

# Independents started from scratch – seeking volunteers

By Greg Pearson  
STAFF WRITER

How do you organize a successful campaign when you don't have a political party like the Republicans or Democrats standing behind you for support? That was the challenge that almost all Independents faced in order to get elected, knowing that the major party candidates would have the experience, expertise and fundraising apparatus Independents didn't.

Independent Marleen Durfee won the Matoaca District supervisor race last week against three opponents and gave the credit to her organization, led by Campaign Manager Cathy Kirk. As a teenager and college student, Kirk had been somewhat involved in political campaigns, but the part-time pharmacist had no experience at this level.

"We had a campaign team of 12-14 people," she explained, "and recognized early that fundraising was going to be an issue for us. So each member was tasked with finding ten residents each, and they wrote personal letters. We reviewed the letters first to make sure they were on message. The letters were very personalized and very successful."

About 150 residents responded with contributions, typically \$50-\$100 each, but some contributors donated a second time and a few even a third time.

"That's a different impact than receiving a letter from the Republican Party of Virginia," observed Kirk.

The campaign sponsored several fundraising events including the kickoff at the Birkdale Golf Club and neighborhood events in Foxfire and Foxcroft. All the while the campaign was collecting names of those willing to put up campaign signs in their front yards and on higher traffic roads zoned commercial.

One committee member oversaw campaign signs.

"We took full advantage of free media opportunities," said Kirk. This newspaper and the Village News in Chester published numerous Q&As in print and online, but she expressed disappointment at other media coverage of the supervisor's race. "We saw the Q&As as a gift, but some of our opponents didn't take full advantage. The newspapers gave a lot of space and addressed issues that were on the voters' minds."

The campaign made sure precinct captains voted in that precinct and assigned poll workers to the precincts on the same basis wherever possible. "We had more poll workers than we had precincts," Kirk added.

Since many of the voters in the district worked, Durfee and her supporters knocked on doors to talk to voters on the weekends. During the last two weeks of the campaign, Kirk said she was working 16 hours a day on the election.

Supporters stuffed campaign fliers in

12,000 flier boxes during the last five days. "Some drove the neighborhoods during the wee hours of the morning with their children asleep in the back seat," marveled Kirk. "We were on a budget, and the flier services were too expensive for us."

Most of the advertising budget went to four direct mail pieces with the remainder for Durfee's Web site, a YouTube commercial plus ads in this newspaper, the Community Weekly and some community newsletters. The campaign also used the professional services of consultant Jamie Radtke.

## State Senate race

Durfee was fortunate to be running for an open seat, but Independent Roger Habeck, running for the 11th District State Senate seat, had a different set of challenges. His major opponent was incumbent Republican Steve Martin. Habeck would raise about \$120,000 for his campaign efforts to reach most of the voters in Chesterfield and all of Colonial Heights, but Martin would raise far more with all the other advantages of being the incumbent and backed by the Republican Party.

"Initially, the Democrats went to Roger, but the views were so far apart he couldn't contemplate running as a Democrat," said businessmen Bob Schrum. He, businessman Randy Powers, restaurateur Chris Andreano and human resources executive Debi Girvin became Habeck's kitchen cabinet to run the campaign.

"The Democrats wanted Roger to blast Steve early on like Alex McMurtrie did, but the cabinet decided that wasn't who we were," explained Schrum. McMurtrie entered the race as a Democrat after Habeck and did several direct mailings but dropped out last month after polling showed Martin way ahead. McMurtrie's name still appeared on the ballot as the Democratic candidate, garnering 19 percent of the vote to Habeck's 15 percent.

"What shocked me was our poor showing," said Schrum. "I expected 35-38 percent. As for me, I won't be personally involved in any more campaigns. It's too time-consuming."

Even though the cabinet worked 40 hours a week for 10-12 weeks, the Habeck campaign was playing catch-up. Schrum said \$30,000-\$40,000 of the early fundraising had been misspent – "money that we desperately needed."

Powers and his son drove all over the district putting up signs, adds Schrum, "But we didn't have enough ground troops. We needed people to stuff flier boxes, have a phone bank, and we didn't have poll workers at about half of the precincts."

Shortly before the election, the campaign held a successful fundraiser at the Halfway House. "We sent out e-mail invitations about five or six days before, and about 50 people showed up for heavy hors d'oeuvre and cocktails – many of them prominent business people, who contributed."



Schrum



Kirk



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

Current Bermuda District Supervisor Dickie King talks with Ree Hart after her defeat. Hart was hoping to replace King, who decided not to seek re-election earlier this year.

