

Guest editorial

By Carol Kable

As I have followed the unfolding of the controversy over the demolition of our former high school, I am *deeply* disturbed over it, because of the Galion Board of Education's behavior throughout and because of their decision-making process. I would like to feel that school boards always act in good faith, in the best interests of all people in their community, listening to all points on all sides before arriving at monumental decisions that will have an impact on communities for years to come. Unfortunately, I don't feel that the GBOE did in the case of the "fate" of the "old" high school.

I attended two of the three information/planning/input "charettes" for determining re-use of the former high school this past summer. Naturally, I attended to unofficially represent the visual arts. I also went to these meetings feeling good about a project that could bring the community together.

What I experienced was very professional and profoundly impressed me. The atmosphere was very open and positive. Pros and cons were brought up, not only by people who came to hear about the plans for making the cultural commerce center out of the old high school facility, but also by those heading up the proposed project. Their work was well-documented, explained in detail, and they heartily welcomed input from people in our community while also drawing on the expertise and experience of those outside the community, including well-respected state agencies when needed. It was rather exciting to me because of something called "vision" and because it was far reaching and included the commercial and private sectors of the community, as well as the arts.

At one of the sessions I attended, there was a lot of ground-work through a very organized, reliable method to determine a thorough list of the ways the building could be used to meet the various needs of the community and surrounding areas. This was done by a person who came highly qualified from a respected state agency and was assisted by those likewise qualified locally.

Their vision was based on realities in the form of similar projects done by communities, some smaller than Galion, and by searching out agencies that have provided financial assistance for such projects. I, too, felt it was very "do-able." Through the years I have also as an arts educator seen and experienced facilities such as the one proposed in Galion in other communities in at least three other states.

Like many in the community, I wonder how it appears that a very small minority of the community evidently had so much "clout" with the GBOE that they could actually get it to discount the opinions and desires of other respectable people "in the community who favor saving the old high school for its productive, positive re-use. The people and alumni who cared strongly enough to sign the petition should never have had their feelings discredited. Wouldn't anyone want to see the

their feelings discredited. Wouldn't anyone want to see the hometown high school be used in the manner of promoting culture and commerce at a local and county level rather than being torn down before its time? I would think that all the members of the GBOE (some of whom are not alumni) would at least have tried to understand how an alumni might feel about their alma mater and be *glad* they felt the way they did about it. Instead the GBOE appears to have totally discounted their feelings.

Through patriotism and nationalism Americans get an important share of their identity from our country's historic buildings and landmarks. That's why they were targets for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The terrorists wanted to attack these visible symbols of our nation that are a source of American pride and spirit in the attempt to hurt us.

The former high school is a landmark of the Galion community. Is this just *my* opinion? Apparently not, as I see there are notecards that feature full color photos of local buildings that include the old high school with the caption "Galion's Landmarks." How ironic — the local school board made a decision to tear it down!

I think that it might be wise for all of us to remember that those who pledge to finance and/or generate private funds for projects only if their demands are met often do so in order to further their own agenda. Once they get what they want (in this case demolition of the old building), will they follow through? I also wonder what many of those people that have been alienated by the board through all this will do when the hat is passed for the board's performing arts auditorium project. I also wonder what will be the timeframe, since details of their proposal seem sketchy, don't appear to address all of the arts, and apparently will be contingent on people's generosity in hard economic times.

As a last, but extremely-important thought, art teachers strive to teach how the visual arts influence and shape society, how they express what we are as a people in regard to creativity, human spirit, and intellect, and how art forms (such as architecture) help us value our heritage and history. What real message has already been sent to Galion's youth and how do art teachers explain it, when those in leadership roles decide to tear down a local landmark that is a fine example of classic architecture that is part of our heritage and history, when there is still so much life left in it? The real travesty is that the GBOE's actions have served to undermine an important part of what we are trying to teach the next generations through our art education program and goes against the support they should be lending it.