

# DeGise's delay on teaching job is questioned

By **KEN THORBOURNE**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Give Hudson County Executive Thomas A. DeGise an A-plus for having a backup plan.

Originally elected county executive in November 2002, DeGise, a former teacher at Snyder High, retired from his school position in January.

Asked about the delay, DeGise said he's essentially been on an extended leave from his teaching job because he always wanted to have a fall-back plan in case he lost the next election.

Highlighting the uncertainties of the partisan political life, DeGise, who won full four-year terms in 2003 and again last year, said, "The day after I lost the mayor's race in June 2001, I went back to work at Snyder High. I needed the money."

DeGise's relationship with the Board of Ed was so cozy that when he decided he needed to be on the payroll again to buy back years in the pension system for time he spent as a substitute teacher from 1977 to 1981, the board invited him to teach adult education night school classes at Dickinson High from September to December 2006.

"It is not illegal at all, but it is enjoying a certain privilege because of your elected position," said board member and former mayor Anthony Cucci, about DeGise's leave of absences and four-month night teaching job, for which DeGise was paid \$798.

Cucci and board member Gerald McCann made inquiries at the board about DeGise's situation after it was brought to their attention that he recently retired.

DeGise acknowledged he "made a call" to a school official when he realized he needed to be put back on the payroll. DeGise paid \$22,630 for the additional time, which gave him 25 years in the system and lifetime health benefits.

DeGise said for two nights a week during a four-month stretch in 2006, he taught civics



**THOMAS A. DeGISE**

and government and dispensed advice about job-hunting at Dickinson High.

His leave of absences didn't cost taxpayers a dime and his option to buy back time is open to any school employee in the state, DeGise emphasized. DeGise said he finally retired in January so he could pass along pension benefits to his two daughters, one of whom is disabled. His wife passed away last year.

DeGise receives \$2,269 a month from the state's teachers pension and annuity fund and has 13 1/2 years invested in the public employees retirement system, said a state Department of Treasury spokesman.

"He (DeGise) can say that this is allowed to everyone. But that is not true," said McCann, a former mayor and political opponent of DeGise who served time in prison for bank fraud and tax evasion unrelated to his time as mayor. "Is every teacher allowed to come back and talk about politics to qualify for extended health and pension benefits for his family?"

Superintendent of Schools Charles T. Epps Jr., who signed off on DeGise's "personal business" leaves — that ran from November 2002 to August 2006 and the entire 2007 calendar year — didn't return phone calls to comment.