

## Realtor joins GOP race for District 73 seat

Betty Parker • Parkerspolitics@aol.com • May 22, 2010

**1:10 A.M.** — Another Republican candidate entered the race for state House 73 this week. Realtor Deanna Casalino of Fort Myers brings the GOP field to four, including Matt Caldwell, Jason Moon and John Schultz. The nominee could win with 26 percent of the vote because there are no more runoffs.

Casalino has lived in Lee County six years. She said she was a child actor and is active in the Screen Actors Guild, Realtor groups and the Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce, which involves San Carlos Park, where she lives.

As part of those groups, she said, she has worked to promote bills that attract more film business - meaning jobs and revenue - to Florida.

"I'm all about creating jobs and revenue and helping small business," she said.

Casalino said she knows she's getting a late start in the race, but she said she's had encouragement from business and civic groups, and believes she brings a new dimension to the race.

"While they've been out campaigning, I've been working on getting things done," she said, citing her involvement in promoting Florida as a film center.

Cole Peacock is the lone Democrat in the race for the seat formerly held by Rep. Nick Thompson, who won a judicial post.

### Lile in the running

When state Rep. Tom Grady, R-Naples, announced this week that he will not seek re-election, his release was followed three minutes later by one from Laird Lile, a friend of Grady's and fellow attorney, who will run for the seat.

But Grady's departure prompted speculation that Grady might be a lieutenant governor running mate

for GOP contender Bill McCollum. Some say, though, that the two men are too much alike, and Grady's Collier base is safely Republican regardless.

Grady said he'll stay involved in politics, especially through his PAC-like group, Prosperity Florida. Such organizations have more latitude in raising and spending money for political purposes; this group has helped to fund several GOP legislators and candidates.

In times like these, having a strong fundraising group can put someone at the table just as easily, if not more so, as being a candidate.

Other names in the mix for lieutenant governor are Reps. Anitere Flores of Miami, and Jennifer Carroll of Jacksonville, both women, one Hispanic and one black.

### Seeing both sides

When it comes to single-member districts for the Lee County commission, Commissioner Frank Mann said he can argue both sides: Each commissioner is elected only by voters in a single district, or keep the present system to let all voters pick all commissioners.

Until recently, Mann said, he supported putting the measure on the ballot to let voters decide. But now he leans toward a hybrid of perhaps a seven-member board, with some commissioners elected by

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districts, and others elected countywide.

Mann discussed the proposal with members of Businesspeople United for Political Action this week, where a large majority of members made clear their opposition to single-member districts.

Although Mann said he hears support for the change from Lehigh Acres and Cape Coral, former Cape Mayor Joe Mazurkiewicz disputed that.

"It would be foolish for Cape Coral to support single-member districts," he said.

That would mean Cape residents would get only one, or perhaps two, commissioners on the board, whereas now, if Cape voters stuck together, the city could control all commissioners' election.

And, he added, why would anyone give up his or her say with all commissioners in exchange for only one who'd be responsible for his or her interests?

Mann echoed those concerns, citing community issues such as a proposed Colonial Boulevard expansion, opposed by nearby residents and property owners. Under single-member districts, Mann said, only their commissioner would care. "One commissioner could throw a hissy fit and say no," Mann said. "But the others have no reason to listen to him."

On the other hand, Mann said, it would be easier and cheaper for candidates to run in a smaller single district than to run countywide.

### Clarification

Last week's column talked about Republican gubernatorial candidate Sen. Paula Dockery's fight against a rail project near Orlando. The project she opposed is the SunRail commuter project. She supports high-speed rail projects elsewhere.

**- Betty Parker is a freelance columnist specializing in politics. Her column runs Saturdays.**

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