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In the Fight of Her Life

Hearing begins on termination of school librarian from Liberty staff

By Leni Santoro
The Towne Crier

LIBERTY – In the age-old fight of good versus evil it is not always easy to tell which side should win, especially when taxpayer dollars and student's abilities to access the skills of a favorite librarian are at stake.

This week, a 3020a hearing regarding Liberty Middle School librarian Angela Page is taking place, not in the school where such hearings would usually be held, but in the Liberty Fire Department Hall. Ms. Page contends that the same conditions which have prevented her from continuing in her duties as Middle School librarian also prevent her from attending the hearing in any of the district's three school buildings.

In the case of The Liberty Central School District vs. Angela Page, Section 3020a, the school district contends that the hearing is not disciplinary in nature. Rather, they are seeking to terminate Ms. Page's employment as a certified school librarian

because she has not worked in the district since June of 2004. Page suffers from multiple chemical sensitivity due to exposure to mold and mold spores.

At the 3020a hearing, which is open to the public, many people who knew Ms. Page were present as proceedings opened. Absent from the hearing were the current school superintendent and the current school board members.

The district admits that Ms. Page and her physician have advised the district that she is totally disabled from working in the district schools and that she can only work at home or some other non-district site which she finds to be free from a variety of substances and which are deemed safe for her.

It is the feeling of the district that a 3020a proceeding is held to test the fitness of a tenured teacher to be entrusted with the custody and care of school children. Further, they feel that Ms. Page's insistence that the district must accommodate her condition by permitting her to work entirely from home, some other remote location or through video-conferencing where she will not have any responsibility for the custody or control of school children enables them to bring this proceeding against her.

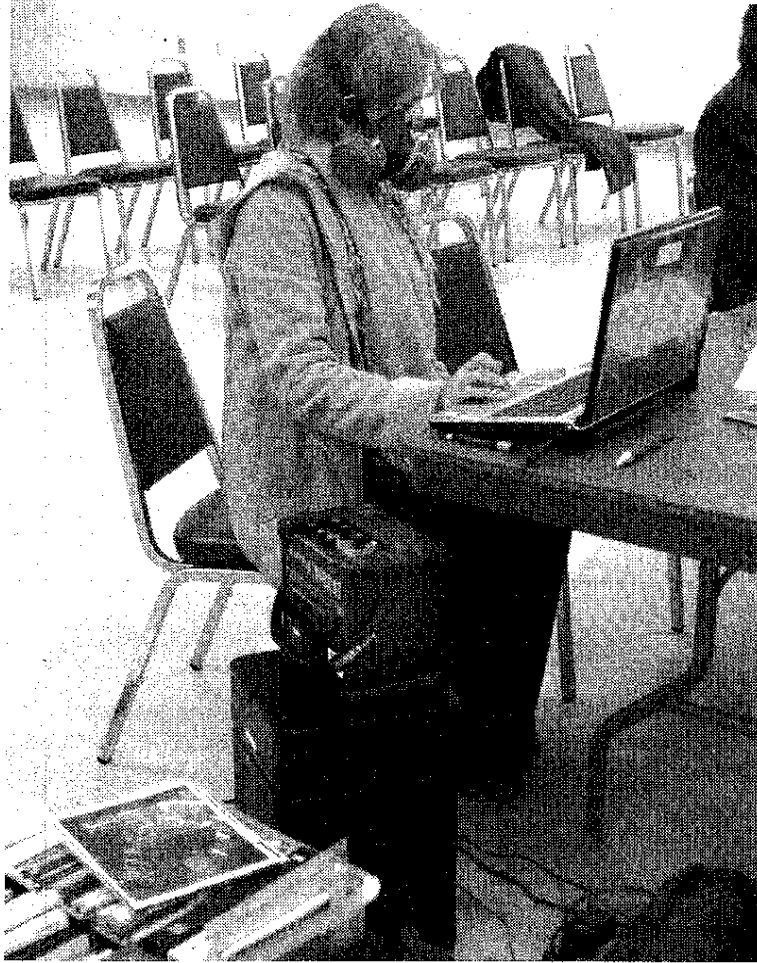
The district strongly believes that a school librarian must be physically present and in regular attendance at the district school to provide face-to-face instruction and to be responsible for the supervision of students and to work cooperatively with other staff to support the instructional program and learning standards of the district.

While it is true that Ms. Page has offered her services as a non-instructional employee, perhaps as a grant writer for the school district, the district is not in need of a full-time grant writer, and they would not be inclined to continue her tenure and benefits as a teacher in the district under those circumstances.

Also, because the district has had to hire an additional librarian, it is felt that retaining Ms. Page places an onerous and unusual financial burden on the small rural school district. It is the policy of the school to continue to provide full salary and benefits to any teacher on a workmen's compensation leave. The school feels that it has an obligation to the taxpayers of the district and sees no reason to



FORMER Liberty Central School Superintendent Larry Clarke was often slow to answer.



ANGIE Page has accumulated a virtual library of information regarding her condition. LENI SANTORO PHOTOS

continue paying such benefits indefinitely.

Meanwhile, Ms. Page's lawyer contends that in February of 2004 Ms. Page became disabled due to working conditions in the Middle School Library.

These conditions included mold on books and surfaces in the library as well as the carpeting, all of which had to be cleaned or removed eventually from the room. Furthermore she had repeatedly brought to the attention of school administrators the adverse conditions in the library under which she was working. Not only did they take no action, alleges Ms. Page and her attorney, but the school district's behavior [at that time] demonstrated gross negligence and a callous disregard for both Ms. Page's welfare and the welfare of the entire district including staff and students.

Ms. Page disagrees that the district has fully remediated the mold and chemical problems within the three school buildings sufficiently to ensure her health and safety, hence her necessity to work from a location other than the district's three school buildings and the necessity to hold the 3020a hearing outside the district school in the Liberty Fire Department Hall.

It is apparent that Ms. Page wishes to retain her rights as a certified school librarian for the district and feels that in this modern age surely accommodations can be found, especially in the area of video-conferencing.