

BULLETIN

Activism inspires run for council

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by BEV PAUSCHE



lison -Ali" Gaul, a child life specialist and mother of two young children, ran for council in Esquimalt November 15, winning a spot on council to represent her community. On two of Novembers wettest days, Gaul was out door knocking in Esquimalt, surprising many residents with her determination and energy.

-Lots of people took one look at how soaked I was standing there, and said ... "well, I can see youll certainly work hard ... Ill vote for you."

Gaul has always watched politics and attended both the BC Federation of Labours Summer Institute for Union Women and HSAs campaign school, thinking she might want to help on someone elses campaign. She never thought shed be running herself.

Her decision came when the previous council voted to close a local elementary school and the Archie Browning Sports Centre, which her seven- year old daughter, Grace, uses to pursue her dream of figure skating.

The decision was made on a Monday night and her daughter came home from school in tears on Tuesday afternoon. -Mommy, please fix this," pleaded Grace. Gaul reassured her daughter shed do her best and told her shed always be able to skate, even if it meant driving 100 kilometres.

-I thought to myself, "if these kinds of decisions can be made without my knowledge ... someone who walks by the facilities every day, who uses them on a regular basis ... then something is definitely wrong."

Gaul began her fight by serving on the sports centres audit committee, where she discovered that there was not a reasonable rationale for the closure. Knowing she needed community support, she spoke to another concerned parent about getting more people involved.

Together, they co-founded the Esquimalt Residents Association, sending 50 e-mails to residents in June, 2007. By September, they had had their first AGM and elected a board.

-By January, there were 250 people getting our newsletters and bulletins. We got 400 people to come out to talk about the impact of the decisions on the community. They did close the school, but we had the decision on the arena overturned."

People were inspired by Gauls commitment, and many asked her to run for a spot on council. Eventually, thats what she decided to do, joining 12 other new candidates in a bid for a spot on the six-member council team.

-From the minute I called a friend, telling her I was going to run, I was overwhelmed with the support I had in the community," says Gaul. -I told her ... as Ive told many others ... I need you there before and after this ... if I win, I need you to help guide my decisions."

Her campaign materials, website and photos were impressive, thanks to help from two of her friends, a designer and a photographer.

A former local politician told her, -Im retiring, but I believe in you," and handed over all his old signs.

Gaul used the \$200 she received from HSAs Political Action Fund for her campaign to revise them.

Gaul believes that HSA members, as advocates in health and community care, have lots to offer as politicians at every level of government.

-We advocate for people all the time in the workplace and the concerns I hear on the doorstep are the same ones I hear on the job," says Gaul.

The next council has a lot of big issues to tackle, but Gaul believes she can do it with the support of the people around her and an open-minded approach on the part of the incoming mayor and council.

-We have to earn the trust of the local community by consulting broadly within six months. We need to develop a plan that reflects the values of the community and then stick to it."

Gaul certainly has drive, energy and passion " qualities that are sure to help her succeed in her new role. 

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017