

## **REVOLUTION AT RCC**

The annual preference poll for members of the Board of Governors of Reston Community Center has historically yielded a minimal turnout. Last year voting was desultory at best: 338 ballots were cast. This year the contest aroused enough public interest to bring 1,300 tax-district residents to the polls.

The number of candidates in prior years never surpassed six. This year nine candidates entered the preference poll lists to fill three seats.

Low voter turnout in the past has resulted in little involuntary turnover of members of the Board of Governors. This year the two governors who sought reelection were both rejected by the voters. If future RCC preference polls continue to be vigorously contested, the effect on RCC management will be nothing short of revolutionary.

Why has the electorate suddenly come alive? Controversy is the likely answer. Plans by the Board of Governors to create a skateboard park unleashed a storm of opposition, largely from residents living close to the proposed site of the park. At one point the RCC teen program was temporarily shut down when it was discovered that budgeted funds for the program had been exhausted. The RCC Governors have also been criticized for booking excessive reserves and limiting outside funding to minor projects.

Even more controversial, the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce sought designated seats on the Board of Governors, given the fact that businesses pay almost half the taxes which support RCC but have no representation on its Board. The Governors refused any concession to GRCC.

A flyer distributed by a business coalition called for the election of Carl Levine, Joe Lombardo and Larry Williams to "Support the Teen Program," "Oppose Senior fee increases" and "Partner with the business community (mentoring, internships, seminars)" among other objectives. The flyer also noted that 80% of likely skateboard park users live outside the RCC Tax District.

Carl Levine and Joe Lombardo won 550 and 564 votes respectively in the poll, placing third and second among the nine candidates and thus winning two of the three contested seats on the Board of Governors -- if the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors appoints winners of the preference poll as it has always done.

It was Bill Bouie who placed first with 578 votes. Bouie was one of five candidates pushed by the Alliance for a Better Community (ABC) and one of three candidates endorsed by an informal coalition championed by Reston's founder, Robert E. Simon, Jr. Bouie, an 18-year resident of Reston, serves on the Friends of Reston board raising funds for Reston Association's Nature House renovation and other worthy RA projects and on the local YMCA board. He also presides over the Reston Little League.

The decision of ABC to support five candidates for three seats, thus scattering its support, may have delivered defeat to one, or even two, of its candidates. With head-of-the-slate Bouie winning big, voters would have been encouraged to follow the ABC line. But with four ABC candidates running for the remaining two seats, there simply was no ABC line.

The RCC preference poll may look like small potatoes compared to yesterday's election of state and county officials, but the closer local elections get to the voters, the more influence they are likely to have in voters' lives.

*William Nicoson is president of the Reston Historic Trust which follows closely Reston's internal politics.*