seeking to govern better and always keeping student learning at the forefront was passed to the trustees that joined him at the board table.

"Rod was an inspiring leader. As a new trustee, he instilled in me the importance of doing the job well, always coming prepared for meetings, having read everything thoroughly, given deep thought about the information ahead of time and being prepared to ask relevant questions. Rod's high standards and dedication often came at a cost to his own livelihood and personal life but he did it anyway because he was elected to serve. He took his commitment to the students selflessly and seriously. He was always one to check in with board members after a long tough day and his sense of humor was always appreciated. Rod is a man of character in every sense of the word."

- Janet Kotylak PVSD Board Chair; Southern Constituency Rep SSBA Executive

As we conclude the "Year of the Trustee" and looking back over the 100 years of the Association's history, PVSD is also looking back at its 10 years as school division. Prairie Valley School Division and its trustees stand upon the shoulders of those that came before us. Rod Luhning's legacy is steadfast. We are privileged to stand on such a great man's shoulders; Rod Luhning is a trustee of Distinction.