

Expected record voter turnout in El Dorado County



More than 50 people celebrate election night at the Tahoe Mountain Lab in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

A contemptuous, yet engaging, presidential race, multiple California ballot initiatives and a slew of local measures and races brought El Dorado County voters out in record numbers today.

Registrar of Voters Bill Schultz reported that more than 116,000 residents registered to vote, dwarfing the June primary in which 106,000 or so ballots were issued. The number of registered in South Lake Tahoe is 10,202.

“It’s the most we’ve ever had,” Schultz told *Lake Tahoe News* from his busy elections office on Nov. 8. He attributed the level of interest to “one of those perfect storms” in which “people came out who haven’t come out in years.”

He even took three families who wanted to see the process on a tour. Polling “observers,” who showed up across the nation amid claims of prospective voter fraud were also on hand in Placerville, but the office remained civil.

The level of interest kept the Elections Department hopping. The staffers emptied the absentee drop box six times during the day. With just the absentees numbering at least 47,000 collected from the more than 86,000 issued, the county sits at an estimated 48 percent turnout just on the absentees. The county turnout is estimated at a 73.5 percent.

Schultz also pointed out how his department has seen a run-on with provisionals, those ballots counted last and command more attention in checks on accuracy. The county takes 28 days to certify the election largely because of those. Provisional ballots are ones that need extra verification.

South Lake Tahoe was hopping with anticipation – some good and bad – over the election. Parties dot the landscape, including a large group that came out to socialize at Tahoe Mountain Lab.

Many people admitted to being nervous, exhausted and somewhat glad the campaign season is over – if only it culminates with their candidates winning a seat or their pet measures passing. California had an unprecedented number of ballot initiatives that turned the voter guide into a document the size of a small phone book.

Some people who kept one eye on the large screen television in the lobby area at the lab and another on the other people said the one thing about the exhausting and heated presidential race that was welcome was that in turn the local candidates

would get their due.

Coleen Shade characterized the election season as a war of sorts, adding she's shell-shocked by the process.

"I'm nervous for my community and my country," she told *Lake Tahoe News*, noting how the divisiveness in the nation has hit at many levels. "I see the same level of divisiveness in the smaller elections too."

She's not alone.

David Orr, who runs the Tahoe Mountain Lab, said he's drained by the mean-spirited nature of election campaigns.

"We're going for each other's throats," he said. Being a parent, some people who run for office "scare the hell out of me," he admitted.

Heidi Hill Drum, no newcomer to election politics and activism, said it was difficult to balance a full time job and her family and being politically active. But she isn't about to shirk from her civic duty.

"It's pretty hard to be passive," she said.

As the Tahoe Prosperity Center's chief executive officer, she would like to see South Lake Tahoe City Council members "work with the community and staff" to get things done. That to her is what it takes to build a successful community.