Ascension Board voids contract with architects

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DONALDSONVILLE - The Ascension Parish School Board Tuesday night terminated its contract with the architectural firm responsible for plans for the troubled Galvez Primary School construction project.

By an 8-2 vote, the board released Alex Theriot & Associates Inc. from the Galvez project and announced plans to ratify a new contract with a yet-unnamed architect to complete the new school.

The architectural duties probably will be taken over by architect Ken Trivette, a former Theriot employee who designed the school before the firm got out of the architectural business and laid Trivette off, authorities said.

Theriot hired Trivette as a subcontractor to finish the school after he was released from the firm, according to Superintendent of Schools Ralph Ricardo.

He recommended that Theriot's contract be terminated because the architectural duties were sublet without the board's approval, in violation of the contract. School Board members Leon S. "Bubber" Geismar and Glynn Parent voted no.

Assistant District Attorney Gordon Crawford, the board's legal adviser, recommended that the Theriot contract be voided because the subcontractual agreement with Trivette is not permitted without the board's permission, Ricardo said.

"I'm just not completely convinced that all the ends are tied," Parent said.

The contract will be voided seven days after Theriot is notified in writing of the board's action, Ricardo said.

"I don't think they've taken the first step in dealing with this," Ricardo said.

The development is the latest in a long string of complications surrounding the $4 million-plus school construction project.

Construction work ground to a halt in mid-February when the original contractor, Campbell Construction Co. Inc., walked off the job and was placed in default of its $3.3 million contract to build the school.

Campbell's bonding company, Fidelity & Deposit Co. of Maryland, declined to finish the half-complete project, and the School Board was forced to seek bids a second time.

Picou Brothers Construction Co. of Gonzales submitted the low bid of about $2 million and resumed work in August only a few weeks before the School Board had hoped to open the school for classes.

Instead, the completion date was moved back to the end of the year. Trivette reported Tuesday night that construction delays probably will postpone completion another six weeks until February 1987.

Dropping Theriot from the project should not affect its progress, school officials said.

School Board member Garney Gautreau said the board stands to save money on architectural fees by dropping Theriot. The board will save $10,000 even if it is forced to pay a 5 percent penalty for canceling the contract, he said.

On another matter, a group of parents asked the School Board why their children are not allowed to bring their reading books home so the parents can tutor them.

Huey and Robert Hymel of Donaldsonville said their elementary school children are having difficulty with their reading assignments and could use the additional instruction they'd receive at home.

Ricardo said the School Board staff is developing a package of instructional materials to send home with students with reading difficulties.

However, he said the School Board does not allow the books themselves to be taken home. Students might merely memorize the reading assignments without gaining the reading skills the books are designed to develop, Ricardo said.

"We want to help your children," he said.

School Board Supervisor Shelby Robert said the school system is in the early stages of developing a wellness program for teachers and other school employees.

Matters of concern expressed by school officials are physical fitness, nutrition, stress and health and safety, Robert said. He said proposals to address the concerns will be presented to the board in the coming months.

School Board member Billy Arcement said the program will benefit employees by making them healthier, happier and more productive.

"This is a benefit. We're looking for their welfare," Arcement said.

In other action, the board:

- Learned that sales and use tax collections in the current fiscal year are about 2.5 percent below that of last year.
- Ratified a lease agreement with the city of Gonzales for recreational property adjacent to the Gonzales Primary School that will be used as a soccer field.