

COLUMN

Election of Justin Altmann was one for the ages

Since arriving in Stouffville back in 1951, we've attended 14 municipal elections involving six for Reeves: Henry Ogden, Elmer Daniels, Gar Lehman, Ken Wagg, Win Timbers and Ken Laushway.

When the Township of Whitchurch and the Village of Stouffville became one, the lead council position changed from reeve to mayor. This position was then held by Ken Laushway, Gordon Ratcliff, Eldred King, Tom Wood, Fran Sainsbury, Sue Sherban and Wayne Emmerson, twice.

During the past 63 years there have been many tightly-run races for the chief magistrate's job, but none so astoundingly close as Monday night when, with five polls to report, Justin Altmann came from behind to defeat rival Phil Bannon by 357 votes.

The unofficial count was 4,363 for Altmann to 4,006 for Bannon or 33.64 percent for Altmann to 30.62 percent for Bannon. Richard Bartley, a current councillor was third with 3,464 votes;



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

Arnold Neufeldt-Fast fourth with 1,047 and Willie Reodica fifth with 205.

Turnout at the polls was 59.02 percent, a major improvement over 2010, although that percentage will drop when unregistered voters are factored in.

Two of six councillors were returned, Ken Ferdinands in Ward 1 and Rob Hargrave in Ward 6. Newcomers include Maurice Smith, Ward 2; Hugo Kroon, Ward 3; Rick Upton, Ward 4; and Iain Lovatt, Ward 5.

The two incumbent school trustees were returned, Lauralea Carruthers (public) and Elizabeth Crowe (Catholic).

With nine polls to report, Altmann was trailing Bannon by 79 votes. That's when a member of his town hall cheering section yelled "c'mon Justin, you can do it." With five polls to go, he did, climbing into a lead he never relinquished.

"It was all about community," the mayor-elect said later. "Everyone came."

"I owe it all to you," was flashed on a screen inside the jam-packed Sgt. Pepper Bar and Grill where Altmann was besieged by hugs and handshakes. The 32-year-old farm market owner along with other members of council will be sworn into office Dec. 2.

The election aftermath was a two-fold gala in that Tanis Altmann, Justin's mother, was celebrating a birthday. Tears flowed between cheers. Two large cakes were shared.

"Never for a minute did I doubt the result," Ms Altmann said.

While the contest for mayor was a genuine nail-biter, such was not the case for the six wards where councillor Ferdinands easily defeated Elizabeth Johnston, 1,884 to 293 in Ward 1; Maurice Smith won over Adam Schickendanz 1,884 to 182 in Ward 2; Hugo Kroon defeated Jim MacDonald 438 to 229 in Ward 3; Rick Upton won over his closest competitor Oliver Belo, 879 to 549 in Ward 4; Iain Lovatt defeated Mike Humphreys 1,142 to 952 in Ward 5 and councillor Rob Hargrave won over Joanne Iannuzzi 1,457 to 813 in Ward 6.

For town clerk Michele Kennedy, it was the last of many elections.

"I'll be retiring before the next one," she said.

As for taking a well-earned vacation, she said any off-time would have to wait until the Dec. 2 inaugural. "Not until the fat lady sings," she joked. She was ably assisted in monitoring the vote count by her husband, Michael Kennedy.

Although the council chambers was set up to accommodate

48 onlookers, less than half that many showed up.

Lemonville's Dave Probert, a council watchdog for decades, described the 2014 election as "one of the messiest I've experienced in my 35 years' living here."

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"Accusations at both the mayor and councillor levels were unwarranted," he said, "and unbelievable."

As defeated Ward 5 candidate Tom Winters appropriately put it: "It's all over but the crying."

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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