

Santa Clara Candidates Get Up Close and Personal with Voters

By Carolyn Schuk

On Thursday October 21, candidates for Santa Clara city offices put a personal face on the election at a forum sponsored by the Santa Clara Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, Intel Corp., and the Santa Clara Weekly. The forum included both statements from the candidates as well as Q&A.

Steve Lodge, a 27 year veteran of the Santa Clara police department who is running unopposed for a second term as police chief, was the event's first speaker.

Lodge highlighted some of the department's business-focused programs including Business Watch and Project Clearance's crime prevention through environmental design — both examples of partnership between a public agency and private business, a theme that was sounded repeatedly throughout the evening. To illustrate the ways the police department addresses the character of the Santa Clara community, Lodge said that the police department currently dedicates 50 percent of its patrol, detective, and undercover officers to property crime — with two officers dedicated full-time to high-tech crime.

Different Routes to Fairness

Presentations by the three candidates for City Clerk — Elise DeYoung, Rod Diridon Jr., and Vonna Gissler — offered insight into the responsibilities and challenges of the office of city clerk. Because of the city clerk's role in administering elections, record-keeping, and communications, all the candidates stressed the importance of fairness and high ethics in the conduct of this office.

Diridon spoke first, highlighting his experience as an elected official and eight years on the Santa Clara City Council. This is in contrast to his opponents, neither of whom have held elected office. He pointed out that his familiarity with city government and its operations would let him hit the ground running. "Political experience is key because the City Clerk manages our elections. A clerk that doesn't know about politics lacks the skill set to keep people honest."

Of course, being a political newcomer is viewed as an advantage by some. DeYoung — who brings an impressive list of business and educational credentials to her

Board. Previously, Moore served as campaign manager for former Council members Lisa Gillmor and Jim Amo. Moore has also served eight years as a Commissioner of Parks and Recreation.

Although this is their first run for public office, Karen Hardy and Gap Kim both serve on the city's planning commission. In that role both bring insight and experience in making planning decisions.

Karen Hardy is well-known for her successful grassroots campaign to prevent a card club from being built in Santa Clara in 1992. Jamie McLeod brings an extensive list of credentials as a civil engineer — currently McLeod is a city planner with the City of Sunnyvale — as well as long experience working with non-profit community organizations in California and overseas. Currently a sales team manager at large software company, Gap Kim served as a policy aide for San Jose Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, where he worked on transportation, economic development and quality-of-life issues.

Mario Bouza, Chuck Blair, Will Kennedy, Nam Nguyen, and Todd O'Donnell — all newcomers to Santa Clara's political scene — bring the perspective of small businesses to the race.

Blair and Bouza are long-time small business owners in Santa Clara. For 12 years Kennedy has run a Santa Clara law practice specializing in consumer protection cases and has been active in several legal aid organizations. Nguyen is an independent software developer with deep community activist roots in Vietnamese community. O'Donnell works in his family's Santa Clara-based construction company and teaches theater.

Fred Clegg, who is a former Parks and Recreation Commissioner, is a veteran of several city elections. A buyer for a telecommunications company, Clegg has run for a number of city council seats and, in the past, has highlighted his role as the sole candidate from the north-of-Bayshore neighborhood.

Where They Stand

In light of the current economic climate, improving the local economy was the focus of several questions. To attract and retain new business, Kolstad pointed to the

criteria," fellow commissioner Hardy added.

McLeod emphasized the role of high-density housing in protecting industrial and business space and maintaining the tax base to support core city services at current levels. As an example of how in certain cases conversion makes sense, Moore cited the Santa Clara University project that converted commercial property into a recreation area.

Housing is another issue that is always of interest in Santa Clara. Bouza has made his opposition to high density development a central feature of his campaign — he also opposes converting commercial real estate to residential. Both Kennedy and McLeod have made clear their support for high density development when located in proximity to public transit.

By the end of the evening, listeners certainly had a better acquaintance with the people who want to represent them in City Hall.

Terry James, a first-timer at attending a candidate forum in Santa Clara, thought that it was a valuable experience. "It's great to get a sense of who the candidates are and why they're running. My biggest surprise was the small audience."

The Mission City Money Trail

Questions about influence have figured prominently in the San Jose Mercury's reporting of Santa Clara's city council election. ("Old Guard making a Play", Monday Oct. 11, 2004 and "Wheeler-Dealers Pressured Gap Kim to Switch Races", Sunday Oct. 10, 2004.) These editorials describe ties between the Blair, Kennedy, and Moore candidacies and the Gillmor family — long-time Santa Clara power brokers. So it's not surprising that the final Forum questions focused on ethics and financing.

The candidates were asked about the funding for their campaigns; specifically if they had accepted cash donations over the \$99 limit specified by city law. Bouza,

MacDevitt, and O'Donnell stated that they were funding their campaigns themselves. And Hardy — whose credentials as a 'watch dog' include spearheading the effort to discipline Councilman Jim Amo (subsequently convicted) for failing to disclose campaign contributions — reported that the average donation to her campaign is \$35.00.

Blair, Kennedy, Kolstad, and Moore described being offered — and returning — cash contributions of \$500. However, disclosure statements from Blair, Kennedy, and Moore show patterns that might be, in the words of Hardy, "unsettling" to voters concerned about the influence of money on public policy.

The Sept. 30 FPPC 460 reports for Blair, Kennedy, and Moore show deposits of multiple individual contributions of \$500 from members of the Gillmor family. The candidates admitted at the Forum that these were in cash. The total amounts shown in the September 30 reports are: \$3,000 to \$2,000 to Kennedy, 4,000 to Moore.

These contributions were made on Sept. 17 and Sept. 27. All contributions to a single candidate were made on the same date even though they were from different individuals. These contributions were subsequently returned to be replaced with checks. It is also interesting to note that the total number of contributors shown by these three candidates is significantly fewer than those reported by other candidates.

Represented among these contributors were former Mayor Gary Gillmor and former Councilwoman Lisa Gillmor — who would presumably know that accepting cash contributions over \$99 is illegal.

The Blair-Kennedy-Moore candidacies share the same backers and contributors. In addition to heavy representation by Gillmor family members, the list of supporters includes family of John Vidovich — developer of the controversial Doma Estates project.

