

The Southern Ute Drum

WINNER OF FOUR NATIVE AMERICAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION AWARDS INCLUDING GENERAL EXCELLENCE IN 2011

Vol. XLIII • No. 22 • November 4, 2011

Ignacio, Colorado • 81137-0737

Bulk Rate - U.S. Postage Permit No. 1

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Something wacky this way comes



photo Ace Stryker/SU DRUM

Business as usual came to a halt on the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's campus on Monday, Oct. 31, as young monsters, superheroes and princesses flooded the halls of office buildings in search of candy. For more photos, see pages 9 – 11.

16 candidates vying for votes in general election

By Ace Stryker
The Southern Ute Drum

In the largest general election in years, five Southern Ute tribal members are in the running for the chairmanship and 11 more for two additional seats on the Southern Ute Indian Tribal Council.

Voting day is Nov. 4. Ballots will be accepted at the SunUte Community Center from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Competing for the chairman's position are Renee J. Cloud, incumbent Pearl E. Casias, Kevin R. Frost, Clement J. Frost and Jimmy R. Newton Jr.

The candidates for the two open council seats are Ian D. Thompson, Andrew C. Frost, Steve R. Herrera Sr., Shelly L. Thompson, Vida B. Peabody, Barbara Scott-Rarick, incumbent Marge Borst, Vicenti (Vince) Mirabal, incumbent Alex Cloud, Pathimi GoodTracks and Aaron V. Torres.

The chairman candidates gathered for a Meet the Candidates Night at the Sky Ute Casino Resort on Wednesday, Nov. 2, in which they each introduced their platform and later took questions from the audience. The council candidates participated in a similar forum on Monday, Oct. 31.

Tribal-member employment was a hot topic at both events, with virtually every candidate saying the status quo is unacceptable and the council should act to make more tribal government jobs available to tribal members.

Health care, education, fiscal prosperity, housing, and retention of Ute culture and language were also widely discussed.

Among the chairman candidates, Renee Cloud said the tribe's leaders should be focused on tribal members' concerns, not their own. She said she's willing to research any issues affecting tribal members, and would push the council to move forward with new ideas.

Kevin Frost said he would look at restructuring the tribal organization to reduce personnel and slim down the budget. He also proposed better training for tribal members

and removing the requirement for a valid driver license from jobs that don't require driving.

With the right policies in place, Frost said, the tribal government could employ 80 percent tribal members within 15 years.

Clement Frost said he believes the tribe is in good financial shape relative to the rest of the U.S. economy. He said the financial plan is working well despite the outside recession. He proposed to bring back regular focus groups in which tribal members can share their ideas and concerns with the council.

Newton, who resigned from his seat on the council earlier this year to run for chairman, said tribal leadership must be diligent in protecting the tribe's right to self-governance. He also said equally as important as hiring tribal members is helping them to stay in their jobs, and that the council should bring back a priority list to guide its actions.

Casias said housing, education and employment would among be her top priorities going forward. She said she wants to see more tribal members participating in internships with tribal departments. Casias said her vision of leadership is listening to the people and following guidelines established by past tribal leaders.

Questions asked by attendees shed light on more specific areas of policy. When asked about whom he would choose as an executive officer, Kevin Frost said he would consider eliminating the position.

"As chair, I feel we have to get our hands dirty," he said. "An XO is too often used as a buffer, a scapegoat, when things go wrong."

Newton said he would seek someone who exhibits openness, compassion, and a willingness to work with the people without pushing his or her own agenda. Clement Frost said knowledge of culture and tradition would be a foremost requirement.

Among candidates for the council seats, much of the discussions centered around similar issues.

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Miss Southern Ute crowned



photo Jeremy Wade Shockley/SU DRUM

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe welcomed a new Miss Southern Ute and first alternate at the Health and Wellness Powwow on Saturday, Oct. 29. Assuming the crown, which went uncontested during the regular royalty pageant in September, is Brianna Goodtracks-Alires; her first alternate is Suzi Richards. The two will represent the tribe at events across the nation in the coming year.

