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Upsets mark Radnor elections

By Sam Strike

Radnor voters on Tuesday elected three Democratic candidates in three townshipwide races - a "historic" feat for a party whose township registration is about half that of Republicans, say party officials.

At the Radnor School Board meeting three weeks ago, Brucie Rapoport was standing at the podium saying there was only two publicized liaison meetings in three months' time and asking the board when it does its business. For months she has seated herself, usually in the same spot, in the audience of the meetings, and last night she earned a seat on the other side of the table when she, according to unofficial numbers, got the second highest number of votes in the general-election race.

Until recently a virtual unknown even in his own party, Democrat **Eric Zajac** will also join victorious Republican incumbents Kathy Fisher, John McMeekin and Mary Young on the Radnor School Board.

Longtime Magisterial District Justice Beverly Foster was defeated by challenger John Tuten, who was endorsed by the Democratic Party. Foster has served for 18 years in her position deciding civil cases and misdemeanors in four of the township's seven wards. The position carries a \$75,000 salary, according to the county.

In another contested race, Ward 2 Commissioner Ann-Michele Higgins, a Republican, was re-elected to a second term by defeating Democratic challenger Christina Perrone.

George Badey, vice chair of the Radnor Democratic Party, had said that he was "cautiously optimistic" as he entered the precinct reports into a computer at the Wayne Beef & Ale in Wayne Tuesday night.

A half-hour later, Badey was beaming.

"We just made history in Radnor Township tonight," he said, announcing their unofficial results.

In the School Board race, Democrats Lydia Solomon, Roger Balson and Sheila Gray and Republicans Dave Roderick and Anne Albright were defeated.

Zajac won a special two-year election against Albright, a former school director.

Earlier in the day, he had said that his special term race gave voters a unique opportunity that is rare in a school-board race - the chance to line up two candidates side by side.

Zajac is finishing the term originally won by Republican Nancy Dixon, who resigned last fall and whose seat has been temporarily filled by Dorothy Orlichowski.

His wife, Jennifer, had applied last year for the seat, "getting the train running," **Zajac** said Tuesday morning.

On Tuesday night he was outside the Beef & Ale, hugging his running mate Balson while a chorus of candidates' children clapped for him on the front steps.

"You did it," Balson told him.

"We all did it," he responded.

"If there's any message here it's that education isn't partisan," **Zajac** later said.

Down the street at Ristorante Primavera, Republicans looked at their results largely projected on a wall, the crowd there more subdued and looking a bit shocked.

"It's a wake-up call, everybody's talking about it," said school-board member Art Lewis as he was leaving the restaurant.

The last Democrat on the board was Barbara Wester, who served from 1991 to 1995, Lewis said.

Inside, Republican Party chair Mimi Auchincloss reminded the lingering crowd, "We have many victories."

Re-elected school board president McMeekin said, "We'll wake up tomorrow and continue to do the good job we've been doing."

And as for the two Democrats who will be joining the board, they'll get along together, McMeekin said.

"The township won't let us not get along," he said.

He also announced that the scheduled groundbreaking for the new Radnor Middle School is Dec. 10.

Higgins said she was "thrilled" with her re-election. The other two Republican Commissioners, Tom Masterson and Enrique Hervada, were running unopposed for re-election.

Foster also spoke, thanking those who helped her campaign.

"I wish you the best of luck with you new judge, I really, really do," she said, adding that she was sorry she couldn't serve another term.

"We're sorry, too," responded someone in the crowd.

To many in the party, Foster is a veritable fixture.

Some of her supporters said that the separate campaigns against her were personal and vindictive, punishing her for her past opposition to the Radnor Trail.

All of the Republican candidates who spoke thanked campaign manager Patty Booker, who in speaking asked that the public "stay involved and pay attention" to local affairs, to go to the meetings and ask questions.

Back at the Beef & Ale, chair of the Democratic Party Bruce Bikin said that the Republicans made a significant tactical error in their campaign by making lawn signs that focused on "Radnor Republicans" but whose individual names were unreadable from a passing car.

"They better get used to putting their names up there," Bikin said. "Being a Republican ain't that big a deal anymore."

"People will see this and think 'It's OK to be a Democrat'" in Radnor, Badey said.

Badey also jokingly gave credit to President George W. Bush for theoretically driving disgruntled party voters to change their votes.

But candidates gave credit to their family and friends who campaigned for them. On Tuesday, spouses, children, siblings, parents and friends of the candidates stood outside the polls handing out leaflets or attesting to the positive qualities of friends and relatives.

Some candidates had Web sites, others used mailings, in addition to the ubiquitous lawn signs. But throughout Tuesday, the power of knowing people and word of mouth became apparent.

Rapoport, who ran for the school board four years ago, said she did a lot of door-to-door campaigning. And overheard in the Fourth Ward was a woman who told **Zajac** that if her friend, a teacher, was supporting him than she would too.

Bikin spoke of the Democrat's school-board campaign, saying it was "the first time slate candidates have sort of gone their own ways... they were very independent and I think that's been nothing but good for us."

According to Ward 1 Democratic committeeman James Higgins, four of the township's precincts elected Democratic Judges of Elections, who are responsible for ensuring the laws on election day.

It was another historical vote, he said.