

School paper unafraid of controversy

By MIKE McINTIRE

WILTON — "In America, the president reigns for four years, and journalism governs for ever and ever."

With those lofty words spanning the masthead, the October issue of The Forum hit the halls of Wilton High School, making administrators everywhere shift in their seats.

The newspaper, published by a 14-member editorial staff of students, for students, has taken a distinctly investigative turn this year, probing into such thickets as the resignation of the student body president, high food prices in the cafeteria and the closing of a lounge for pupils.

It also has confronted the administration, charging school officials and staff with trying to manage the news and conducting a "cover-up" in one instance. Overall, it has the makings of a classic clash between those with a stake in maintaining an even keel and those who have an obligation to rock the boat.

Much to the unrest of the high school principal, Donald Holt.

In what is billed as the first of a monthly column in The Forum by the principal, Holt diplomatically conveys his perturbation with the current state of journalism and even

invokes the resignation of State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb as an example of "integrity and honesty" in reporting.

"Over the years I must admit I have found fault with both journalism as a profession and with our Forum in particular," Holt said. "My goal is to have a school newspaper that is NOT reflective of the preponderance of today's journalism.

"Perhaps the answer to my problem is to ask The Forum to reject most of the current journalistic practices and instead exemplify a set of values that returns integrity of reporting to their rightful prominence," said the principal.

Editors of The Forum, however, have their own gripes. Under the bold heading "May I Print This?" Scott Copperman relates a tale akin to Watergate, in his attempts to report the story of the student body president resigning, after one month on the job, upon the request of the rest of the student government.

"Wilton High School is a notoriously conservative school, and I am not surprised that an issue as 'touchy' as this one resulted in 'managed news,'" said Copperman. "I think the staff should reconsider the example it is

setting and try to prevent future 'cover-up,' for we, the student body, are the impressionable leaders of tomorrow."

David Facini, the Wilton High School history teacher who advises the editors of The Forum, said this group of students "is the best single group of kids I've had."

"I have seen an evolution in the right direction," said Facini, who has been the paper's advisor for three years. "I really think the thing is getting better."

Facini said many complaints in the past about inaccuracies and exaggerations in reporting were justified, and that this year a real attempt is being made to present quality reporting while at the same time creating a "forum for controversy." So far, said Facini — who screens all stories before they get in — the students have been doing a good job of stirring up controversy.

"They're going to have me working in a hardware store before the year is out," he moaned.

Adam Rifkin, editor-in-chief of The Forum, said the paper is working in conjunction with a newly-formed student television news/feature program, "Spiltered

Please See Page 8

Paper

Continued from page 1
Views," on many stories. The journalistic team is currently trying to find out why "people don't like the cafeteria anymore," said Rifkin, and in

particular the reasoning behind the school's food prices.

Kris Forland, the brains behind "Spiltered Views," summed up the goals of the program this way: "Investigative reporting. We're not looking for trouble, we're just looking for the truth."

What sorts of people are the news crew looking for?

"Hard workers, writers, people with connections or hot leads, people with abstract or hidden talents, liberals, communists, skateboarders and members of every club in this