

Dist. 99 critics say they won't quit

By Dave Fornell

Staff writer

Although the opponents of the Community High School District 99 School Board did not win seats in the April 5 election, they pledge to continue their efforts to reshape the district's policies and its fiscal approach.

"We absolutely will continue to closely monitor the School District to expose the district's actions to the community," said defeated candidate Gary Tagtmeier.

Tagtmeier and running mate Richard Rooney finished fifth and sixth, respectively, in the six-way race for four open seats April 5. The winners were incumbent Board President Julia Beckman, incumbent Craig Greenwood, Downers South Parent-Teacher Association President Teresa Pavesich and Woodridge District 68 School Board member Allyn Barnett.

"I don't think it sends a strong message from the community when only 4,000 residents voted," Tagtmeier said.

Tagtmeier noted that turnout was much higher in November when voters soundly rejected the district's bid to raise property taxes and close a budget deficit. Tagtmeier and Rooney helped organize an anti-referendum effort to help defeat that measure, then ran for the School Board this spring on a platform of fiscal conservatism. They also wanted the board to sell its vacant 44-acre Woodridge parcel and improve its communication with residents, among other issues.

Tagtmeier said the district still has not explained the dismissal of former Downers Grove North High School Principal Steve Wroblewski in December. He also contended the board also discusses too much business in closed session, including the disposition of the Woodridge property.

Beckman said many of the positions Rooney and Tagtmeier had staked out were similar to those taken by current board members.

"I don't think we are really that far apart in our ideas," said Beckman. "As a board we were already cutting the budget, and we have a study to look at selling the Woodridge property."

Current board members characterized many of the questions and comments from Rooney and Tagtmeier at meetings as antagonistic. Board members also said the two have spread misinformation on their financial decisions and other policies.

"We won't go away. We will still ask questions," Rooney said. "We will try not to be antagonistic. We want open communication, and I don't get the feeling they are always perceptive."

According to the unofficial election results, Beckman won her bid for re-election with 6,616 votes, the highest of any candidate. The other clear favorite was incumbent Craig Greenwood, with 6,175 votes. However, the choice was not as clear for the other candidates, who each finished within 1 percentage point of each other in total votes cast.

According to unofficial figures compiled by the DuPage County election officials, Pavesich received 5,811 votes and Barnett 5,515 to win seats on the board. Tagtmeier and Barnett were neck and neck in the race toward the end of ballot counting, but Barnett was able to pull ahead by 143 votes when the final two precincts reported. Tagtmeier earned 5,372 votes, followed by Rooney with 5,295.