Growth Fund looks more toward oil

By Ace Stryker
The Southern Ute Drum

Managers of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Growth Fund said in a general meeting with tribal members on Friday, Oct. 21 the organization is looking away from natural gas and toward oil for higher returns in coming years.

Executive Director Bruce Valdez said oil has made a better recovery than gas since the low point of the recession.

"As a Growth Fund, we've switched gears," he said. "That's one of the reasons we predict we're going to have some good future years coming up."

Natural gas production peaked on the Southern Ute Indian Reservation in 2000 and has been declining since — a critical factor in the initial for-

mation of the Growth Fund. A transition toward oil means the organization is positioned for a record year in 2013, Valdez said — assuming there are no surprises forthcoming in oil pricing.

"As long as we see consistent oil pricing and good oil pricing, then we're going to do well as a Growth Fund," he said.

Valdez conceded that the energy sector can be volatile, with oil prices fluctuating from nearly \$134 per barrel in June 2008 to just \$41 in December of the same year. Similarly, natural gas prices ranged from more than \$12 per unit in June 2008 to a low of \$3 in September 2009.

But oil has come back stronger than gas lately, with current oil prices hovering between \$75 and \$110 per

barrel.

Since roughly 89 percent of Growth Fund revenue comes from oil and gas sales, its success is heavily dependent on being able to sell at high prices.

Valdez said there's currently little drilling occurring on the reservation. Instead, drilling has picked up in Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas, especially for oil, he said.

One potential bright spot in the Growth Fund's near future is offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. After the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in April 2010, the federal government placed a moratorium on drilling; that's since been lifted, and the Growth Fund is "back actively working that area again," Valdez said.

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Richards returns to Tribal Council

By Ace Stryker
The Southern Ute Drum

Howard D. Richards Sr. will return to the Southern Ute Indian Tribal Council to fill the vacated seat of former Councilman Jimmy R. Newton Jr.

Richards will serve out the remainder of Newton's term — roughly one year — after winning the tribe's Nov. 1 special election handily, taking in 40.8 percent of votes cast. Elise V. Redd won the second-most votes with 25.3 percent, while Byron Frost and Corliss M. Taylor took 17.9 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

A total of 375 votes were cast in the special election.

Richards' election marks his first return to the council since 2002 – 2004, when he served as chairman. He was first elected as a councilman in 1991.

"I felt that this Tribal Council needed assistance in making decisions as this tribe moves forward into the future," he said following a swearing-in ceremony in the Council Chambers. "I'm here to help this council move change."

He conceded that one year isn't a long time, but pledged to work to improve services to tribal members.

"You, the membership, deserve better than what you're getting today," he said.

Richards said he planned to address duplication of services among departments, the direction of the Tribal Court, and unnecessary "pork" spending in the budget. The habit of the government to waste money is going to stop, he said.

"We can do more with less, and we need to do more with less," he said. "There's one employee for every tribal member, so what do [you] get out of it?"

Going into the election, Richards had campaigned on a platform of developing a health care plan for tribal members, scrutinizing the growth of tribal administration, and developing a clear vision for helping tribal members become more educated. He also called for better planning for housing and use of the tribe's natural resources.

Vice Chairman Mike Olguin said Richards' experience makes the council a stronger body overall.

"It's going to be very exciting moving forward, knowing that today we bring a lot of strength to our council," he said.

Council Lady Marge Borst welcomed the presence of a U.S. veteran to the council, while Council Lady Ramona Eagle said Richards' experience and wisdom would be a boon.

Chairman Pearl E. Casias, who served as vice chairman under Richards, said she was pleased to have the opportunity to work together again.

"We have had a very long professional relationship," she said.

Richards pledged that when his term expires, he will not seek a severance package from the tribe.

Robert L. Ortiz contributed to this report.