

HSA members take seats on council, school board

January 1, 2006

The Report: January / February 2006 vol.27 num.1

Debora Munoz takes her seat on Prince George Municipal Council

Debora Munoz was still glowing a bit the morning after she was inaugurated as a new member of the Prince George city council. Having finally recovered from the sleep deprivation that accompanied the last weeks of her campaign, she had enjoyed every minute of the ceremony.

-It was exciting. I got to sit in my council seat for the first time. It felt great," says Munoz, a diagnostic neurophysiology technician at Prince George Regional Hospital.

Munoz has good reason to be pleased. As one of 25 candidates for eight seats, she succeeded against stiff odds. She chalks up her achievement to hard work and a well-planned, well-executed campaign.

-Its been noted over and over again in the local media that I ran a well-organized campaign and had an incredible campaign team. My newspaper advertising was incredible. I had signs out early. And I had good contact with the constituents. I approached 3000 constituents door-to-door. For three weeks I was standing at street corners from early morning to evening, shaking hands and talking to people," she said.

Campaign planning began a full year before the election. -I booked all my front-page ads a year in advance. Starting earlier made a huge difference," says Munoz. -Also, I was one of the only candidates with a web-site. That was a critical piece given the large number of candidates."

Munoz credits HSA with providing crucial assistance. -I had incredible support from HSA beginning with the campaign schools where I learned a huge amount. I also had HSA members step forward to be on my campaign team.

-I want to say thank you to all of the HSA membership and executive for the tremendous support and encouragement throughout my campaign and in preparing me to run for public office. All that hard work really paid off," she said.

Munoz is looking forward to the opportunity to promote labour interests on council. -It is my hope that I will continue to build on the good relationship I have with labour organizations in the community. For example, when I look at growing our economy it is my hope that we do so in such a way that benefits people locally, so that we keep the prosperity growing in our community and not have all the profits go elsewhere"

Munoz is also committed to promoting gender equality. Part of what motivated her to run was her frustration at seeing only one of eight council seats occupied by a woman. The current council has three women, which is an improvement, says Munoz ... but no reason for complacency. Rather, Munoz has already begun organizing women to strengthen their political influence.

-Last night at the gathering after the inauguration I was discussing the desire Ive heard to form a womens caucus in our community. The interest is there and I would be happy to spearhead it," she said. Clearly, Munoz

has lost no time in getting right to work.

-Im ready to go," she said. -I was ready a year ago when I made the commitment to run. Im excited to have this opportunity."

-Its About Trust": Bob Phillips returns as Sooke School District Trustee

Bob Phillips has a clear vision for the mandate of a school trustee: -My idea of a good Trustee comes from the word itself ... its about trust. How do we create trust? How do we help our students and their families, as well as considering the voices of all the other stakeholder groups? Consultation is key."

Phillips vision obviously resonates with the teachers and CUPE members in Sooke, who phoned last October asking him to run for the School Board of School District #62. Phillips had sat on the School Board twice already and did not have much trouble agreeing to their request. He also had little trouble getting elected.

-I filed the papers and ended up being, um, â€”handled by my wife and a great group of friends. They did tons of phone calls and brochures. Theres a science to winning local elections. Nothing works quite like local people in the community making phone calls," Phillips said.

Phillips, a medical social worker at Victoria General Hospital, is passionate about education. Much of this passion comes from his own life.

-Our public education system blessed me. I think Im the only college graduate in my family of origin with a Masters in Social Work and a BA in History. Education was the path to the jobs I have loved and that I believe Im good at."

His education also provided him with one of his formative life experiences: four years teaching history in Africa. -Going to teach in Africa was amazing. Close friendships remain from those days. -There are very few people Ive met whose education is not important to their life and work. So why wouldnt you want to get involved in making the public education system work?"

Another important part of Phillips life experience has been trade union activism. He has been an HSA activist for 20 years, including several terms as Chief Steward, one as HSA Vice-President and four stints on HSA bargaining committees. This is a huge influence on how he approaches his School Board work.

-One reason I wanted to run again is that people were saying that when youre a trade union activist you understand how to treat employees. People said that when I was not on the board there wasnt the same level of consultation with staff. HSA has provided valuable training both in skills and attitudes," he said.

-My experience as a steward and activist has taught me a lot about labour relations. It has taught me about constructive ways of dealing with conflict and disagreements," Phillips said.

