

Parties look to seize control of board

28 Oct 2009 — Bucks County Courier Times

middletown

The Republicans will look to seize the board majority and the Democrats to maintain it in next week's election for Middletown supervisor.

Democrat Julie Sauerbry-Smith faces Republican Tom Gallagher for a two-year seat that will fill out the remainder of Diane Marseglia's term. She was elected in 2005, but left in 2007 after being elected a Bucks County commissioner. Two more years remain in that term.

Incumbent Democrat Chuck Thompson, appointed to the board in 2007 to replace Marseglia, and running mate Harry Arnold are running against Republicans Patrick Mallon and Drew Kreiling for two full six-year seats.

The board is 3-2 Democrat. Republican Jasper Caro didn't seek re-election. And Democrat Kathy Heuer, appointed to the board last year to replace Lisa Pflaumer, chose not to run for a full term.

As the election draws near, the Democratic candidates are accusing the Republicans of ducking a debate the Democrats wanted to hold at the township municipal center and televise over the government access cable television channels. It would have been moderated by someone from the newspaper.

"These Republicans' delays, ducking and dodging a public debate proves only one thing: They know they are on the wrong side of the issues," Thompson said in a Democratic release. "Given the fear and smear that they have published and mailed thus far, one could understand why they would want to avoid the light in an open debate."

Gallagher said the Republicans had a previously scheduled meet-and-greet on the night the Democrats wanted to debate. Thompson responded that accommodations could have been made if the Republicans really wanted it to work.

However, Gallagher said he had tried to set up a debate to be moderated by the Bucks County League of Women Voters, but the league had to decline because of a scheduling conflict. Gallagher said he also invited the Democrats to debate on the "Speak Your Piece" program on WBCB radio but they refused.

"Gallagher suggested debating in a 50-minute segment on WBCB with a partisan-slanted moderator who is starved for programming content and has an audience that could fit in a van," said the Democratic release.

Thompson, 63, and his wife, Christine, own a marketing consultant company called C & C Communications that they run from home. Thompson believes the Democrats are best able to move the township forward.

"In the last few years, we've built a new public works building, a new fire and rescue substation, paved all the streets in the Levittown sections and formed a committee to look at how to improve police, fire and rescue services in the township," he said.

While tax increases have accompanied that progress, the increases have been reasonable and well thought out, said Thompson.

"Our philosophy is to get things done with as little taxpayer money as possible but to still get them done," he said.

Arnold, 39, is single and an organizer with the Communications Workers of America Local 13000. He's on the township zoning hearing board and is a former member of the Telecommunications Advisory Board.

"When the township had Republican-controlled boards over the years, as a resident I felt disconnected from the inner workings of the township," he said. "I want to have a responsible government and one where residents feel comfortable talking with government officials. I believe the Democratic ticket in general shares that philosophy of an open and responsive government."

Sauerbry-Smith, 35, owns a marketing and technology services company called Openspark LLC that she runs from home. She lives with husband Brian and daughter Jenna, 1, and said she was partly inspired to seek public office by her father, Chris Sauerbry, and grandfather Paul Sauerbry. They were owners of the former Greenwood Dairies on Business Route 1 and were very active in civic and charitable organizations such as the United Way and Kiwanis Club.

"Once I became a parent in this township, I felt it was my responsibility to try and make sure it continued to be a good place to live," Sauerbry-Smith said. "I believe we're not elected to power, we're elected to serve. I will try to keep politics out of things as much as possible. I don't want to get involved in the negativity."

Gallagher, 56, has served on the township zoning hearing board for five years and before that was on the planning commission for a year. He lives with his wife, Patricia, and owns a computer systems consulting company he runs from home.

"It's time for a change," he said. "We want to control spending and hold the line on taxes."

The Republicans favor a chief of police over the public safety director system instituted by the Democratic majority.

"I favor a chief of police because it keeps politics out of the police department. A chief needs to be autonomous in that regard," said Gallagher.

"I think unifying emergency services under a public safety director will bring some much needed efficiencies to the township and will save taxpayers money," Arnold responded. "I believe a public safety director is better able to control overtime and other spending in the police department and also bring more efficiency to the process of buying fire trucks and other equipment. That's not a referendum on the quality of work being done by any one department in the township. No one is saying any one department is doing a bad job. It's more of an administrative problem, I think."

Mallon, 53, is senior vice president of sales for the ICT Group in Newtown Township.

"I've always had a desire to do more for the township and community," he said. "My wife (Patricia) suffered a massive stroke in 2003 and it reminded me that tomorrow is not promised to us and if there was something I wanted to do, I should do it. To me, the Republicans would bring some fresh faces to the board. We're new to the political scene and don't bring any baggage. We're all business people who have run successful businesses, and I would put my business experience up against the Democrats any day."

He continued: "One of the things I'm concerned about is the police department being understaffed, so I think we need to address that and do it without imposing additional taxes. I think there are federal grants that could help. I also want to help bring back more civility and respect to the board."

The Democrats said they don't think those qualities are lacking.

The newspaper was unsuccessful in reaching Kreiling for comment. He is a human resources administrator at Trane Inc. in Trenton.

Chris English can be reached at 215-949-4193 or cenglish@phillyBurbs.com.

"Parties look to seize control of board" Bucks County Courier Times 28 Oct 2009: B8