

Totals change, winners don't as they plot path for S. Tahoe

Updated Nov. 5, 2010, 8:28am.

By Susan Wood

A qualified congratulations came early and from far away Wednesday to longtime South Lake Tahoe resident Claire Fortier, when her 86-year-old father L. "Ren" Renshaw called at 5:30am Eastern time to wish his daughter well for ending up as the prospective front-runner in the City Council race.

Angela Swanson got an early-morning kiss goodbye from her husband declaring: "You're ahead," when in the darkness he left his wife, the third in line for three seats on the City Council. She later received a call from former fellow school board member Larry Green, who she encouraged to run for his seat for Lake Tahoe Unified. The gesture seemed to come full circle in South Lake Tahoe civics.



Tom Davis knows the fence at El Dorado Beach, aka Lakeview Commons, is a sore spot with

residents.

Photo/Kathryn

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Veteran former Councilman Tom Davis started the morning with a congratulatory call from current Councilmember Hal Cole, who has served alongside the former vacation rental property manager and casino marketer during his 12-year run on the town's board.

This year, 10 candidates ran for the seats being vacated by Kathay Lovell, Jerry Birdwell and Bill Crawford. Fortier took in 1,402 votes at 16.62 percent; 1,279 ballots, or 15.16 percent of the vote, were cast for Davis; while Swanson edged out the rest of the pack with 1,024 votes at 12.14 percent of the tally. The trio takes office Dec. 14. Those numbers were updated as of 5pm Wednesday.

However, 1,000 votes still need to be counted along with the 222 provisional votes, elections officials told *Lake Tahoe News* Thursday morning.

All results are preliminary pending until final tabulations, which are expected in the next 10 days. The deadline is cut short by the state from the usual mandated 28-day certification to be able to turn around results from the special election, which was on the same Nov. 2 ballot, for the 1st District Senate race. There will be a runoff Jan. 4 between Ted Gaines and Ken Cooley to replace the late Dave Cox. If Gaines wins, he'll vacate his Assembly seat and a special election will be necessary.

El Dorado County voter turnout was 54.57 percent. Election officials had predicted it to be 65 percent. In South Lake Tahoe, 41.8 percent of the 8,747 registered voters cast ballots. Those numbers could go up slightly as the provisional ballots – or problem forms – are counted by hand.

County elections data cruncher Joe Zitzelberger admitted the close contests are “subject to change.” Swanson increased her lead with the latest numbers to 48 points over fourth place businesswoman Joy Curry.

The city’s Measure E, which aimed to raise the business tax in the city, lost by seven votes based on the most current data. It had been a dead heat when first reported. Mayor Pro Tem Hal Cole did not know if the city would seek a recount.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen a 50-50,” Zitzelberger said before the count changed.

Ready to take office

Despite the vote totals not locked in, the three frontrunners for council are looking ahead to tackle a lengthy list of tasks facing the city – from the beleaguered BlueGo transit system to Lakeview Commons’ bankrupt construction project, a site designed as a gathering place for a community in need of something to cheer about.

“Yes, we have a heck of a lot to do, but rather than it seeming overwhelming, I’d like to think that this is one group who can focus on achieving,” Fortier said.

Jumping out of the starting gate, Fortier – a former newspaper editor and medical office chief – wants to have at least one council retreat to “immediately” nail down a few priorities. Other councils have developed a long list of goals.

Davis, who has a prolific history of South Shore volunteerism, would also like to narrow the goals to ensure the emphasis remains on the highest priorities.

“What I learned on the campaign trail is we all have the same goals,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*. Davis listed tourism, recreation, public safety and roads as core priorities in need of attention.

"I think we have a great council. This is not about me. It's about we," he said, later quoting the late city Mayor Norm Woods' advice to him: "Tom, all you need to do is count to three." Woods was referring to a quorum needed on a five-member board to get the work done.

Davis, Fortier and Swanson admitted to being three different people with varying approaches, but pledged to work together.

Swanson commended Davis' community mindedness and Fortier's smarts. The school facilities planning consultant and former school board member plans to use her contacts in Sacramento to get the city a little help from the state. She was pleased to learn Proposition 22, which bans the state from taking funds from local jurisdictions, was headed for passage.

"I think people are sick and tired of the state not taking care of its financial house," she said. Still, the reality of closing a \$15 billion shortfall could prove painful for California, she added.

Like Fortier and Davis, Swanson anticipates working closely with the current council, consisting of Cole and Bruce Grego.

"We all have different approaches, and don't always agree, but I've found myself saying 'I'd never thought about (things) that way,'" she said. "We all share the same passion for the community."