His years with HSA have become woven into the very fabric of his identity, Phillips said. -Im a trade unionist at heart. My mindset comes from the volunteers I worked with in Africa and my trade union colleagues. Ive always felt comfortable with HSA comrades. Its like a tribal consciousness, knowing theres so many that share a similar mindset in the world."

Ongoing community involvement from campaign momentum

-Would I do it again? Absolutely. I would be raring to go, Brigid Kemp said. Fresh on the heels of a campaign to win a seat on Pentictons municipal council, shes already thinking three years ahead to the next election.

Although Kemp did not win a seat, the campaign has left her motivated and inspired.

-Its been a great experience. Its given me an opportunity to look at those bits and pieces of the fabric that make a city, make a city council, and make it all work. It adds a whole layer to being involved in the community," says Kemp, who has been a community activist on many fronts, for many years. Also, her work, as Older Womens Liaison at the South Okanagan Women in Need Association, brings her face-to-face with social issues on a daily basis.

Looking back on her campaign, Kemp can clearly identify what she'd do differently next time.

-I've had a taste of what to do and what not to do. I would start earlier. I would get more involved in the early days. I would do more fundraising to afford more signs and brochures. I would simplify my brochure ... people don't want to read tons of information," she said.

She is equally articulate in identifying what worked.

-It was helpful to have an understanding of what the issues are, to listen to what the people were saying, and to have a network of friends and people who are experienced, have been there before, and can give you some guidance as a mentor," she said. -It was very important to have the support of HSA," she continues. Kemp cites HSA-sponsored campaign schools and the opportunity to attend the Canadian Women Voters Congress Womens Campaign School as essential learning and networking resources. However, the help from HSA didn't end there.

-Different people in the union offered me support and ideas. The financial support of having time off work was important," she said.

Kemp is channeling her post-campaign momentum into ongoing involvement. -I attended a meeting last night of the new council. I spoke to the mayor saying I'd like to join an advisory committee ... in particular, the social development committee, which will incorporate affordable housing issues."

Kemp would like to see city council take on issues that are not always thought of as in its jurisdiction. She has done her research and knows that municipalities in fact can contribute to better health care or fair wages. -I was at a BC Federation of Labour convention last week where the Mayor of Burnaby talked about a fair wage policy, so that any business the city has a contract with would have to pay fair wages to the people they hire. That is something I'm going to follow up on," she said.

-There's a lot of work to be done whether I am or am not on the council," Kemp concludes.

Election campaign re-energizes community activist

Janice Morrison thinks everyone should run for an election at some point in their lives.

-If everyone threw their name in just once ... what a better world it would be!" she said. -It's kind of like voting ... it's your democratic right and it's important to exercise it. There's so much to be learned; you gain a much better understanding of what goes on in your municipality and province. You see how the whole system works."

Morrison, a physiotherapist at Kootenay Lake Hospital in Nelson, spent much of the fall campaigning for a seat on Nelson's city council. Although she lost this election, she did not lose her passion for political engagement.

And while losing was not her desired outcome, it hasn't slowed her down.

-It was a bittersweet moment," she said. -I wasn't all that upset. We had 15 people running for council and six seats. Nine people had to lose. The next day people are phoning you and offering condolences • and life goes on. There's still stuff to do. On Monday I had my Chamber of Commerce meeting. Tuesday was the Museum and Art Gallery meeting. It doesn't stop. I don't stop," she said.

Morrison says her experience in this campaign ... it was her fourth so far, and she's definitely not ruling out a fifth ... has made her more effective than ever as a politically engaged citizen.


-It's always wonderful to be out meeting people and hearing what their issues are. With this campaign we had a much bigger door-to-door campaign than usual, so it really gave us a chance to hear what people have to say," she said.

As well, she says, campaigning is fun.

-One of the best times is voting day. I was out walking through the mall with one of our campaign team

members and everyone was saying to me oh, I voted for you, youre going to win, its going to be a great council. It goes on all day and its wonderful ... hearing that people are so positive and supportive," she said.

The support of others ... voters, campaign team members, friends, and family, to name a few ... is a huge part of what makes a campaign possible. Morrison acknowledges the Health Sciences Association as a particularly important member of this support network.

-I really want to thank the union. It was great to have time off and concentrate on the campaign. This really is a wonderful opportunity that I look forward to taking again," she said. 

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