

Mehl wins big in supervisor race

By ADRIANA REYNERI
STAFF WRITER

Sherry Mehl's easy victory over Russ Oaks in the race for Watsonville-area supervisor shows things might be changing politically in the Pajaro Valley — but they're not changing very rapidly.

Mehl captured 58.8 percent of the vote, but that accomplishment didn't exactly surprise the widely-favored candidate, who had predicted on Monday she would take up to 60 percent depending on the turnout of eligible voters.

The results did surprise and disappoint Mehl's opponent, however. Oaks, a progressive candidate who ran a highly-visible, aggressive race, said when he went to his election-night party he expected to celebrate his victory.

Oaks and his supporters had based their hopes on the belief that political change was taking place in the Pajaro Valley. They said they expected Oaks' promises to slow growth, protect all agricultural land and serve the needy would appeal to a growing faction tired of representation by members of the so-called Watsonville establishment.

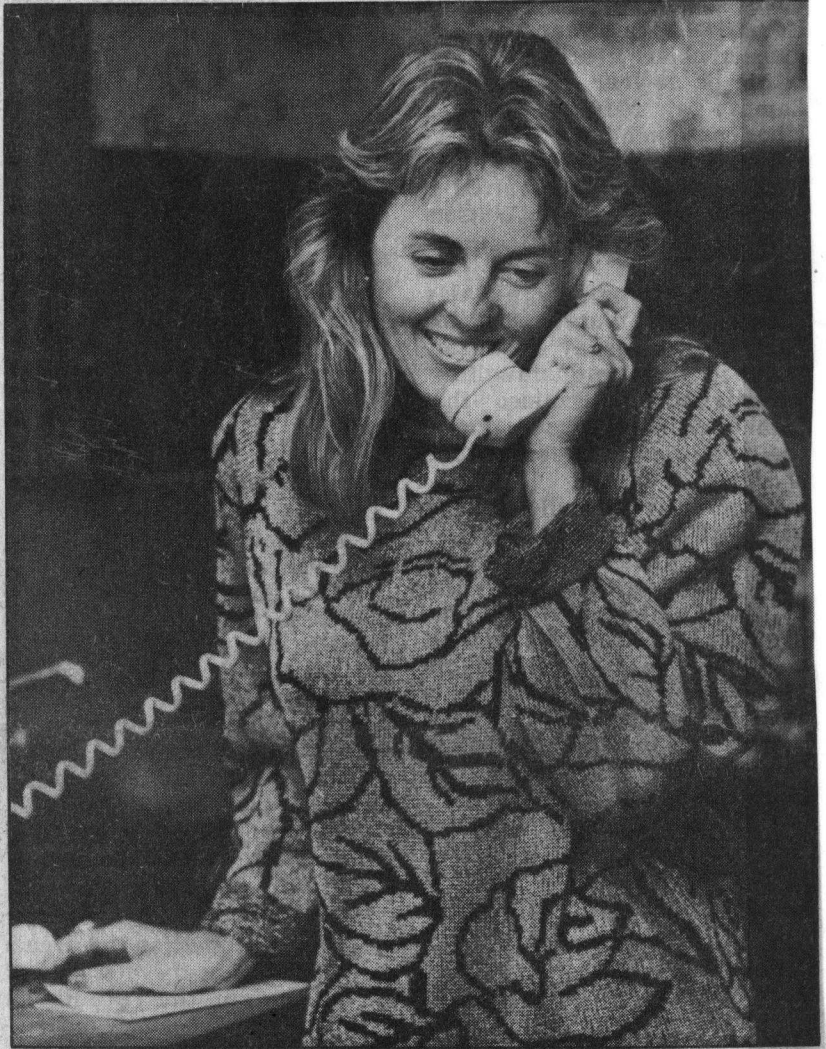
Though Oaks said he was disappointed in capturing only 41 percent of the vote, he predicted the grassroots coalition created by his campaign would affect Pajaro Valley politics for years to come.

