

THE Hardwick Gazette

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photo by Doug McClure

Because of COVID-19, Hardwick Elementary School has set up tents for outdoor learning for as long as the weather holds.



photo by Doug McClure

Hazen Union has erected two tents for school activities to reduce the risk of virus spread.

Hazen Union Re-Opening Concerns Raised

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK – In a letter to Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSSU) school boards, National Education Association (NEA) affiliate Orleans Southwest Education Association (OSWEA) expressed concerns over the OSSU's reopening plans.

In its letter, the OSWEA demanded that the OSSU school boards take steps "to remedy the OSSU's shortcomings in planning

for reopening schools." The letter stated that OSWEA seeks to "inform" that the OSSU that "the faculty and staff of the schools within the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union have received inconsistent or inadequate training, personal protective equipment [PPE], and time to plan for the safe reopening of schools."

In a separate letter, a copy of which was reviewed by the Gazette, Hazen Union Principal David Ferrigo concurred. "I wish

that I were in a position to refute these concerns, unfortunately, I do not have any information that supports the safe opening of schools," he said. "In fact, quite the contrary, I am only in a position to add to the list of concerns."

Ferrigo responded to the OSWEA letter in an e-mail directed to the Hazen Union and OSSU school boards with additional concerns. Ferrigo wrote, "The concerns of the OSWEA are well-founded." He added that he

raised his own numerous concerns before, beyond those raised in the OSWEA letter. Ferrigo wrote that the pressure to reopen has silenced worried faculty and staff, and added, "I have tried to calm my conscience, but the last two weeks that our staff have spent in the building preparing for the year have only compounded my concerns."

In his letter, Ferrigo summarized his concerns, which he said

See **CONCERNS, 2**

No More Signs in Peace Park without Town Permission

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK – The Town of Hardwick is removing all signs from the Peace Park effective immediately and going forward no information can be posted without permission.

The decision came at the September 3 select board meeting after attempts at reaching a new sign policy for Hardwick floundered on a First Amendment impasse.

Several months ago, a stalemate developed over the policy's attempts to allow public discourse while rejecting hate speech. Multiple attempts at reaching a workable compromise failed.

If the board entered the night's meeting tentative about the new policy, a public comment likely left little room for deliberation. A resident noted that two new signs had been placed on the same spot in Peace Park and both were, in that person's view, problematic "dog whistles."

One sign contained misinformation about COVID-19's survival rate and death toll. The sign claimed "450,000 deaths" were attributable to the virus. As of Sunday, September 6, a total of 886,574 fatalities were attributed to the virus, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),

the World Health Organization (WHO), Johns Hopkins University, and other reputable sources.

The second sign noted "800 thousand kids go missing per year in the USA. Thats [sic] The Real Crisis #Savethechildren." The information is accurate; the problem is the hashtag and its association with QAnon, which multiple media outlets have labeled a conspiracy group. The Wall Street Journal described QAnon as a "right-wing group that believes Satan-worshipping pedophiles in the 'deep state' seek to undermine President Trump." Other outlets point out a part of the theory involves Democrats eating children to gain their life force.

"[The sign's] intention is to hurt," said the resident. "Whether it's explicit or not."

The meeting had scheduled deliberation time for the sign ordinance, but in light of the resident's comments and no new ideas on ways to move forward, the board decided to halt its efforts to create a new sign policy. Board member Shari Cornish said, "In light of time, and because I started this thing, I propose we revert back to our original policy." She said she still wanted to "take another hard look" at the subject and, "I think there's a better way to do this but maintain public art. There's been a gray

See **MEALS, 2**



photo by Doug McClure

A resident raised concern over two new signs at the Peace Park. The top one includes misinformation that could prove dangerous, while the bottom one, has a "#SaveTheChildren" hashtag. That hashtag has been co-opted by the conspiracy group QAnon according to multiple media outlets.