



*Russ Harris*



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*— A Newark Rotarian*

It's not everybody who would have spent 19 years serving on the Board of Education in their community, nor would they be running for a seventh consecutive, three-year term on the BOE when they could be using their time doing lots other things in their retirement.

But Russ Harris isn't typical. He served on the Newark Central School District Board of Education from 1993 until 2003 and was re-elected to a fourth-three-year term on the BOE in May 2014 after he retired from his job in the IT Department of the Wayne Central School District where he worked from 1999 until 2014. He's completing his sixth, consecutive three-year term on the BOE and was re-elected May 16th to a seventh term that begins July 1st. Harris, who also is President of the Four County School Boards Association, served as Newark BOE Vice President during the 2015-16 and 2019-20 school years and served as President of the BOE for five consecutive school years: 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Also a Newark Rotarian, his life *truly* embodies the service organization's motto: "*Service Above Self.*"

Harris has won several awards in recent years, including in 2019 the Alex Eligh Service Award given by the Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce. Executive Director of the Newark Community Center for 27 years, the award is given annually in Alex Eligh's memory because of his outstanding service to the community.

In 2021, he received a distinctive Level 4 Board Lifetime Achievement Award by the New York State School Board Association (NYSSBA). Its recognition program is comprised of four achievement levels which are reached by accumulating points by participating in various training activities including state-mandated training workshops, board officer's academy, legal workshops, convention. Included among these many activities in Harris' experience is that he has attended several roundtable sessions with the Commissioner of Education in Albany.

**So it's not at all surprising he recently received another outstanding service award. This time it was the Sr. Edwardine Weaver Service award given by the Genesee Valley Chapter of the New York State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (GVASCD) at its annual awards reception May 11<sup>th</sup> at the Ridgmont Country Club in Greece.**

Newark BOE Vice President Julie Nevelizer \_who along with former BOE President Yvonne MacTaggart, who was a Newark BOE member for a total of 12 years \_ nominated Harris for the award because of his exemplary and extraordinary years of volunteer service on the Newark Central School District BOE \_ noted the award was renamed and presented to Sister Edwardine Weaver in 2001. She was a lifetime advocate for professional development of teachers, administrators, and counselors in the Catholic or private schools and was active in the Rochester community.

*"Russ Harris, like Sister Edwardine Weaver, has committed years of service to the Newark Central School District and to the Newark community. During most of the 19 years on the BOE, he has been involved in several committees such as policy, audit and legislative. Russ also participates in associations the Newark BOE belongs to including the Four County School Boards Association of which he is completing his second year as President. In that capacity, he is part of a team that collaborates on topics related to professional development for school board members in 21 school districts. This year, Four CSBA developed 9 professional development meetings ranging from an open round table discussion on "What You Don't Know, You Don't Know" to a topic on "Caring About Culture: Leadership Strategies to Retain World-Class Educators." Russ is a true believer in professional development and once a revised policy is voted in, one of his lifelong goals will come to fruition that includes the requirement that Newark board members complete 6 hours of professional development every year.*

Nevelizer, who was elected to her first term on the BOE in 2021, told GVASCD reception attendees Harris has been an "amazing coach" for her including advocating she attend BOE members professional development classes.

*"The knowledge I have gained through this has helped me develop as a better board member and to better understand my role as a Vice President. Russ' knowledge of policy, expertise on contract negotiations, reminders of how Open Meeting Law pertains to different situations, history of how things began and where they are for our District are invaluable to me. I can always count on him for knowledge and direction to steer our Board into a positive direction. As educators, we know knowledge is power and Russ' extensive professional development and longevity on the board mirrors how Sister Edwardine Weaver was in her career. He keeps the "what is best for the students" as the number one priority in his thoughts and reminds our whole board to keep this focus."*



MacTaggart expressed similar sentiments about Harris at the GVASCD podium.

*“The time I spent with Russell on the Newark School Board was student-centered, rich in policy and forward thinking. His vast knowledge and expertise of being a school board member for so many years, make him valuable in making decisions based on past experiences and more. Russ will always think about the who-what-why for every student. He is thoughtful about making changes, ensuring every detail is considered especially with difficult or challenging issues. One particular area that I can recall was his focus on the need for creating an alternative school for our more challenging students. He reminded us of this need frequently in my last year on the Board providing many ideas and supporting evidence on how this would benefit this student group, educators and our school community. This particular area of service for our students will start in the Fall of 2023 with an exceptional plan and outline for growth to meet the needs of even more students in years to come.*

*“I tried to find a definition of service to describe what it truly means,” MacTaggart continued. “There are several options that include; ‘the action of helping or doing work for someone’ or ‘helping others who need assistance’ but I think the one that I found most fitting of Russell and many others was this ‘a lifelong dedication and commitment to helping others to a better life and to higher standards.’*

*“Many consider serving on a Board to be a thankless job. Others feel they don’t have the time or what it takes to be valuable to an organization or group. We are fortunate to have others that dedicate their time, expertise and more to benefit so many in several capacities in our communities. Russell has provided the dedication, knowledge and expertise to provide a better future for the youth of Newark. He considers every student, in all situations and faces those challenges with passion and care. His service to even a few students will expand and affect the lives of many more. It is a great honor and pride that Russell Harris is the recipient of this year’s GVASCD’s Service to Education award.”*

Both Nevelizer and MacTaggart noted Harris’ outstanding work with Newark Rotary since the early 90s including the Rotary Exchange Student Program. For nearly 10 years, he has served as

Newark Rotary’s Youth Exchange officer and is Rotary’s District 7120 Country Officer.

