

The New Crop

by Kathryn Maese

It was a lesson in civics for many candidates who ran for seats in the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (DLANC) election last Wednesday. The voting ushered in a mostly new crop of residents and professionals who will attempt to give voice to the Central City.

From the homeless to Downtown's powerful business groups to artists, 27 board members were elected to represent Downtown's interests to city government. While voter turnout was lower than last year, observers say the process yielded a wider breadth of candidates.

"This election has been both good news and bad news," said Brady Westwater, one of three winners who will represent the Arts/Culture/Entertainment seat. "I'd love to see more contested races, but we were happy with the caliber of candidates this time and had some good people running. We didn't have to drag people to fill seats like last time."

Jerry Kvasnicka, an election administrator for the League of Women Voters of Los Angeles, monitored last week's election and tallied the votes. He said voter turnout was affected by a number of factors.

"What we have seen in the neighborhood council movement is what happens in almost any election," he said. "The councils, in varying degrees, really work as outreach to get folks to vote and they also work at getting candidates. One thing that lowers participation is when there is no competition."

Of the 27 seats, 10 were unopposed, with some candidates winning with as little as two votes. One exception was Simon Jun, who campaigned for the Civic Center Resident category, and garnered the most votes in the entire election - 166 according to preliminary results.

The Central City Association (CCA) and Downtown Center Business Improvement District, two of Downtown's most influential business groups, secured two seats. Hal Bastian, who heads the BID, won unopposed with 60 votes. Susan Shaw, the CCA's director of business development, beat out two competitors with a total of 28 votes.

"I think the neighborhood council is important for Downtown because unlike other areas of the city there aren't homeowners associations that can represent different interests," Shaw said. "It makes more sense in Downtown than any other part of L.A."

In the Area-Wide Homeless Category, five candidates ran, though only three garnered votes. Among those, two tied for the seat with two votes each - R. Martin Johnson Garcia and Luke Vincent. Kvasnicka said he will set a date for a coin toss to determine the winner, a common practice among cash-strapped neighborhood councils that cannot afford a runoff.

The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council was formed two years ago as a way to give residents a greater say in decisions affecting their community. Despite working on a shoestring budget - L.A. spends \$2 per capita while most major cities spend \$13 to \$20 - the Downtown council has begun to build its influence in Downtown affairs. Most recently, the group helped organize a collection of galleries in the Historic Core called Gallery Row, and has weighed in on city budget priorities, filming issues with the Los Angeles Entertainment Industry Development Corp., and the homeless crisis.

"These folks are volunteers and spend a lot of time working for their community," Kvasnicka said. "People have busy lives. But I'm very impressed, as I work with the councils, with the hard work they do and their dedication."

The League of Women Voters allows a challenge period before the results are certified. Candidates may request a recount until June 16.

Preliminary Election Winners:

Resident - Area-Wide (1 Seat)

John Sellars 69

Resident - Area-Wide Artist (1)

Santonia Amberly 3 (uncontested)

Resident - Area-Wide Homeless (1)

R. Martin Johnson Garcia 2

Luke Vincent 2

Tie to be decided by coin toss

Resident - Alameda East (1)

Joel Bloom 2 (uncontested)

Resident - Bunker Hill (1)

Robert Yap 13

Resident - Civic Center (1)

Simon S. Jun 166 (uncontested)

Resident - Central City East (1)

Robert Lockhart 11

Resident - City West (1)

George Luk 2 (uncontested)

Resident - Fashion District (1)

Brandon C. Finch 10

Resident - Historic Downtown (1)

Ken Yeung 19

Resident - South Park (1)

Wendy Bruget 62

Business - Area-Wide (1)

Hal Bastian 60 (uncontested)

Business - Alameda East (1)

Frank Novak 2 (uncontested)

Business - Central City East/Toy District (1)

James Doizaki 43 (uncontested)

Business - City West (1)

Cheyenne Cook 19

Business - Downtown Center (1)

Susan Shaw 28

Business - Fashion District (1)

Lynn Myers 7 (uncontested)

Business - Historic Downtown (1)

Sara R. Mendez 2 (uncontested)

Business - South Park (1)

Ed Marzec 4 (uncontested)

Arts/Cultural/Educational (3)

Kjell Hagen 29

Nic Cha Kim 25

Brady Westwater 35

Social Service Providers (3)

Ronald Holmes 86

Kai Stansberry 106

Orlando Ward 94

Workforce - Public Sector Employee (1)

Michael Gholampour 17

Workforce - Private Sector Employee (1)

David Damus 3