



COUNTDOWN TO NOV. 2

ATHERTON

Money trickles in for council candidates

Records show much of coffers consist of loans hopefuls made to own campaigns

BY BONNIE ESLINGER
Daily News Staff Writer

In a town with some of the most expensive homes in the nation, only a trickle of money is flowing into the campaigns of candidates for the Atherton City Council.

And much of the funding is in the form of loans the candidates are making to their own campaigns, according to finance statements released earlier this week.

Incumbent Jim Dobbie is the only candidate to raise more than \$10,000 so far this year — \$14,131. During the latest reporting period between July 1 and Sept. 30, he also received the highest number of contributions at 45, with only one from outside the town.

They included \$1,000 each from residents Robert Wilson, Joan and Elmo Sanders, O.L. Hoch, and Herman and Isobel Christensen.

Dobbie also loaned his campaign \$1,400. The second highest fund-raiser is challenger Bill Widmer, who has amassed \$9,840. He is followed by incumbent Jerry Carlson with \$6,147 and newcomer Cary Wiest with \$1,376, including \$876 that he loaned himself.

With less than four weeks until the Nov. 2 election, Wiest said he hopes to collect more money but noted he has focused on talking to people, not “campaigning for money.”

“I’ve been out there campaigning for a seat on the council,” said Wiest, who moved to Atherton in 2009. His one donation, for

\$500, came from the Silicon Valley Association of Realtors.

Widmer, a business executive, loaned his campaign \$1,000. His 21 contributors are all from Atherton and include the Christensens, who gave a total of \$3,000, and Greg Conlon, the Republican nominee for an Assembly seat, who donated \$100.

Carlson donated \$1,000 to his own campaign. Of his 25 donors, only three are from outside Atherton, but they contributed a total of \$1,500. The donations included \$1,000 from fellow Council Member Elizabeth Lewis and her husband, Joe, and \$500 from Conlon.

E-mail Bonnie Eslinger at beslinger@dailynewsgroup.com.

SCHOOL MATTERS

Community, PTA work in tandem to push school biking

When Penny Ellson, a PTA council traffic safety committee member, asked PTAs at the individual schools to write letters supporting Palo Alto’s application for a student bicycling grant, she said the response was overwhelming.

“I was truly amazed at (and grateful for) their quick response,” she said in a letter thanking the PTA Council. “Many sites took time to write really thoughtful, customized letters about the specific ways the grant could help their sites.”

Ellson hoped the letters from the PTA groups as well as the Palo Alto Unified School District and other community groups would help the city get the grant.

Palo Alto is vying for a piece of a \$500,000 fund allocated by the Valley Transportation Authority to reduce greenhouse gases in the county through Vehicle Emissions Reduction Based at Schools, or VERBS. The VTA issued a call for projects in September to expand existing Safe Routes to School programs and is planning to present the chosen projects at the Dec. 9 VTA board meeting.

Palo Alto’s project, if approved, would produce new route maps for all the district schools, expand “Bike Rodeo” education events, fund automated bicyclist counters, create more biking encouragement events and subsidize safety devices like helmets for children who can’t afford them.

“This funding would go a long way toward helping Palo Alto tie together our various existing Safe Routes programs under one umbrella and bring our existing materials up to date,” Ellson said.

The Safe Routes to School programs have helped children get back to biking and walking to school. More than half of Jordan students ride their bikes to school, which, according to Ellson, may be one of the highest percentages in the country.

She said, “We are proud of our student commuters.” Adults who want to get back on their bicycles can get a push this Sunday at “Bike Palo Alto!”

The free event, open to families and cyclists of all abilities, will happen from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Escondido School.

At the event, you can find the best ways to get around town on a bike with bike maps, have your bike inspected for free, and get safe biking tips, fitted for a helmet and answers to bicycling questions.

The program is an example of community cooperation — the Green Teams of College Terrace and Barron Park neighborhoods are sponsoring “Bike Palo Alto!” along with Palo Alto’s Way2Go Alternative Transportation program.

For more information, call Kathy Durham at 650-329-2568 or e-mail kathy.durham@cityofpaloalto.org.

Event info is listed at www.350.org/bike-palo-alto. School Matters is happy to hear your feedback. Please e-mail comments to schoolmatters@paloaltopta.org to reach Preeva Tramiel.



PREEVA TRAMIEL

SANTA CLARA COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Seven candidates seeking 3 seats on board

BY SHARON NOGUCHI
Bay Area News Group

The candidates for county school board say they would like to steer it back toward its education mission and away from the fractious politics that have landed the Santa Clara County Office of Education in the public’s eye.

Seven people are seeking seats in the board’s three district elections. Up for grabs Nov. 2 are seats in three areas: One stretches along the western part of the county from Los Altos to Los Gatos; another covers South San Jose, Evergreen and part of East San Jose; and the third stretches from Gilroy to Alum Rock and Mount Pleasant school districts. The outcome could tilt the balance of the board, which has sometimes split in partisan 4-3 votes even though the board is officially nonpartisan.

“Very few people understand the county school board,” said biotech consultant George K. Tyson, 54, who is one of three candidates seeking the Los Altos-to-Los Gatos seat that is held by T.N. Ho, who is stepping down after four terms.

Candidates find it a challenge to explain what the agency with a familiar name but obscure mission actually does.

The board has oversight over one employee: the county superintendent of schools,

Charles Weis, who runs County Office of Education, a \$259 million agency with 1,850 employees. The County Office teaches 15,500 students in special education, Head Start and alternative schools — for students who are incarcerated or expelled from their home schools. The office also runs Walden West, an environmental education center that serves 8,500 students annually, and provides business services to school districts and certifies those districts’ budgets.

The County Office edged into the news in recent years not over its mission, but first with the drawn-out ouster of former Superintendent Colleen Wilcox in the wake of charges of employee harassment. Then controversy erupted when teachers complained about safety and poor oversight of alternative schools. Most recently, some board members moved to censure a colleague, Craig Mann, who is seeking a second term representing the south-to-east San Jose area.

Last month Mann received a warning but escaped board censure for sending angry e-mails critical of Weis’ hiring practices. This week, the board agreed to reconsider the proposed censure on Wednesday.

Mann, 50, who apologized to his colleagues and Weis, admitted his criticism was “inelegant and harsh.” But he said he will persist in speak-

ing about issues he considers important.

His opponent is Angie M. Cardoza, 61, who served as forewoman of the 2009-10 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury, which issued scathing criticisms of school district organization and their spending on benefits.

She said she hopes to restore integrity to the county school board. Among other important issues, she suggested signing up mentors to help close the ethnic achievement gap.

Three candidates are seeking the Los Altos-to-Los Gatos area seat: Tyson, a consultant in biotech; Lynette Lee Eng, a volunteer; and Michael Chang, a former Cupertino city councilman and former Cupertino Union School District trustee.

Tyson, a longtime schools volunteer and former Cupertino Union board member, said he is a “team-builder” who “could bring a measure of process and decorum” to the county board.

Tyson said he believes Weis has been doing a good job.

Eng, 47, also was a member of the county grand jury. “I support making sure we meet the needs of our students while balancing our shrinking education budget,” she said.

Chang, a De Anza College instructor, did not respond to requests for information.

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