

, November 6, 1991

Pulitzer Prize, 1956



124th Year — No.

The new City Council



Kurt Ellison

Election winners Oscar Rios, Tony Campos and Al Alcala look at vote results at City Hall last night.

REFERENCE

Lack of contests kept voters from the polls

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

Yesterday's municipal election generated little interest among Watsonville residents.

Only 22.3 percent of the city's 9,546 registered voters cast their ballots, the lowest turnout in several years. Voter registration itself was down some 800 voters from 1989, when it was 10,318. Turnout in that election, which seated six new council members, was 45 percent.

The low turnout can be attributed, in large part, to the fact that the four council candidates were running unopposed. Barring last-minute write-in campaigns, the seats were won from the moment the filing period closed in September. And with the exception of District 2 incumbent Oscar Rios, the candidates did little campaigning. Voters undoubtedly concluded that their votes would make no

difference.

That there were no other county, state or national elections was also a contributing factor.

The two incumbents, Rios and Betty Bobeda (District 7), and two new council members, Tony Campos (District 6) and Al Alcala (District 1), will be seated at next Tuesday's council meeting. The council will also select one of its members to serve as mayor for a one-year term. Rios, who has been vice mayor for two years, is expected to get that job.

Bobeda is the only council member who will be serving a two-year term — she's finishing out the term of the late Johnny Kacsmatyk, who died in office earlier this year. The rest of the terms are for four years.

The five ballot measures were also apparently insufficient to

draw many voters. Three made fairly minor changes to the City Charter, a fourth concerned sublets in mobile-home parks and a fifth was a routine measure asking for approval of 150 housing units for low- and moderate-income people; the blind, the elderly and the disabled. All of the measures passed.

Turnout was the lowest in District 1, where 11.4 percent of the 728 registered voters came out. Alcala received 79 votes. Eighteen people cast ballots, but didn't vote for a councilman. In District 2, 16.4 percent of the 785 voters cast ballots. Rios received 139 votes, with 27 people casting blank ballots. In District 6, 20.7 percent of the 1299 voters came out. Campos received 282 of those votes, with 100 voters casting blank votes. In District 7, 24.4 percent of the voters turned out, with 542 voting for Bobeda and 68 casting blank



BETTY BOBEDA
She's a winner, too

votes.

Bobeda received the highest number of votes percentage-wise — 88.9 percent of those who voted in her district voted for her. Campos received the lowest — 73.8 percent of those who voted in District 6 cast a vote for him. Rios and Alcala received 83.7 percent and 81.4 percent, respectively.

Turnout in District 3 was 16.2 percent; in District 4, 14.3 percent; in District 5, 15.2 percent.

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The greatest number of votes on ballot measures were cast for Measure F, the measure to allow temporary sublets of mobile homes. There were 1,481 "yes" votes and 580 "no" votes. The other measures had "yes" votes in the 1,100 range and "no" votes in the 800 range.

This is the second election held in Watsonville under the district-election system imposed on the city as the result of a Voting Rights Act lawsuit. The suit, brought by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, charged that the city's at-large system diluted Latino voting power. District elections were seen as a way to increase Latino representation on the council and were implemented in 1989.

Despite the lack of interest this time around, changes on the council, in terms of Latino representation, are significant. It would be the first time Watsonville has had a Latino mayor and that more than one Latino at a time has been on the council. Tony Campos, who was first elected to the council in 1987, was the first Latino councilman. Campos lost to Betty Murphy in 1989, in the same election that

made Rios the second Latino to sit on the council.

Rios, Campos and Alcala — although they disagree on a variety of issues, including the merits of district elections — have said they think the increased Latino presence on the council is a good thing, considering that 61 percent of Watsonville's population is Latino.

Some of the activists who pushed for district elections, generally liberal-to-left themselves, say it's a bit ironic that two of the three Latinos on the council are conservatives. They say they don't represent the interests of the majority of Latinos in Watsonville. Others, however, point out that the Latino community is not monolithic, and say a diversity of views among Latino council members is appropriate.

The changeover isn't expected to make much of a difference in the council's politics. Alcala and Campos are generally considered to be conservatives and replace Paul Milladin and Betty Murphy, also considered more conservative than the majority of the council. Some have predicted that the next race will be more contentious, when voters decide on districts 3, 4 and 5, now held by liberal members Lowell Hurst, Todd McFarren and Parr Eves, respectively.