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New blood in Bernardsville?

■ GOP endorses 'fresh faces' over incumbents for council

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2 comments

BERNARDSVILLE – Dumping a pair of two-term incumbents, the municipal Republican Committee endorsed two first-time candidates for seats on the Borough Council during a screening meeting on Wednesday night, March 14.

Jeff DeLeo of Mine Mount Road and Michael DePoortere of Mine Brook Road were the winners of the GOP endorsements in a five-way contest. They defeated council members John McCrossan and Charlotte Foster and first-time candidate Geri Rosman of Claremont Road.

All five candidates made presentations during the public portion of the meeting, but the balloting was conducted behind closed doors by the 14-member Republican Committee.

The endorsements mean DeLeo and DePoortere will run on the Somerset County Republican Organization line in the June 5 GOP primary. In a joint statement, DeLeo and DePoortere thanked the GOP Committee for its endorsement. "It's an honor to represent the Republican Party at the local level," they said. "We will kick off our election campaign next week and we are looking forward to serving our community."

Republican voters, however, might have a contested primary to decide. During their presentations, both Foster and McCrossan said they would prefer to run for council in 2012 as a team. At the screening, neither divulged whether they would run for new terms without the party endorsement.

In the week since, both have said they are still undecided about a primary run. The candidate filing deadline for the primary is April 2.

DeLeo, a research scientist, has lived in Bernardsville for more than 24 years. His wife, Patricia DeLeo, is a member of the Republican Committee.

DePoortere, who is employed by Turner Construction, has lived in the borough for 23 years.

Early in the week, a sixth candidate, Mine Brook Road resident Amanda Moy, had told the GOP committee she

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would seek its endorsement. But Moy did not participate in the screening.

Bernardsville Republican Chairman A.Q. "Skip" Orza, II would not release the screening vote totals. The outcome, he said, appeared to be an indication that a majority of the committee "wanted fresh faces and new blood."

"We had five great candidates screen," Orza added. "Sometimes, with incumbents it's difficult. They have a voting record that people can agree with or not agree with. They're more easily judged."

"Of course, I am disappointed," Foster said the day after the screening. "I like to think that I have served well and always with thorough thought, concern and caring for all of the residents of Bernardsville.

"It is what it is," Foster continued. "There is still much that I can contribute, particularly when it comes to Sustainable Jersey efforts and the restoration and development of the Dunster property. I won't roll down my sleeves just yet."

Like Foster, McCrossan expressed disappointment over the outcome. "Especially since many of the Republican Committee members have never contacted me concerning the borough," McCrossan said, "I fail to understand why the majority of the committee voted the way they did.

"I believe I have served Bernardsville well during my tenure on the council," he added. "I am thorough in my study of issues facing our community and have always kept the taxpayers of Bernardsville in the forefront of my mind, being fair in my positions. I am proud of my record for our community and have served with honesty and integrity."

Field Shortage

During his presentation to the committee, Jeff DeLeo said he favors "fiscal accountability and less government."

Explaining why he's pursuing a council seat, DeLeo said he's been "disturbed and frustrated" by things he's read in the newspaper.

DeLeo, who has a lengthy involvement in local youth sports programs, said the borough needs more multi-use playing fields.

"We need more (synthetic) turf fields," he said. The field shortage, he added, "has been going on for years. There's been no closure."

The borough also needs safer sidewalks and a review of the landlord registration process, according to DeLeo.

Foster and McCrossan, he said, have had six years to govern. "Now it's my turn to step up and participate," DeLeo said.

DePoortere gave a sparse, several minute-long presentation in which he gave personal history but did not mention specific municipal issues.

He said he was born and raised in Green Village before moving to Bernardsville and is a former Irish step dancer who has performed at Carnegie Hall.

"You have to give back to the community," DePoortere said. "I want to give back. I want to help the people of Bernardsville."

Orza said that DePoortere, at the request of the committee, was brought back to answer questions in the private portion of the meeting prior to the vote.

Rosman spoke of several community safety issues that she has complained about to the council, but still sees unresolved after months and years. She was also critical of the need to repair sidewalks that were completed as part of the downtown improvements in recent years.

She said she's witnessed public urination, garbage thrown about and mattresses being moved in and out of garages.

"I'm a bit of a flamethrower, I'm a bit controversial, I have a big mouth," said Rosman. "I'd like to put that to use for Bernardsville."

"I'd like to see the bar set a little bit higher," Rosman concluded. "I don't think (the town) is moving in a great direction."

Economic Challenges

Foster said Bernardsville is facing some of its "greatest challenges," in part, from the economy. The council continues to have to budget within the 2 percent cap allowed by the state, she said. Foster called herself a team player. "I believe I do my homework," she said. "I do not shoot from the hip."

McCrossan said the most difficult task facing the council is to maintain services and work to improve infrastructure within the budget's constraints.

McCrossan said his corporate experience had prepared him to manage large operations and budgets.

"This expertise gives me the ability to get results," he said. "I've delivered stable tax increases."