The low turnout of 62.5 percent, or 9,380 voters, may have worked to Mehl's advantage. A high number of these votes, 957, were cast on absentee ballots. Mehl took 64.5 percent of the absentee votes.

The 37-year-old Mehl sounded elated by the handy victory, but also issued a sober press release commenting on the intense race.

Tuesday's election capped a heated and occasionally nasty battle between Mehl and Oaks for the seat on the county Board of Supervisors recently vacated by E. Wayne Moore Jr.

Oaks, who squeaked into the runoff election with 23 percent of the vote in a four-candidate primary election, tried to overcome Mehl's lead with an intense, aggressive campaign. The continual attacks on Mehl's background and record began in August with accusations that Mehl was too "combative" to be an effective supervisor.



Kurt Ellison

Sherry Mehl accepts congratulations on the phone.

Oaks' campaign, master-minded by professional consultant Gary Gartner, also depended heavily on sophisticated, specially-targeted letters to elderly persons, Democrats, and mobile home park residents.

The last appeal capitalized on Oaks' strong support for mobile home park rent control and Mehl's philosophical opposition to such controls. The pitch obviously helped Oaks take four of the total of six precincts he won.

Oaks beat Mehl in precincts containing Colonial Manor, Pinto Lake Mobile Estates, Meadows Manor and Monterey Vista mobile home parks.

He also won in two predominantly Latino precincts in downtown Watsonville. Those victories may be partly due to a concerted voter-registration effort by the League of United Latin American Citizens.

Oaks also won considerable support for his opposition to a controversial development pro-

posal, the Wingspread Beach conference center. Much of this support came from residents outside the district who bitterly oppose Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley's plans to build condominiums, a conference center and performing arts complex on the oceanfront Porter Sesnon property in Aptos.

If elected, Oaks promised to provide the third vote needed to kill the project. Mehl, in contrast, said she supported the concept of Wingspread and would approve the plan if the traffic and environmental problems it posed could be solved.

Though the support from environmentalists, Santa Cruz progressives and some Mid-county residents was highly visible, it didn't appear to help Oaks much at the polls. Some said it hurt him by enabling Mehl to link him to the "radicals" of Santa Cruz.

Mehl took 22 of the district's 28 precincts.

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
Register-PAJARONIAN
November 5, 1986

Up to the final weeks of the race Mehl ran a quiet, conservative campaign reflecting her confidence of winning. She had fallen a few percentage votes short of taking the four-way primary.

Mehl said jokingly yesterday that the inside of her mouth was sore from biting her tongue so many times to keep herself from responding to Oaks' attacks.

In the final weeks of the campaign, however, when Oaks appeared to be gaining considerable momentum, Mehl turned on her opponent and blasted him for his ties to North County liberals.

Mehl responded to criticism of this nasty turn of the race in a somewhat defensive press release last night.

She said she felt she and Oaks had done a good job of sticking to issues and explained that she didn't refer to Oaks' outside help "until it was clear that several groups were making a concerted effort to defeat me."

Once again, she denied Oaks' charges that she wanted to "pave over" the Pajaro Valley and was too confrontational to work well with supervisors representing North County districts.

She said common ground existed between the needs of the farmers and the needs of all Pajaro Valley residents, and between the northern and southern parts of the county.

"If I am to accomplish anything in the next four years I will need the good will and help of many, many people," Mehl said. "I hope that once the campaign emotions have subsided, that Mr. Oaks and everyone who has been involved with this campaign will remain equally involved in working for the common good of the county."

Gartner, a somewhat controversial figure in Oaks' campaign, said he would run the same race if he had to do it all over again.

"We ran a very good campaign that we're proud of and brought an important message to the people here," Gartner said. "Unfortunately, not enough people responded positively."

Oaks did quite well considering he had entered the primary as an unknown and came from far behind in the runoff, Gartner said.