*“As a Country officer, Russ oversees student and family contact throughout the exchange process and works with the country counterpart to negotiate contracts and student applications for exchange. Russ received the Paul Harris Fellow award in March. This was not his first time receiving this award.*

*To receive the Paul Harris Fellow award, the nominee has contributed or had contributions made in their honor to the Rotary Foundation. The Rotary Foundation helps Rotary members to advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace by improving health, providing quality education, improving the environment, and alleviating poverty,” Nevelizer said.*

Similarly MacTaggart, who noted Harris devotes a great amount of time and detail to ensure a safe, enriching and educational experience for young students from around the world’ also shared several comments made by some of Harris’ fellow Rotarians including these:

- *Russ also supports the Rotary Club with all his technology knowledge. He’s just always there to give with his talents in whatever way he can.*
- *He is an active Rotarian and friend of the community. He is ever involved in life changing and giving activities to our Newark students and residents.*

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*Above from left: Jule Nevelizer, Russ Harris, Newark Superintendent Swan Hasenauer and Yvonne MacTaggart.*

Among Harris' many other activities, he is a past committee chair of Pack and Troop 122 in Newark. He is past member of the Newark Library Board.

He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Drumlins Radio Club. He is an American Radio Relay League Volunteer Instructor and a member of Wayne and Ontario County RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services) affiliated with county and state divisions of Homeland Security. He is a member of MARS (Military Auxiliary Radio System), a volunteer radio communications service for the Department of Defense and is a member of SHARES, SHARed RESources, part of the Department of Homeland Security. SHARES, MARS and RACES are high frequency radio programs that provide an additional means for users with a national security preparedness mission to communicate when landline and cellular communications are unavailable.

A technology geek long before the Geek Squad was ever imagined, Harris has long been on the cutting edge of advocating for the use of technology in education.

*"When I started on the BOE in 1993, the Internet was a curiosity and in its infancy. Many were wondering if it had a place in education. Bob Christmann, then Superintendent in Newark, sent me to a National School Board Association Teaching and Learning Conference in San Diego to get some insight on what this Internet thing was, what it could bring to education and how we could get it.*

*When I returned I reported my findings to the Wayne County Superintendents group and they began to investigate how we, as a group could bring the Internet into schools. During that time there were many vendors nipping at the ankles of the schools with varied solutions. We asked if our investigations and implementation could be BOCES-aided. That brought more minds into the conversation and started the formation of Edutech, and we all have heard of Edutech. Technology and the Internet have come a long way since then and now it is as common as chalk was in our schools. Where will it go next? Well, this speech was written with the help of Artificial Intelligence!"*

Asked about how he felt about receiving the GVASCD's Sr. Edwardine Weaver 2023 Service award, he said:

*"I am deeply honored to accept this award. I would like to start by thanking Julie and Yvonne for nominating me. It is truly an honor to be recognized by such esteemed colleagues. I also would like to thank my wife, Marianne, and my son, Dan, for supporting me while I was involved with many educational and community organizations.*

*"And of course, I would like to thank all of you for continuing the fight for a free, diverse, and fair education system that welcomes all students. It is through our collective efforts that we can continue to make a difference in our students' lives, it will continue to be important to me because I have two grandchildren, Christopher, in Kindergarten, and Lily, in pre-school in Irondequoit."*

And finally this from Superintendent Susan Hasenauer:

*"I don't even know where to begin when thinking about the words that would articulate what Russ exemplifies, not only a community servant but as a human. I can highlight his amazing passion for policy, his dedication to the Newark School District Board, Rotary and Four County, however, that would barely scratch the surface. When I think of Russ it is his unending gift of humanity that he portrays through all acts of service. Never individualistic, Russ truly serves his community through all voices and various lenses which helps others understand we all belong to each other. I couldn't think of anyone more deserving of this award than Russell Harris."*



*Above Harris, right, with wife Marianne Arseneau on the left.*



*Above: Harris, right, is seen with the two other 2023 GVASCD award winners. Left is Supervision Award winner Kathleen Graupman, Superintendent of the Greece Central School District, and center, Curriculum Award winner Stephanie Smyka, Coordinator, Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development, Reading Recovery Site Coordinator & Teacher Leader for the Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES.*

