

School Committee prepares request for new food vendor

By Donna K. Drago

The School Committee reviewed a draft request for proposal for new food service vendors at its Jan. 3 work session.

Julie Kallfelz, the committee vice president, put together the draft using a boilerplate RFP form from the state Department of Education that has been modified to include nutritional specifics desired by the Jamestown district.

The committee discussed putting out a three-year contract that includes a probationary period and "good bail-out language" in case the new vendor does not meet Jamestown's needs.

Among the language specific to Jamestown are objectives that include promoting healthy eating "by offering only healthy choices every day." The School Committee asked potential vendors "to maximize the use of RI-grown/locally grown products, including but not limited to fruits, vegetables, and dairy products, whenever possible." And the committee also asked that the vendor "develop and maintain the cafeteria as a nutrition education learning environment," where all posters, promotional materials, and messages will promote only healthy foods and positive nutrition and lifestyle habits.

The RFP draft asks the vendors to include offerings rich in whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, one serving a day of which must be an orange or dark green offering. No added sweeteners or artificial sweeteners will be allowed in any product, the RFP states.

Last month, the school board held a bidders conference to see if any area food vendors would be interested in giving a quote for a healthy lunch program and four vendors showed up. They are the two largest food-service companies in the country, Aramark and Sodexo, which serve millions of children per day across the U.S., the North Kingstown food service department, which currently has the Jamestown food contract, and Ocean Side Catering of Newport, the only small business to show an interest.

The committee expects to finalize the RFP by its Jan. 18 meeting.

In other business, the School Committee asked Superintendent Robert Power to provide it with a preliminary budget at its Jan. 18 meeting. Budget hearings for the upcoming fiscal year will be held during February.

Committee member William "Bucky" Brennan asked that the numbers of employees in special subjects like physical education be reviewed in light of declining enrollment.

Islander drafts international oceanographic research vessel laws

By Sam Bari

Dennis Nixon looks forward to going to work in the morning. He is one of the 12.8 percent of the people in the United States who likes his job. And he should. He's good at it. He travels to exotic destinations. His work is appreciated, and he invented a good portion of what he does for a living.



Dennis Nixon

Nixon is a well-published lawyer as well as the College of the Environment and Life Sciences associate dean for academic affairs at the University of Rhode Island. His job description is quite a mouthful, and it is as complex as the title implies.

Academics are the lifeblood of Nixon's livelihood. On the college side, he is the good shepherd to the professors in his department. He is also a lawyer who specializes in marine science research. During the past two decades, he has served as marine law advisor and risk manager for the University Ocean Laboratory System. The system was designed to provide coordination among U. S. ocean research vessels.

During the 1960s, most universities with an oceanography program had access to a research vessel. URI's ship was the Trident. The National Science Foundation paid up to 85 percent of the fuel bills to foster research on the various ships.

However, inefficiencies were found within the system. Often, research vessels sailed hundreds of "deadhead" miles from one site

to another to fulfill requests from scientists.

"For example, some scientists would be asked to go on a trip to the Caribbean, and then someone else would want them to go to Newfoundland. Often, the system would lead to deadhead trips," he said. "This was costing the NSF a lot of money."

Thus, the University Ocean Laboratory System (UNOLS) was revised to make more efficient use of the research ships. In the aforementioned example, the scientist who wanted to go to Newfoundland would now go into the system to find out if other research vessels with the appropriate gear were already there or had plans to go there.

With his law background, Nixon was frequently asked to address maritime law issues such as who has the right to do research off certain coasts. Biological and geophysical issues arose — for example, those searching for oil and gas deposits often used explosives, posing potential threats to marine mammals.

More recently, the NSF and the U.S. Navy required Nixon's expertise in maritime law to write an advisory on the safest use of sound beneath the ocean surface due to whales beaching themselves and bleeding from the ears resulting from exposure to some types of Navy sonar. Nixon's advice was crucial in every incident.

After several years of providing free advice for federal funding agencies and the vessel opera-

tors, Nixon approached the NSF and suggested the agency pay a percentage of his salary for his legal advice services. The agency agreed, and now pays for 25 percent of his time.

Today, 20 to 30 countries operate research vessels. Every year during the month of October, the International Ship Operators hold a meeting. Last year, the meeting was in Galway, Ireland. This year it will be held in Quin Dao, China. Nixon is invited to all meetings.

There is a need for an international code of conduct for research vessels, Nixon said, and his new job, in concert with colleagues in the UK and Ireland, is to draft a code for presentation at the China meeting.

"It's a load of fun to get to write what amounts to be an international treaty," Nixon said. He went on to say that the code of conduct he will help write will be no easy task, emphasizing that the document "must respect all international sensitivities. "In 30 years here at URI, it's one of the most exciting things I have ever done," he added.

Nixon is the United States authority on international, oceanographic research vessel laws.

Born in Detroit, Mich., Dennis Nixon spent seven years in Cincinnati, where he earned a law degree in 1975. Continuing his education at URI, he earned a master of marine affairs degree in 1976. He has been married to his wife Sheila, a special education teacher, for 32 years. They have two daughters, Sarah, 22, and Marisa, 18. Sarah is on the staff of U.S. Senator Jack Reed and Marisa is a freshman at URI. The Nixons have been Jamestown residents since 1978.

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