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Potter elected mayor by 2 to 1 margin; Baron and Theis for council



PHOTOS/KERRY BELSER

[Clockwise, from above] At the Cypress Inn Tuesday night, Mayor-elect Dave Potter and wife Janine Chicourrat celebrated his landslide win over Steve Dallas, while councilwoman Carrie Theis talked about her reelection to another four-year term, and council challenger Jeff Baron shared the news of his victory. They'll all be sworn in early next month after the election results are certified.



■ Landslide called 'shocking' by all sides

By MARY SCHLEY

DESPITE AGGRESSIVE campaigning by Mayor Steve Dallas and his fellow incumbents, Carmel voters resoundingly chose Dave Potter as their new mayor and Jeff Baron as their new councilman Tuesday. The surprising result — Potter received almost 60 percent of the vote, and Dallas just 30 percent — practically shouted the electorate's desire for change in city hall. The only incumbent to survive was Carrie Theis, who earned another four years on the council.

Councilman Bobby Richards, often the minority voice on the council and a strong supporter of Potter and Baron, said the election sent two messages: "The majority of voters in Carmel-by-the-Sea will not tolerate boorish, thoughtless and tasteless behavior, and they like a democracy with independent thinkers."

No close calls

According to "semi-final" results posted by Monterey County Elections early Wednesday morning, 817 people voted for Potter, while Dallas got 402 votes and Gene Hughes received 156 votes. Of the city's 2,566 registered voters, 1,460 cast ballots, for turnout of just under 57 percent, the county elections office said.

In the council race, voters were asked to pick two candidates. Baron got a little more than 43 percent, with 866 votes, while Theis garnered 655 (just under 33 percent), and fellow incumbent Carolyn Hardy received 481 votes, or 24 percent.

Because ballots were no longer counted at city hall, several of the candidates on Tuesday skipped the traditional Election Night gathering in city hall, instead opting for dinner out with family and friends, or gathering with supporters at their own parties. Baron appeared briefly, while Theis greeted people there for a while before leaving for her own celebration,

RESULTS

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but the rest were nowhere to be found.

Potter told The Pine Cone he was surprised by the margin of victory, which he thought was due to “a lot of voter frustration on a variety of issues.”

“I’m really shocked by the public support here,” he said. “I was not expecting that.”

Reflecting on his campaign, Potter said he learned the most about the city and its voters by going door to door. “Walking neighborhoods is something that I normally don’t like to do, but I found it incredibly educational,” he said — especially in the apartment complexes and other more densely populated areas where many of the people who work here live. “It was a great study in the eclectic community of Carmel.”

Mistake to be a ‘slate’?

There, he said, he heard from people who felt that the current city council wasn’t listening to them, and who felt disenfranchised. Potter speculated the incumbents’ decision to run as a slate — which hasn’t succeeded here since the 1938 election, according to historian and former city administrator Doug Schmitz — hurt them at the polls.

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but if you’re into public service, you’re supposed to be solving problems and bringing the community together. That’s really your job.”

As the manager of her family’s hotel, Theis has a full-time job, which deprived her of the ability to canvas neighborhoods like Baron did. “Jeff had the time to walk the streets,” Theis said. “I give him a lot of credit for that.”

Instead, she spent much of her campaign standing in front of the post office — a Carmel tradition, since everyone has to go there to get their mail.

“Our tradition of standing at the post office is unique, and the biggest complaint people had was the cosmetic shops on Ocean Avenue,” she said, referring to the stores where employees stand in the doorways and call out to passersby. “The other thing they’re concerned about is the homeless guy at the post office. And people are concerned about tourism and how it’s affecting them. That’s what I learned talking to people.”

And the vote, she said, taught her a lot about them, too. “Obviously, people want change,” she said. “I’m looking forward to Potter’s leadership and his experience, in terms of gov-

ernance and running meetings. He’ll hit the ground running.”

Theis said she’s hopeful the council can come together following a divisive campaign season.

“I want a council that works better for Carmel, and to continue to make progress,” she said.

Door to door

The hallmark of Baron’s campaign was his walking door to door through the entire city — an effort he said sometimes took up to six hours.

“I did 95 percent of my canvassing by myself,” he said, adding that it got easier as he did it more often. “Knocking on doors is just great.”

He also followed up with handwritten thank-you notes. “I sent hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of thank-you cards,” he said. “I got comments about it everywhere.”

During those visits, he learned a lot about residents and their concerns. “The biggest issue by far is the effect of more people in town,” he said. “People talk about traffic and parking,” which impact them in different ways.

“Downtown, you think about not being able to get a spot in front of your house, and near the Forest Theater, the parking makes the roads too narrow for emergency vehicles to get

Reflections and what’s next

Reflecting on his 2.5 years as mayor, Dallas said he and his council accomplished a lot, including moving forward on an option for Flanders Mansion, restoring the North Dunes at the beach, paving major streets in town, and repairing drainage.

And even though he lost the election — which he said came as a major surprise — he’s not planning on going anywhere.

“I was born and raised in Carmel and love the community with all my heart,” he said. “The residents have chosen a new council, and I wish them well. I will never stop giving back to the community that I love.”

Dallas isn’t sure what that giving back will look like, but he said he’ll be available to help in whatever capacity is needed.

“I’m not going to go to meetings, though,” he laughed.

Hardy, meanwhile, said she wasn’t as disappointed about the loss as some might think, though she’s disappointed for

her supporters. “I now have the opportunity to get on with the rest of my new life,” she said, following not only her exit from the council, but the death of her husband, who had been ill for several years, and the loss of her two brothers.

“I no longer have to shoulder the city’s problems, deal with the drama, or spend hours on end — of which I refused to keep track — to do the work to my personal standards and expectations of a council member,” she said. Hardy said she always tried her best and had always wanted to serve on the council — “and I got to do it!” — and that she’s proud of what the council accomplished.

“We have been one of the most effective councils in a very long time,” she said.

While she’s unsure what she’ll do next, Hardy is certain she won’t run again.

“I have no particular plans yet, except to again adopt a cat, travel a little, and after five years of caregiving responsibilities, to now get back involved in social activities, make new friends and chart some new adventures — whatever or wherever that may be,” she said. Hardy will also probably end up finding a new challenge to take on, “because I usually don’t go very long without taking on a project.”

The veteran

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