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Potential candidates look to fill mayor's seat

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January 9, 2009

By JUDY MASTERSON JMASTERSON@SCN1.COM

GURNEE -- Familiar names and a familiar issue -- the economy -- will color the ballot for the April 7 consolidated election in Gurnee. Petition packets for the election, which will decide the next mayor, three trustees and village clerk, have been taken by incumbent trustees Hank Schwarz and Jeanne Balmes, former trustees Tom Chamberlain and Mark Ratfelders and former trustee candidates Bob Kofler and Tony Maniscalco.

Candidates must file their nominating petitions between Jan. 19 and 26.

Click to enlarge image



Chamberlain

Click to enlarge image



Maniscalco

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Kovarik

Kovarik to attend fund-raiser

Gurnee Mayor Kristina Kovarik will make a re-election announcement during a fund-raiser to be held from 7 to 9:30 p.m. Saturday at DirectBuy of Gurnee, 4081 Ryan Road, Suite 107. The event will include food, drink and music. Tickets are \$20 at the door. All proceeds will go to Daisy Resource Developmental Center in North Chicago and the Pay It Forward Foundation.

Mayor Kristina Kovarik, who won election as the village's first female president in 2005, has not formally requested nominating petitions through Village Hall. But those mulling a run for office may take packets without signing for them -- or produce their own petition.

Kovarik, 51, is expected to make an announcement on a possible second bid for office during a Saturday fundraiser for two not-for-profits at Direct Buy of Gurnee.

Chamberlain said that despite pulling a petition, he is not planning to challenge Kovarik. Nonetheless, he blasted her, claiming she has failed to deal with a sharp dip in sales tax revenues. Chamberlain was elected to three terms as trustee before suddenly resigning two years ago over what he claimed was Kovarik's failure to keep board members apprised of vital information.

"The village is in worse shape than it has been in the history of Gurnee because we have an incompetent mayor," Chamberlain said.

Kovarik, long at odds with Chamberlain, said she's waiting to see "how Christmas turned out."

According to the latest figures available through the Illinois Department of Revenue, the village's sales tax share for September and October 2008 dropped \$550,000, or 18.4 percent, from the same two months in 2007.

Kovarik said her administration is scrutinizing expenses and putting a hold on budget-approved items, like new technology, vehicles and conference trips. The village has also put off hiring for nine municipal positions that were vacated by people who retired or otherwise left, Kovarik said.

"Not a day goes by that we're not making adjustments for the drop in revenues," Kovarik said. "We may have to cut some programs. We're asking is it a 'have to have' or a 'nice to have.' Right now it's got to be a 'have to have.'"

Maniscalco, 50, a former Navy man and Gurnee restaurateur who made an unsuccessful bid for trustee four years ago, is expected to announce a run for mayor. He said he regrets having supported Kovarik over former Mayor Don Rudny in 2005 in the wake of a two-year court battle in which Maniscalco was ultimately cleared by a jury of DUI and disorderly conduct charges by Gurnee police.

"This town needs help," Maniscalco said. "I've always cared about the community and the businesses and the people. We have to take our community back."

Trustee Jeanne Balmes, who owns Gurnee Flowers by Balmes and who was first elected in 2001, quashed rumors that she planned to run against Kovarik.

"I'm not dissatisfied with Krysti," Balmes said. "We don't always agree on everything, but at least you can talk to her and reason with her. She's approachable."

Ratfelders, who served as trustee from 1991 to 1999 under former longtime Mayor Dick Welton, is also expected to run for a trustee seat. Kovarik's attempt to appoint him to the board in 2005 was blocked by trustees, including Chamberlain, who pointed to his vote to approve a controversial Jewel-Osco project at the northwest corner of O'Plaine Road and Route 120.

After Wal-Mart announced plans for a nearby store in Waukegan, that Jewel was not built.

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