

YOUR VIEW

## Sherry Jasper: Community leaders linked together

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Chippewa Falls witnessed three significant events this week: the selection of hometown Heidi Taylor-Eliopoulos as superintendent; the resignation of School Board President Jim Dimock; and the passing of Julie Stafford.

While separate as news items, the line connecting them to each other is strong and rooted deep in this community.

I'm neither a native of Chippewa Falls nor a graduate of Chi-Hi. I moved here 27 years ago to work at Halmstad Elementary as that school's first counselor. Dimock, then principal, hired me. Taylor was a fourth grader. I soon came to know Stafford.

Stafford fits the cliché of a woman before her time. She married when told to, followed the traditional route as a teacher, but from then on she blazed trails. She continued working as a mother of five while also earning a master's degree and becoming vice principal at Chi-Hi, a large high school. Completing a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison was no small feat, even in the early 1970s.

After a time as director of curriculum and educational leadership with the Chippewa Falls Schools, she created a partnership with Cray Research that benefited teachers locally and across the state. She made sure that science and mathematics education and professional development was available for teachers.

During much of her professional career, a young man from town was watching, learning and then being mentored by Stafford. After graduating from UW-Eau Claire, Dimock spent his entire professional career in Chippewa Falls, serving as teacher, principal, director of curriculum and then school board president. He was elected to Stafford's seat on the board when she decided not to run again.

I'm privileged to have both a professional relationship and friendship with Dimock and Stafford over the years. I learned from them much about education, about people, about Chippewa Falls and about doing the right thing. More than once, Stafford asked when I was going to earn a doctorate. It wasn't in the cards for me, but being believed in mattered.

And so, it is more than fitting that Taylor-Eliopoulos, a woman educated in the Chippewa Falls Schools, takes over as superintendent. As a fourth grader, she showed the drive and desire to learn and be a leader. She took advantage of opportunities thrown her way.

Like Stafford, she earned that doctorate and dedicated herself to making education the best it can be. From high school student and mentor under Stafford to principal and school board president of Taylor-Eliopoulos, Dimock has been a link in the chain of progress.

As we share stories of Stafford and say our final goodbyes, let's take a moment to look to

the future and raise a glass in anticipation. I know she would be proud of her hometown.