

[Click to Print](#)[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

District's ads raise questions of conflict

Sunday, April 26, 2009

BY MICHAEL GARTLAND

NorthJersey.com

STAFF WRITER

A private vocational school, which competes directly with a Bergen County Technical School District program targeted for closure, paid for at least six ads that the district's Workforce Investment Board has run in a weekly newspaper since last year.

The ads raise questions about whether the district — as it prepares to close its own daytime adult vocational program — is promoting the interests of the private Eastwick College and the HoHoKus Schools.

The ads were paid for by Thomas Eastwick, a member of the Workforce Investment Board and the private schools' president. The ads ran in The County Seat newspaper on Sept. 15, Oct. 15, Nov. 15, Jan. 15, Feb. 15 and April 1.

Tammy Molinelli, executive director of the board and a salaried employee of the district, is quoted in the Feb. 15 ad, in a question-and-answer format, "Getting a job in tough economic times." The ad also displays the Eastwick and HoHoKus logos, their Web address and advertising copy, promoting the schools.

Molinelli said she could see how the advertisement might be interpreted as an endorsement of Eastwick's schools by the Workforce Investment Board, but contended that was not its purpose.

"It wasn't meant to advertise anything, one way or another," she said. "It never really dawned on me to think of it that way."

But Ingrid Reed, a policy analyst at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, said that people who hold positions of public trust should not only consider the potential for a conflict of interest, but also the appearance of one.

"The use of the county workforce board could very well increase [Eastwick's] business," Reed said. "It leads to the question of what should I be doing in the public interest versus what should I be doing in my own, private self-interest. ... It's a perfectly legitimate issue that should be discussed."

The controversy over the ad comes as the district prepares to lay off at least 18 teachers and aides at its Paramus, Teterboro and Bergen Academies campuses. Those employees learned of the layoffs Tuesday.

The district also plans to end all daytime programs in the Adult and Continuing Education Division after the current school year. According to district Superintendent Robert Aloia, night classes will remain in session during the next school year.

Once daytime courses end, the only alternative to night classes — which also may close — will be private vocational programs, such as Eastwick's.

Aloia, who also sits on the investment board, contends that the WIB-Eastwick advertisement is

not an ad, even though it was paid for by Eastwick.

"He volunteered to pay for it," Aloia said. "I don't consider it an advertisement."

Aloia contends that it was not intended to promote Eastwick's schools, despite the presence of an Eastwick College logo in the advertisement.

Eastwick also refused to refer to the paid ads as advertisements.

"These were done strictly as a community service," he said in a written statement. "We pay for them, just as we pay for so many other programs that help New Jersey's population. Never has there been an endorsement of Eastwick Education in these articles."

The professionals who work for the Workforce Investment Board are paid by the Bergen County Technical School District. According to its Web site, the board is "an alliance between the public and private sectors with an emphasis on business leadership."

Robin Widing, the acting executive director of the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission, which oversees the state's 17 local Workforce Investment Boards, said in a written statement that investment boards are required to have a majority of private-sector members, as well as representatives from organized labor and public education.

"Their programs and services are designed to reflect the needs of their local economy," said Widing, who added that the matter concerning the Bergen County WIB will be referred to the commission's governance committee.

Molinelli pointed out that Eastwick was a member of the Workforce Investment Board before she arrived, and that his membership was vetted by Democratic County Executive Dennis McNerney, the all-Democratic Freeholder Board and Jim Black, the investment board's chairman.

Molinelli and her husband, Bergen County Prosecutor John Molinelli, have donated more than \$30,000 to the Bergen County Democratic Organization during the last 10 years. Eastwick has donated more than \$12,000 to the campaigns of Rep. Robert Andrews since 1995. Andrews' campaign committees, in turn, have donated \$30,000 to the Democratic organization during that time.

Eastwick maintained that there is nothing untoward about his contributions.

"I do donate a generous portion of my income to various non-profit organizations but campaign contributions are a tiny percentage of my giving," he said. "Obviously they are trying to blame someone, but naming me as having some possible involvement in Bergen Tech's closing is totally false."

Ed Feiszli, a carpentry instructor at the county technical schools, is not convinced. He thinks Molinelli should be promoting the less-expensive county course offerings instead of more costly private schools.


"That seems like a blatant conflict of interest," he said.

E-mail: [gartland@northjersey.com](mailto:gartland@northjersey.com)

---

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.northjersey.com/news/bergenpolitics/43708857.html>

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)