

Alliance Ticket Wins Seats on Healthcare Board

BY MICHELLE ASCHWALD

Incumbent board member Sharon Jackson and challenger Dr. Harris (Hank) Simmonds won two posts on the hospital board in the election on November 4.

Rising from a field of five competitors, Jackson garnered 3,489 votes and came in first, while Simmonds, who finished second, got 2,910 votes at Tiburon, Belvedere and Strawberry polling stations.

The Alliance to Save Our Hospital, a political action committee dedicated to "ensuring a well-planned future for

Marin General Hospital (MGH)," sponsored Jackson and Simmonds.

The Coalition for Excellence at our Hospital backed incumbent board member Dr. Archimedes Ramirez, whom Simmonds defeated. Ramirez placed third with 2,449 votes, and Dr. Francis (Frank) Parnell came in fourth with 2,430 votes.

Unaffiliated Peter Romanowsky, in last position, received 118 votes at Peninsula polling stations.

District-wide results (most of Marin except Novato) ranked the contestants in the same vote order: Jackson (35,907), Simmonds (29,145); Ramirez (27,420); Parnell (25,577) and Romanowsky (2,946).

The Marin Healthcare District (MHCD) board will guide the transition process of MGH to district control when Sutter Health departs, which could be as early as January 1, 2010, and no later than July 1, 2010.

Four of five Marin Healthcare District (MHCD) directors have been elected with the help of the Alliance committee.

Jackson and Simmonds will take their oath of office at the December regular board meeting.

"I ran for director because I want to save Marin General," Simmonds, who spent 37 years as a Marin physician, told *The Ark*. "One of my goals is to communicate to constituents the hospital's importance in this community."

Jackson believes that she and Simmonds gained the confidence of voters because over 265 Marin medical professionals endorsed their slate. "People trust their doctors," she said.

Charles Auerbach, Alliance co-chairman and Belvedere resident, thinks that his candidates won because the governance issue resonated with voters.

The Alliance platform stresses that the MHCD board will set district policy, while the hospital subsidiary board will make day-to-day MGH decisions and be shielded from politics.

"Voters are tired of politicized board meetings and negative campaigns," Jackson said. "With the election behind us and the loan agreement confirmed with the county, we are going forward with the transition."

On November 3, by a vote of 4 to 1, the district board approved the terms of a \$20 million loan from the county to be used to finance some of the transition costs. Under the terms of the loan, the money plus interest, is to be paid back to the county within seven days of Sutter's departure.

The loan funds will be used for MHCD legal, administrative, architectural and engineering plans, medical professional retention and recruitment programs. ☛