

PBA Candidate Interview and Endorsement Process Continues to Lead from the Front

Municipal Elections Offer Opportunity for Members to Participate as Stakeholders in the Political Arena

BY RANDY BYRD

The North Carolina Police Benevolent Association (PBA) candidate interview and endorsement process continues to lead as a catalyst for positive change for law enforcement officers in North Carolina. This process offers a unique opportunity for members to participate as stakeholders in the political arena; educate future and current elected officials on issues that are critical to law enforcement officers; and develop long-term relationships with those officials.

In 2009, the Raleigh, Cary, North Mecklenburg, Eastern Coastal, Wake County, and Mountain chapters conducted screenings for candidates seeking office in various towns and cities in North Carolina. Candidates seeking office were invited to meet with the membership and answer questions of vital importance to law enforcement and members represented by the PBA. Endorsements were given to selected candidates based on the candidates' responses in a graded format.

Nowhere is the candidate interview and endorsement process more important than at the local level with municipal elections. Council members are the closest legislative body to municipal officers and are empowered to make budget and policy decisions that have far-reaching implications for officers' everyday lives. In many races, the PBA endorsement serves as a critical component for candidates running against incumbents or those seeking to retain their seats in a re-election campaign. Jackie Holcombe beat an incumbent to become the new Mayor of Morrisville on November 3, 2009 and understands firsthand how valuable the PBA endorsement can be. According to Holcombe, "Endorsements can increase turnout and provide additional information to voters who may be undecided. The PBA endorsement lets voters know that the candidate is trusted to support local law enforcement officers and address concerns regarding their welfare and public safety." Holcombe also recognizes the importance of the endorsement on a personal level and the efforts of officers to build relationships

through the PBA by stating, "In our small town, our law enforcement community is highly regarded and the endorsement of the PBA is an honor I am proud to have received. Not only do our officers work tirelessly to protect our community, but their relationship-building efforts are recognized as service above-and-beyond the call. I look forward to working closely with our Morrisville police officers."

Jennifer Robinson was an incumbent candidate for the District A seat in Cary. Her race became the classic example of why every vote is important and how the PBA endorse-

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continued



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ment can be pivotal in a close race. Robinson met with members of the Cary chapter on August 3, 2009 and received their endorsement for the October 6th election. The PBA offered financial support for her campaign and input for a mailer to Cary residents that demonstrated her support of various law enforcement initiatives. The mailer also included a picture from the candidate screening and a quote from the chapter president. A PBA press release was picked up by the local newspaper and the ensuing article highlighted the endorsement. Robinson also prominently displayed the PBA endorsement on her web site. Although Robinson got the most votes in a four person race, she was unable to avoid a run-off election with the second place finisher. She needed three

more votes to win the election outright and avoid continuing to the November 3rd election. The PBA continued to offer support to her campaign and produced a radio ad in the week before the November election. Robinson also used the PBA logo in an ad that her campaign ran in the local newspaper. The radio and newspaper ad were instrumental in her run-off election victory, as she won with 53% of the votes. Robinson summarized her appreciation in a note to the chapter president and the PBA. "Thank you so much for your incredible help throughout my campaign for re-election. Your contributions to the campaign clearly brought in votes. I really appreciate your funding of our "public safety" mailer and, especially, the awesome radio ad! I look forward to working

with you to make Cary an even better place to live and work!"

Holcombe and Robinson were also complimentary of the candidate interview process that led to their endorsement. Holcombe noted that the PBA process was professional and thorough. She said, "Having uniform questions and supporting documentation in advance were keys to assuring a fair, equitable process and members conducting the interviews did an excellent job representing the PBA." According to Robinson, "The process was very organized and served both to educate the candidates on matters that are important to the PBA, as well as give the candidates an opportunity to convey what they hope to accomplish while in office."

Jackie Holcombe has been a Triangle resident for 20 years and has resided in Morrisville, since 2002. She and her husband, Rick, have two daughters, Kristin and Lindsay. Holcombe is involved in special-needs-advocacy, especially as it relates to Lindsay who has Down syndrome. Holcombe is the owner of a small home-based business that provides employment opportunities for those with special needs

Jennifer Robinson moved to Cary, from Virginia in 1995 to work in the software industry. She became active in local government issues soon after moving to Cary. As a community activist, she advocated on behalf of her neighbors for many years and served on Cary's Growth Management Task Force. In 1999, she was appointed to serve the last two years of a seat on the Cary Town Council. She has subsequently been re-elected to the Cary Town Council three times. Robinson lives in western Cary with her husband, Paul, and their four children.

The PBA is looking forward to working with Holcombe and Robinson on future issues and continuing the positive relationship that has been developed. □