

And then there were two

LMC settles on two president candidates

By **RALPH HEIBUTZKI**
HP Correspondent

BENTON HARBOR — Trevor Kubatzke and Jon Mandrell are the last finalists standing in Lake Michigan College's presidential search.

LMC Board members chose Kubatzke and Mandrell at Tuesday night's meeting, while eliminating Jackson College Provost Rebekah Woods from further consideration.

All three candidates interviewed last week for a chance to succeed Bob Harrison, who returned in May 2016 as president emeritus/acting CEO, after the board fired his predecessor, Jennifer Spielvogel.

The fourth finalist, Orinthia Montague, vice president for student affairs and chief diversity officer at Normandale College in

Bloomington, Minn., withdrew for personal reasons.

Tuesday's decision came down to the finalists' interview performances, plus 167 feedback surveys due by 5 p.m. Monday, said Trustee Mary Jo Tomasini, who's chairwoman of the search committee.

"It was a very difficult decision," Tomasini said. "We received feedback from staff, faculty, students and the public, and we were able to get different constituent feedback. We definitely read all the surveys, that's for sure. It was very difficult to eliminate one. All three were great fits for this college."

The current process — which began in November 2016, with 92 applicants, and narrowed to 13 semi-finalists — is exceeding the board's expectations, Tomasini said.

"We're just really pleased at the

candidate pool. I believe it's the best candidate pool I've ever seen. We had strong candidates, and we had more candidates. And that is why this decision is so very difficult," she said.

Now that the board has chosen finalists, doing more reference checks is the next order of business, Tomasini said.

"Once we finish the referencing, we hope to make an offer in the next 30 days," she said.

The board may also do site visits, but hasn't decided on that yet, she said.

Kubatzke is vice president of student services at Milwaukee Area Technical College, according to a biography on LMC's website.

He's a board member for the Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee and is a member of the Milwaukee Power Squadron. He's served on the Taylorville Community School District board and the Illinois School Board Association, his biography states. He

worked as a police officer in West Union, Iowa.

Mandrell is vice president of academics and student services at Sauk Valley Community College in Dixon, Ill. He serves on the boards of the Dixon Family YMCA, Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce, Sauk Valley Leadership Program, and is a member of the Twin Cities Rotary, his biography states.

Mandrell previously worked as a police officer in Oregon, Ill.

The board plans to have Harrison's successor in April 2017, though the actual timing will probably depend on whatever loose ends Kubatzke or Mandrell will have tie up with their current employers, Tomasini said.

"It'll depend on who we select, and what their transition plan can be. Any administrator at that level, it's not like you get two weeks' notice. So we want to respect that because we would never want someone to leave us in the lurch,"

she said.

The board wound up launching a second search in less than a year after it fired Spielvogel in May after only three months on the job. The board alleged unauthorized spending and unprofessional behavior.

Harrison then stepped back into the presidency, from which he'd retired in December 2015.

Tomasini said the fall 2016 timing of the second search, which LMC is conducting with consultant Angela Provart of the Pauly Group, made a real difference in the overall quality of candidates.

"Angela advised us this time might be better, and I'm really glad we heeded her advice. (Last time) we wanted someone to start Jan. 1. She cautioned us to slow down and try to push this into the first or second quarter of this year," Tomasini said. "We're real appreciative that Dr. Harrison is willing to stay, and give us a little more time."