Retired educator seeks seat on board

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WATSONVILLE — After working in California public schools for more than 35 years, Lupe Rivas retired. But she hasn’t lost the desire to make a difference in education.

Rivas, 66, is running for the Pajaro Valley school board, and unless another candidate files by 5 p.m. Wednesday, the Trustee Area II seat will be hers. Doug Keegan holds the seat, but is not seeking re-election.

“I saw the need to have representation on the school board by someone diverse enough to see all sides, to understand the diverse population,” Rivas said. “I have a lot of experience, a lot of time and a lot of knowledge.”

The child of migrant workers from Texas, Rivas said she understands the lives of many of Pajaro Valley’s working families. At the same time, she escaped poverty through education, and has lived among the more affluent as an adult. She now resides in Bay Village, a senior citizen community in Watsonville.

One of her priorities will be outreach to the senior community, to keep members informed about schools. Some seniors no longer see the need to invest in education now that their own children are grown, Rivas said.

“It’s important that they understand the importance of educating all students,” she said. “They are going to be our tax foundation in the future.”

Rivas said she also offers the experience of a former classroom teacher, bilingual education coordinator, parent educator and school administrator. She’s concerned that budget cuts have created tough working conditions for teachers and fewer educational opportunities for students. She wants to review the entire budget, and particularly look at spending on upper management. The district needs to focus its dollars in classrooms, she said.

One of the strengths of the district is its teachers, Rivas said, adding she wants to ensure they are supported with supplies and quality staff development.

As a board member, she said she’d use her leadership skills to build consensus. Rivas is president of her church council and a former vice president of her homeowners association.

Rivas moved to Watsonville from Bakersfield 12 years ago, and she said she considered moving back after retirement to be closer to her children and grandchildren. But she made the decision to stay. The Pajaro Valley is her home now, and she’s committed to it.

“This is my home base,” Rivas said. “I have a very deep love for the community and a respect for the community members.”

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