Long, Mortensen, Schaaf win GMCS board seats

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 10 February 2017 10:33

Official: Certification Feb. 10

Michael Schaaf, Charles Long and Christopher Mortensen were elected to seats on the Gallup-McKinley County Board of Education Feb. 7, bringing fresh faces and new ideas to a board that recently put former Superintendent Frank Chiapetti on paid administrative leave.

The board seats that were voted upon were for Districts 2, 4 and 5. Lynn Huenemann, Joe Menini and the seat occupied by the appointed Sandra Jeff each changed hands. Schaaf essentially had no competition in a race that included retired educator Ester Macias and retired government administrator Gerald O'Hara.

WHO WON?

Charles Long, a former McKinley County Treasurer, won the District 2 board seat occupied by Jeff. Jeff, who did not attend a recent school board candidate forum sponsored by the *Gallup Sun,* the Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation and Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, was appointed to the seat last year when Titus Nez resigned from the school board. Long received 352 votes and Freda Joe, a Crownpoint educator, got 136. Jeff brought up the

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rear with 107 votes and was typecast in media reports as not being a resident of greater McKinley County.

In District 4, Christopher Mortensen received 388 votes to 276 for Brenda Chicharello. Chicharello is vice president of the school district's Indian Education Committee. Mortensen is a local businessman, a Gallup High School graduate and a University of New Mexico graduate, too. The District 4 seat was vacated by Joe Menini who chose not to run again.

Schaaf, a newcomer to area politics, ran away fast in the District 5 race, garnering 770 votes to 217 for Macias and 109 for O'Hara. Of the three districts that were up for grabs, Schaaf won with the widest point margin. Schaaf is a Nebraska transplant who unsuccessfully ran for a city council seat against Allan Landavazo in the recent past.

Like Menini, the pro-Navajo Huenemann decided to not run again.

Members of the Gallup-McKinley County Board of Education serve voluntary four-year staggered terms.

PUEBLO OF ZUNI

Also on Tuesday's ballot were board seats for Districts 3, 4 and 5 in the Pueblo of Zuni. Jerome Haskie won District 3, Shelly Chimoni won District 4 and Willie Zuni ran as a write-in candidate for Position 5 in Zuni and won with 55 unofficial votes.

UNM-GALLUP

For seats on the Local Advisory Board at the University of New Mexico-Gallup, incumbent Priscilla Smith beat Edwin Begay by a margin of 1,721 to 1,120. Incumbent Ralph Richards, a Republican, won over Marvin Murphy 2,006 to 931 in a landslide for the UNM-Gallup Position 2 seat.

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A $25 million bond question dealing with school-wide improvements, hardware and software purchases, among other things, passed 2,206 to 657. A UNM-Gallup tax question that focused on capital improvements passed 1,868 to 1,118.

McKinley County Director of Elections Rick Palochak, said a total of 3,216 registered voters participated in Tuesday's elections. He said everything went well with the county's voting machines.

"We had two poll workers who did not show," Palochak said. "There were no problems with any of the machines."

Palochak said the final election numbers could change since there are some provisional ballots that have yet to be counted. Palochak said the change, if any, would not be that great since winning margins across the board were pretty substantial.

He said certification takes place Feb. 10 at 1:30 pm and before Magistrate Judge Cynthia Sanders.

"I voted for the first time in my life," Donna Johns, 25, of Gallup said. Johns is a graduate of Gallup High School. "My vote counts and that's why I voted."

By Bernie Dotson
Sun Correspondent