

Three vie for two Selectboard spots in

by **STEPHEN C. HILL**
Gazette Contributing Writer

SOUTH HADLEY — Both incumbents and a veteran of the town's political scene are seeking seats on the Selectboard in the April 7 town election.

Carlene Hamlin, a three-term Selectboard member, and Richard Constant, a two-term incumbent, are joined in the race for the two positions on the town ballot by Robert Judge, a legislative aide to state Rep. John Scibak.

Polls at Town Hall (Precinct A), Main Library (Precinct B), Senior Center (Precinct C), Michael E. Smith Middle School (Precinct D), and Mosier School (Precinct E) are open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Richard Constant

A building contractor with a degree in political science from Syracuse University, Richard Constant, 62, has lived in town most of his life. He has been a Planning Board member and Town Meeting member.

"I'm interested in what goes on in town. It's a great town," said Constant, explaining why he is seeking a third three-year term on the board.

Continuing to whittle away at the Ledges Golf Course deficit, he said, is one priority if re-elected.

Shortly after being elected to the Select Board, Constant said, "I soon realized there were serious deficiencies in how it was managed and maintained." He helped negotiate the termination of the golf management company and hire a different company for maintenance and a director of golf.

"I've been actively involved in dealing with this deficit from the very beginning," he said, even though he voted against it as a Town Meeting member. "We have to continue to work to bring that deficit down."

Selling the course would bring penalties to the town from the state Division of Conservation and Recreation that are draconian, said Constant. "We'd be trading a \$5 million debt for a \$10 million debt," he said. The course is projected to have an operating surplus in the coming fiscal year, and the overall deficit is projected to be reduced from \$540,000 in fiscal 2007 to \$376,000 in fiscal 2009, he said.

Still, the town's bond rating has jumped three times in two years and has banked \$3.7 million be-

tion fund, Constant said. "It's the highest on record. The town has been run well," he said.

Revitalization of the Falls section of town is another priority, Constant said. The construction of a riverside park and the renovation of the Texon building are on the horizon, he said, because of the establishment of the Falls as an economic target area and his work on the Intervener Status Committee, which represented the town during the re-licensing of the Holyoke dam.

Even after he helped preserve 288 acres along the Connecticut River, Constant said open space protection is another critical issue. "Open space is important to the character of the community,"

he said. With attractive building sites in the area being used up, there will be more development pressure in the Holyoke Range, said Constant.

Carlene Hamlin

A wife and mother of three children, Carlene Hamlin, 46, said she takes pride in being considered "the people's voice" on the Selectboard. "I take pride in being a watchdog," she said.

Her work over the last nine years, Hamlin said, includes helping to convince state legislators to reconfigure the state's local and school aid funding formulas so South Hadley now receives more money from Boston. She helped organize the first legislative meeting in South Hadley with the state Commissioner of Education, attended by like-minded representatives of other communities and

Hamlin said.

Her priorities if re-elected, Hamlin said, are hiring a new town administrator, having a Charter Commission review and possibly reorganize town government, creating a workable business plan for the Ledges Golf Course and exploring an expansion of the town landfill.

A new town administrator, Hamlin said, will need knowledge specific to South Hadley, with issues such as a charter commission and the golf course requiring special strengths. The new town administrator should be not be overpaid, she said, but at "a salary level comparable to our neighboring cities and towns."

Hamlin said she began the petition drive to give voters the opportunity to elect a Charter Commission. A look at changing the town's form of government, which would be studied by the commission if the ballot question passes, is due, she said.

"Years ago it was a very effective form of government," said Hamlin of the Selectboard and elected Town Meeting, "but we've grown." Many residents told her

the current form of government is ineffective, she said. "We all want a form of town government that can provide the most accountability and transparency of how our tax dollars are spent," Hamlin said. A mayor would be an improvement, she said, because the town needs a full-time executive to oversee its \$41 million budget and to speak with one voice to legislators.

She will continue to question the operation of the golf course if re-elected, Hamlin said. Private supporters of the course need to relieve some of the burden from taxpayers, like athletic boosters have done with the high school stadium project.

Better marketing, new leadership and a new vision are needed for the Ledges, she said.

Robert Judge

His family's history in South Hadley can be traced back to 1861, Robert Judge said, and while he left town for about 20 years, he is back home to stay.

Since moving back to South Hadley in 1993, Judge, 56, has served on the Commercial and Industrial Development Committee,

Zoning Board of Appeals, Personnel Board, Historical Commission (currently its chairman) and as a Town Meeting member. He is married and has a stepdaughter.

"I've always had a big interest in government," Judge said. "South Hadley is facing a lot of issues, which caused me to run."

After working on the election campaign for state Rep. John Scibak, Judge said he accepted a position as Scibak's legislative aide. He works primarily on constituent services, Judge said, which keeps him in town rather than in Boston.

"It's an interesting job," he said. "I've learned a lot in the last five years that would help me be an effective Selectboard member."

While there would be some synergy with his job and a position on the board, Judge said, "at the same time there needs to be a separation." The state Ethics Commission provides clear guidelines, he said.

The economic health of the town, specifically the revitalization of the Falls section of town, will be a priority if he is elected, Judge said. Creating a vibrant

business district will be helped by the purchase and renovation of the Texon building, currently being explored by an experienced developer, as well as the creation of a riverside park, an obligation of Holyoke Gas & Electric, which operates the Holyoke Dam.

Renovations to the Beachgrounds Park and other entrepreneurial efforts will help attract people who will spend money, he said.

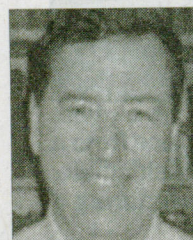
Attracting new businesses to all areas of town and helping maintain the health of businesses already here also will be a priority, he said.

Judge said he supports the Charter Commission ballot question to examine the town's form of government. He also wants to look at how the town is managed, whether departments should be consolidated and whether technology would improve the town's operations.

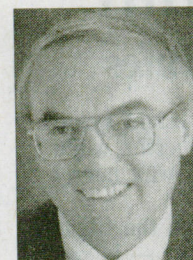
On the Ledges Golf Course, Judge said failure is not an option because penalties to the town would be severe. "There's no use crying over spilled milk. All it does is drain time and energy from other issues," he said.



**CARLENE
HAMLIN**



**ROBERT
JUDGE**



**RICHARD
CONSTANT**

South Hadley