Dr. Bill Russell, O-A Superintendent, is interviewed by media during the construction of the new elementary school in Owego. The school is expected to open by January of 2016. Russell recently received his board’s approval for retirement, effective June 2016.

In a press release received Wednesday, it was announced that Dr. Bill Russell asked the Owego-Apalachin (OA) Board of Education to accept his resignation for the purpose of retirement during the district’s regular board meeting held Thursday, Oct. 8. The board voted to accept the resignation, which will become effective June 30, 2016.

Dr. Russell became Owego Apalachin Superintendent of Schools on July 1, 2006, and upon his retirement next summer, he will have completed 10 years leading the district.
“We’ll accept this tonight,” said David Barton, OA board president, during the meeting. He added, “There will be a lot more to say as the end of the school year approaches, but I’ll offer my initial congratulations now.”

Early this week, Barton reflected on the long-time superintendent’s tenure. “Dr. Russell led this district through some of the most turbulent events to befall New York state and our community in several generations,” he said. “Just when signs of recovery from the global recession of 2008-09 began to emerge, the flood of 2011 devastated our community and our school district.”

The new elementary school, currently under construction in the same location, is nearing completion, and it is a project that Russell holds close to his heart.

“Dr. Russell’s ceaseless efforts in leading OACSD’s recovery secured commitments from the federal and state governments to rebuild the district and restore the main campus as the hub of our community.”

“If flood recovery wasn’t enough to deal with,” said Gene Cvik, the board’s vice president, “I can’t forget the impact of the market crash which resulted in many years of significant state aid reductions to all school districts in New York state, better known as the Gap Elimination Adjustment.

“All of this seemed to run concurrently with our flood recovery efforts, though, adding significantly to an already overwhelming situation,” Cvik continued. “Dr. Russell’s leadership, willpower and resolve to stay focused on Owego Apalachin’s students have been and remain primary catalysts in our district’s ability to weather all these daunting storms.”

According to the OA Public Affairs officer, the new elementary school could open as soon as January, and things are moving along. That project, they added, is one of is biggest.

OA’s most veteran board member, John Crosby, was succinct in his praise.

“I’ve worked closely with three superintendents,” Crosby said. “Bill Russell is the only one who excels in budget development, labor relations, student achievement, and building construction.”

Barton elaborated: “Dr. Russell has consistently provided the OA Board of Education with unerring counsel and he is the key link in
the positive relationship that exists among the Owego Apalachin community, our students and parents, and the district staff. His efforts to engage and inform the community during our annual budget development process have been instrumental in garnering continued support for the district, as exemplified by the margin and success of vote results.”

Dr. Russell came to Owego Apalachin after six years in the Ithaca City School District, where he first served as the Assistant Superintendent for Information and Instructional Technology. After his initial year in that position, he became Ithaca’s Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction.

Unlike many superintendents, much of Dr. Russell’s career was spent in higher education. With a Ph.D. in Educational Policy Analysis, he initially pursued a teaching faculty career. For a time, he was director of an educational advocacy program in Louisville, Ky., that assisted students and parents who were having difficulty with the school system. Many of his agency’s clients were black students experiencing problems in formerly white schools following court-ordered desegregation. Another large group was comprised of parents of students with disabilities, seeking to obtain services for their children under then-newly enacted federal disability rights legislation.

Dr. Russell later moved to Denison University in Ohio, where he taught courses in

the Department of Sociology, and was the founding director of a new Center for Community Research.

Dr. Russell and his spouse, Kathryn, then moved to SUNY College at Cortland, where she was appointed as a professor of philosophy. Dr. Russell was appointed to a newly created position as Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences, where he served for five years.

From Cortland, the superintendent moved to Ithaca College as the Associate Dean for Humanities and Sciences, a position he held for 10 years. Halfway through that tenure, he was asked to also take on responsibilities as the Director of Teacher Education for the college. In that capacity, he began working closely with area public schools. In 2000, he was recruited away from higher education to begin working in the public schools.
“Serving as superintendent in Owego Apalachin has been the high point of my career,” Dr. Russell said. “Though the past decade has not been easy, given the flood and the recession, we have prevailed and rebuilt our school district stronger than ever.

“I am very confident that our district will be well poised to move forward, with beautiful new state-of-the-art facilities, a terrific staff, a very supportive Board of Education, and a community that expects great things from its schools,” Dr. Russell added.

“During my 25 years in school business, I’ve met and gotten to know a lot of school and BOCES superintendents,” said Cvik, “many of whom I’ve had great respect for. But only a few possessed a skill set similar to that of Dr. Russell.

“I’m thankful when I think of our recovery from such significant difficulties, primarily the last catastrophic flood,” Cvik continued. “In all my years in school business I had never seen anything like it. None of us had. But Dr. Russell took the lead in our recovery from day one, and never looked back. Someday very soon Owego Apalachin will be whole again, with all our buildings intact and all our students back home, and all of that will be significantly tied to the leadership and tenacity of our retiring superintendent.”

“Dr. Russell has provided outstanding leadership to our district throughout his tenure with us and has helped the OA community successfully navigate through numerous challenges – those to public education in general and those particular to OACSD,” said Linda Frisbie, former member of the Board of Education, and a retired English teacher with the district.

“He has been the right person for the vast task of rebuilding our district’s flood- devastated buildings,” she said. “He has demonstrated tremendous ability and willingness to learn whatever necessary to get the job done, as well as the tenacity and tireless determination to guide these projects to completion.

“Also, his high standards for academic achievement among all students have provided our administrative team and our teachers with clear goals in the midst of very difficult times for public education,” Frisbie added. “I am proud to have worked with Dr. Russell and I’m proud of all that our district and community have achieved during his time with us.”

“I, too, am proud to have been a board member throughout Dr. Russell’s entire 10- year stay at Owego Apalachin,” Cvik said. “We
wish him all the best as he approaches his new life in retirement with his wife Kathy.

Updated: October 14, 2015 at 5:50 pm

- Traci’s Hope benefit draws a good crowd for a great cause
  Tioga Downs gets nod for full gaming license