

S. Hadley nixes CPA, turns out incumbent

By STEPHEN C. HILL
Staff Writer

SOUTH HADLEY — Robert Judge and three-term incumbent Carlene Hamlin won seats Monday on the Selectboard, unseating two-term incumbent Richard Constant, and voters overwhelmingly approved a Charter Commission but rejected the Community Preservation Act.

A total of 2,659 voters cast ballots, a 27-percent turnout, said Town Clerk Judith Barthelette.

For Selectboard, Judge received the most votes with 1,757. There were two seats with a three-year terms on the ballot.

"I feel honored and thrilled to be elected," said Judge. "I'm looking forward to serving the people of South Hadley and I'll work hard to do my best."

Judge, 56, a legislative aide for state Rep. John Scibak, said one reason for his success was probably his lack of a track record as a part of the town's top elected board and making decisions that might be unpopular with some.

"As a non-incumbent, in a funny way, I had an advantage," he said.

He will approach the Selectboard job, Judge said, looking for common approaches and solutions with the other four members. The town and its leaders need to pull in the same direction to make progress and not divide the town into groups, he said.

Hamlin, who received 1,388 votes, finished narrowly ahead of Constant, who had 1,343.

"I feel good that voters think I brought a lot of change to South Hadley and I'm looking forward to continuing that," said Hamlin.

Hamlin, 46, who works in marketing for a company in Connecticut, said her reputation for asking tough questions and meeting issues head-on appealed to voters. "The voters obviously said they want me to continue to do that. If we ask the hard questions, I feel confident we'll find the answers," she said.

Constant said he will turn his time and energy to his family, his garden and golf. "I have plenty to keep me busy," said Constant, a building contractor. "The people decided who they wanted as selectmen and that's how the democratic process works."

One area where Hamlin might have had an edge, Constant said, was her championing of the Charter Commission, which voters supported by a nearly 3-1 margin, with 1,762 in favor and 660 against.

"I figured my job was to be a selectman and not push for a change in the form of government," he said.

Constant also said he is associated with the Ledges Golf Course "because I try to solve the problems" and that might have cost him some votes.

The Charter Commission will examine the current form of town government and possibly make a recommendation for next year's election about changes. The options include keeping the current five-member Selectboard with a town administrator and representative Town Meetings, having a town manager instead of a town administrator, or having a mayor.

There were 12 candidates for the Charter Commission with nine available seats. The winners are: Linda Young, William Schenker, Constance Clancy, Ira Brezinsky, John Duda, Bruce Carl, Evelyn Chesky, James Menard and Sheila Fitzgerald.

The CPA failed to pass in a close vote, with 1,121 in favor and 1,257 opposed. The ballot questions called for a surcharge of 3 percent on the taxes collected on property values over \$100,000, with low- and moderate-income households exempt. Town collections would have been bolstered by state contributions. Funds could have been spent on historic preservation, open space and recreation and community housing.

Opponents of the question call the CPA just another tax which skirts the restrictions of Proposition 2½.