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come next year, the establishment wing of the Chesterfield Republican Committee will no longer be represented on the board.

Turnout increased to about 42,000 voters, but 186,873 were registered to vote. "The voters had more races to consider, but only 4 percent more showed up," said Registrar Larry Haake.

During 2003, just 19 percent voted but there were far fewer contested elections compared to 2007 when there were more choices for voters with 23 percent voting. Last fall, when Republican George Allen battled Democrat Jim Webb for the U.S. Senate seat and the marriage amendment was also on the ballot, 50 percent of registered voters went to the polls.

"There is a general unrest with the status quo," surmised Democratic Political Consultant Abby Easter. "If you were there with an 'R' [Republican], they didn't want to see you again for the board. Growth wasn't as big of an issue as it became, and then it combined with the uncertainty of the housing market and immigration into a perfect storm."

Polling done in the Midlothian District earlier this year indicated that 55 percent of respondents believed the county is headed in the right direction, but only 33 percent rated the board's performance as good or excellent. Shortly before the election, Gecker was ahead in the polls by 2 percent but within the margin of error of 4 percent. He won with 57 percent of the vote after garnering 47 percent last year running as a Democrat against Sowder.

"A political earthquake hit the county," said Republican Consultant Ray Allen. "If you were on the wrong side of growth, you got beat. Could people have possibly spoken more clearly about a mandate for change?"

The growth issue came to a head just as the political season was picking up steam. On Sept. 26, the board approved Branner Station with 4,998 homes followed by a revised Upper Swift Creek Plan (Oct. 10) that allowed more residential development in the watershed than recommended by the planning commission or planning staff. On Oct. 24, just 13 days before Election Day, the developer of the 5,140-home Roseland project received a deferral. Though both Branner Station and Roseland have been praised for utilizing "smart growth" principles, some citizens point to the sheer size of the planned communities.

With four candidates vying for the Matoaca District seat, Durfee surged ahead and won

with 43 percent of the vote. The after-election party at Emilio's restaurant was jubilant.

"This is absolutely amazing," proclaimed Durfee while standing on a chair to address supporters. "There has been so much grassroots support that I can't thank everyone enough."

The applause continued intermittently throughout her extemporaneous speech as she praised supporters by name. "I'm going to work you even harder, Wayne," she promised Planning Commissioner Wayne Bass who had endorsed her and will stay on in that appointed position.

"Marleen put out three mailers attacking her opponents," explained Easter. "You have to have a message that resonates and then communicate it with the voters."

According to Amy Satterfield who made numerous random calls on behalf of Patty Carpenter's campaign to represent the Midlothian District on the school board, growth was on the voter's minds. "Growth crossed over into every demographic group," she said.

"Parents with children were not happy because Bettie Weaver [Elementary School] has [classroom] trailers," Satterfield added. "I think it hurt Don [Sowder] when he endorsed Eric [Finkbeiner] for the school board because people knew how hard Patty worked to get the school bond issue passed."

Earlier this year, Finkbeiner edged out Carpenter for the Republican Party endorsement and was endorsed by numerous individual Republicans holding local and state offices, but Carpenter was elected.

"And some of the voters were angry about the tenant mix at the Watkins Centre not being upscale," Satterfield continued. "They're still going to cross the river to shop."

"This is going to be a fascinating four years on the board because people know that Dan Gecker has been a Democrat all of his life, and the Republicans have some issues to work out as a party," predicted Easter. "An interesting question is whether Art Warren has inoculated himself with his district or whether he could win against real opposition."

Unknown in Clover Hill District and running as an Independent, Floyd Bayne garnered 25 percent of the vote, spending less than \$200 on his campaign.

"This election reminds me of 1991," said Clover Hill Planning Commissioner Russ Guley. That year, two incumbents were defeated, and two decided not to run. The number one issue in the county was growth.

## Goodwill/Rotary seek bikes for needy families

The 20th Annual Robikes Program, coordinated by the Rotary Club of Richmond and Goodwill Industries to benefit Sgt. Santa, will run through Dec. 8. The name Sgt. Santa has been synonymous with helping needy families in the greater Richmond area.

The Robikes Program collects bicycles in working condition, as well as those in need of repair. Rotarians meet on five Saturday

mornings to repair the bikes and distribute them to families during the holiday season. The organizations will provide hundreds of bicycles for Sgt. Santa to give to children who would otherwise not receive them.

Bicycles are being accepted at the Goodwill stores at 8535 Midlothian TnPk. and 11749 Hull Street Rd. For other Goodwill locations, call 745-6300 or visit [www.goodwillcva.org](http://www.goodwillcva.org).