

EDC auditor candidates distinguish themselves



Joe Harn and Mike Owen are running for El Dorado County auditor.

By Kathryn Reed

Even though Joe Harn and Mike Owen went to El Dorado High School, with four years separating them, friends they are not. Owen wants Harn's job.

June marks the second consecutive election that Owen has tried to unseat Harn as auditor-controller of El Dorado County.

Harn is endorsed by District Attorney Vern Pierson. Owen is endorsed by Sheriff John D'Agostini.

Harn has been auditor since 1994. Owen once worked for the county and is now owner of a winery on the West Slope.

A requirement to be a county auditor in California is to be an active certified public accountant in good standing with the California Board of Accountancy. Last fall when Owen started

actively campaigning for the June election he **falsely claimed** he had kept his CPA license active.

One of Owen's allegations in his campaign material is that Harn doesn't pay bills on time. Legally a county auditor couldn't do that even if he wanted to.

While Harn's campaign material says El Dorado has zero debt, the truth is the county has a sizable unfunded liability for CalPERS and it has loans to repay such as for the new sheriff's facilities – both things the average person would consider debt.

Owen questions Harn's demeanor, citing **past grand juries** that said the entire county was dysfunctional. Those reports led to Harn being investigated by the California Attorney General. That **case was dropped** and Harn was never asked to testify.

Owen has his own baggage. Campaign financial reports submitted to the El Dorado County Elections Department indicate he was penalized at least \$600 for violating the California Political Reform Act. Owen's campaign financial report for the period ending April 21 indicates he paid prior year campaign committee fees to the secretary of state in 2018. The Political Reform Act requires candidates pay a \$50 annual fee to the state if they have an active local campaign committee. In 2018 Owen paid \$450 to the secretary of state for "prior years' annual fees."

Of the \$450 paid, \$300 was a penalty for failing to pay on time. In 2017, Owen paid \$400 to the secretary of state, again \$300 was a penalty for failing to pay on time.

His campaign financial reports call the payments filing fees when actually the majority of the payments are for state imposed late payment penalties.

On top of all of that, Owen's winery in Camino, Crystal Basin Cellars, has had various tax liens recorded for failure to pay

property taxes on time. Owen has also had to pay penalties to the county for not paying his business taxes on time.

The election is June 5, with several county offices on the ballot.