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School Board and circuit judge candidates enlighten Chiefland Rotarians



Ashley Breeden Clemenzi speaks to the members and guests of the Rotary Club of Chiefland on Wednesday (July 24) in The Gathering Table Restaurant of Chiefland. Clemenzi is a candidate for Levy County School Board, District 5.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © July 25, 2018 at 8:58 p.m.

CHIEFLAND -- Members and guests of the Rotary Club of Chiefland were treated to a guest speaker who is one of the two candidates for the District 5 Levy County School Board seat, and an added speaker who is one of the three candidates for the open seat on the bench of the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court.

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Ashley Breeden Clemenzi (left) and Chiefland Rotary President Sandy Oglesby are seen moment after the president gave the guest speaker a Rotary coin momento.

Ashley Breeden Clemenzi is seeking election to the Levy County School Board. The other candidate in that race is Gary Bennett.

David Robertson, an attorney with the Florida Department of Transportation, is seeking election to be a circuit court judge in the Eighth Judicial Circuit (Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, and Union counties). The two other candidates in that race are Julie Waldman and Gloria Walker. Robertson was a guest of Chiefland Rotarian Snuffy Smith, an attorney.

Clemenzi was the guest of Chiefland Rotary President Sandy Oglesby. President Oglesby is the first female president of this Rotary Club. Chiefland Rotary Club President-Elect is Paige Brookins, a member of the Levy County School Board and the charter or founding president of the Suwannee Valley Rotary Club.

Clemenzi opened her presentation by mentioning that she is a fifth generation Levy County resident. She was born and raised in Montbrook.

Clemenzi graduated from Williston High School in 1996. She graduated from the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications in 2000, with a major in journalism and a minor in business.

Her husband Robby Clemenzi is her college sweetheart.

They have three children. She is a member of the First United Methodist Church of

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Williston.

She is a concerned mother who has school-aged children who are in the public school system, except her youngest who is 4 years old.

Clemenzi said she is an advocate for her children, and all of the children in Levy County.

During the past couple of years, Clemenzi has found herself being the voice of kids, teachers and parents who have to be at work and cannot attend School Board meetings.

When she learned that School Board Member Rick Turner had decided to retire, Clemenzi said she chose to run for the office.

She thinks the Levy County School System can become better. She wants to find solutions to problems.

While not wanting to make promises she can't keep, this candidate said, she wants the children in Levy County to enjoy the same opportunities as students in Alachua, Marion and other neighboring counties where the quality of education is better than it is in Levy County now.

"I understand that the budget is an issue," Clemenzi said.

And there are other obstacles.

She believes in the power of numbers, nevertheless, and she believes positive change to improve Levy County schools is possible.

"I want to give our kids the best," she said, "so they can come back to Levy County and excel as professionals – teachers, welders, whatever their profession may be."

Among her first missions is listening and learning in order to support students, teachers and staff.

"I want them to be able to come to me with their concerns and issues," Clemenzi said, "and know that I hear them, and I will do what I can to help."

This potential future School Board member said she plans to encourage parents to become active partners in their children's education.

"This can be hard," Clemenzi said, "because I know first-hand how it is to be a working parent."

She knows, too, that not every parent is in a position where they can participate as much as they may like to in their children's education.

When Clemenzi attends School Board meetings and other school-oriented meetings with little or no turnout of parents, she is disheartened, she said.

She wants parents and others to feel no intimidation at School Board meetings so that they can voice their concerns.

Clemenzi plans to dig in and find all of the programs, grants and possible opportunities available to help the Levy County School System.

She intends, also, to collaborate with others to assure the safety of children, teachers and school staff.

Clemenzi shared that she felt a helpless, gut-wrenching feeling when her son texted her that he was in a school that was in "lock-down."

The Monday after the horror of the Parkland School shooting that left 17 dead at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Feb. 14 was when she received the text from her son.

"No parent should have to go through this," Clemenzi said. "Our kids should be safe when they are at school.

"I am passionate about children, about education," she continued, "and I am

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passionate about the future of Levy County.”

She wants the best for the students and teacher in Levy County.

More transparency between all levels of the Levy County Public School System is needed, Clemenzi said.

“We should all work together,” she said, “and always do what’s best for the children of Levy County.”

After her speech, several Rotarians asked questions.

Among the information she shared was that starting in the fall there is a current anticipation of one deputy from the Levy County Sheriff’s Office to be at each school.



Levy County School Board Member Paige Brookins

School Board Member Brookins added to the answer by saying this school district is also participating in The Guardian Program.

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The Guardian Program will allow some school employees — but not teachers who have no other campus duties — to carry guns on school grounds, if local school districts and sheriff's offices approve and they get required training. The armed employees would have no law enforcement powers but to “prevent or abate an active assailant.”

In the Levy County School, Brookins said, the person will not be known. Therefore, while the armed assailant might first target an LCSO deputy, they will not know this person is armed and capable of stopping an assault on the school.

Brookins added that when the future Chiefland Middle High School is built, it will be constructed with safety features in the structure as well.



David Robertson, candidate for Eighth Judicial Circuit Court judge

After the keynote speaker, candidate Robertson spoke.

He mentioned that many voters have considered and thought about who to vote for in political races for the Florida House, for Congress, for County Commission and School Board, but they may not have considered candidates for the circuit court judge post.

Among the many reasons Robertson urges people to consider their votes for circuit court judge is because in Florida, that man or woman has the power to impose the death penalty.

Even the President of the United States does not have that power, he said.

He shared his background, as he helped those listeners learn about reasons to potentially choose him as the candidate for the position.