

Fallen Leaf Lake residents vote in 3 new board members

By Susan Wood

Based on semi-official results reported by El Dorado County Elections Department officials Tuesday night, Fallen Leaf Lake residents will get mostly a new board in the coming months.

More than two-thirds (321) of the 461 registered voters cast ballots for Thomas Barber to replace former board member Dana Clark, Wanda Kownacki taking board member Eric Thaden's seat and Thomas Bacchetti taking over where former board President Mike Kraft once sat. More than 80 percent opted to recall board members Thaden and Kraft, the latter resigning Aug. 20 as president amid a report of him not qualifying to be a registered voter in the Community Services District.

Kraft has become a controversial figure with a segment of the community. He led a movement to oust longtime general store and marina concessionaire John and Ruth Rich. Since then, Rob and Sandy Wirth have taken over the hub of the lakeside community. For more than a year, CSD meetings have been punctuated by perceived threats, standing room only attendance, shouting matches and has led to a divided community.

When all is said and done, board member Jennifer Thornton will be the only familiar face on the board, as Terri Thomas decided to move on as well. Thornton has been on the board for less than a year.

Board clerk Patsy Miller resigned at about the same time as Kraft with no public explanation. A new clerk will be appointed by the incoming board. Choosing officers of the board is on the Sept. 4 agenda for the district.

In his resignation, Kraft said he's "disheartened" about the "selfish" nature of some citizens of the village at the base of the Desolation Wilderness near South Lake Tahoe.

His successor, Bacchetti, told Lake Tahoe News he looks forward to the opportunity.

"One thing I've looked at over the last year is how important it is to make sure we take care of the process and make sure everyone knows what's going on," Bacchetti said, adding how the CSD board shouldn't "go off and do whatever it wants." He believes the outgoing board failed to do that.

Bacchetti, an arts administrator, noted how the lake represents the one constant in his life over the last 45 years.

Phone calls to Kownacki and Barber were left unanswered.

The district turmoil also prompted a review of the elections code from El Dorado County. A question arose as to the eligibility of board candidates and registered voters if they don't permanently reside in the district.

"(Residency) is where they claim their homeowner tax exemption," Green said.