Oaks' underdog position forced him to go on the offensive, Gartner said. He had no choice. If he had been a nice guy all through the campaign people would still be saying, "Russ who?"

"Russ has certainly made a name for himself," Gartner said. "You never know what the future will hold for him."

Oaks said he plans to return to his job as a counselor for mentally ill people at Interim, a halfway house in Salinas. He also said he will do what he can to keep together the people who joined his campaign.

"Out of that has got to come some kind of political future," Oaks said, then, speaking like the minister he once was, said, "We think of the Lord God as the Creator. He is also the consumer. He uses everything that happens for a purpose. He is going to use this somehow."

Oaks said he might do things slightly differently another time.

"I think I would have kept my mouth shut at certain points," he said. "I do feel I didn't get all the issues as fully discussed as I wanted to."

While Oaks and Gartner discussed their plans for the future, Mehl and her supporters were breaking out cases of champagne to celebrate their victory.

Mehl, whose term otherwise would begin on Jan. 1, said she plans to meet with Gov. Deukmejian's appointment secretary Marvin Baxter Friday to request an appointment to the seat left vacant by the abrupt resignation of E. Wayne Moore Jr. last month.

If the governor moves quickly, Mehl could take office as soon as Nov. 18, when the supervisors are expected to certify the results of yesterday's election.

Election results

4th District Supervisor, Santa Cruz Co.

✓ Sherry Mehl	5,152	58.8%
Russ Oaks	3,593	41.0%

State Assemblyman, 28th District

	Santa Cruz Co.		District Total	
✓ Sam Farr	51,308	73.1%	73,393	72.0%
Jeff Bosshard	18,731	26.7%	28,392	27.0%

U.S. Representative, 16th District

	Santa Cruz Co.		District Total	
✓ Leon Panetta	46,999	81.2%	126,133	80.0%
Louis Darrigo	9,172	15.8%	30,801	20.0%

U.S. Representative, 12th District

	Santa Cruz Co.		District Total	
✓ Ernest Konnyu	7,577	56.0%	108,773	61.0%
Lance Weil	5,233	38.7%	68,328	39.0%

Governor of California

	Santa Cruz Co.		State Total	
✓ George Deukmejian	35,556	50.4%	4,395,972	61.0%
Tom Bradley	34,109	47.0%	2,721,674	37.0%

U.S. Senator

	Santa Cruz Co.		State Total	
✓ Alan Cranston	42,912	59.3%	3,575,436	49.0%
Ed Zschau	27,570	38.1%	3,458,814	48.0%

California Supreme Court

	Santa Cruz Co.		State Total	
Rose Bird				
Yes	31,979	45.1%	2,357,204	34.0%
✓ No	38,922	54.9%	4,586,268	66.0%
Cruz Reynoso				
Yes	31,348	50.9%	2,521,429	40.0%
✓ No	30,277	49.1%	3,846,293	60.0%
Joseph Grodin				
Yes	34,668	57.7%	2,725,200	43.0%
✓ No	25,404	42.3%	3,545,310	57.0%

Prop. 61 (Pub. Employee Compensation)

	Santa Cruz Co.		State Total	
Yes	21,317	32.3%	2,290,184	34.0%
✓ No	44,753	67.7%	4,428,708	66.0%

Prop. 63 (English Official Language)

	Santa Cruz Co.		State Total	
✓ Yes	45,784	64.4%	5,016,556	73.0%
No	25,342	35.6%	1,837,803	27.0%

Prop. 64 (AIDS)

	Santa Cruz Co.		State Total	
Yes	15,083	21.3%	1,991,672	29.0%
✓ No	55,803	78.7%	4,879,641	71.0%

Prop. 65 (Toxic Discharge)

	Santa Cruz Co.		State Total	
✓ Yes	45,756	64.5%	4,299,207	63.0%
No	25,189	35.5%	2,573,921	37.0%