

Three candidates square off for mayor

Chacanaca plays up differences

By NANCY BARR
STAFF WRITER

Robert Chacanaca is different from the other candidates for mayor. He'd be the first to admit it.

Not only does he sport a pony tail that falls halfway down his back and dress informally for campaign appearances while his opponents get dolled up, but also what he says is different.

And when his opponents filed their campaign-contribution statements with the City Clerk as required by law, Chacanaca purposely delayed filing his statement. He said he wanted to protest the whole idea of reporting campaign contributions, because he believes it perpetuates the idea of buying votes.

Chacanaca announced right from the start of his campaign that if he were to be elected he would try to fire City Manager John Radin and City Attorney Don Haile. The city cannot afford the "hidden agendas of unresponsive bureaucracies," he said, referring to the way he thinks Radin and Haile run the city.

He has suggested that any large annexation proposal be placed on the ballot for city residents to decide. Chacanaca has pledged to set up a recycling program in Watsonville and to lobby federal officials



Robert Chacanaca

for protectionist policies aimed at limiting imports of produce grown in foreign countries.

Chacanaca, 32, lives on McKenzie Court with his wife, Jane Wong. He is a Native American and was born in Southern California.

His family moved to Watsonville when he was in high school, so he attended Watsonville and Renaissance high schools. He also attended UC-Santa Cruz before going to China to teach English and to New York State, where he worked as an audio-visual technician.

He now works in the audio-visual department of Salinas High School.

Chacanaca first announced his candidacy for mayor before Mayor Ann Soldo announced she would not seek re-election.

"First I thought I'd run an educational campaign ... to put

ideas out there so other politicians out there will have to recognize them," he said.

Then Soldo announced her retirement from politics.

"I changed gears right then and thought we should go for a win," he said. "It's time for new blood."

Chacanaca said he was perturbed when he returned to Watsonville in 1985 after four years away. Not only did he come back during the frozen-food-workers strike, but there had also been a lot of development.

"All of a sudden I looked around and said, 'Man, look what's happening.' They built Bill Johnston Boulevard up there," he said, referring to the former mayor and the growth on Freedom Boulevard. "Five years ago you could go up Freedom Boulevard fairly nonchalantly."

Chacanaca says the current City Council spends too much time with developers, and not enough time listening to the concerns of the average, working resident. He has proposed forming a labor commission to oversee the living and working conditions of working people in Watsonville. He prides himself on not being a homeowner, but rather a renter, and not being a businessman or administrator, but a worker.

Throughout his campaign, Chacanaca has taken the offensive, criticizing the current council and, therefore, criticizing his two opponents who are both longtime council members.

He criticized the city's decision to force businessmen off the 200 block of Main Street to

put in a post office. One thing the council could offer city residents in the redevelopment area is a community center, something Chacanaca thinks would be perfect in the 200 block.

He's taken the council to task for failing to get Sonic Cable TV to provide a local-origination station when the cable television contract was renewed. And he's criticized the council for paying for numerous studies of the downtown, yet not coming up with money to pay for youth programs, child care or affordable housing.

Chacanaca has made people sit up and take notice. More than a few people around town have said that what he's saying makes sense. Even people who say they wouldn't vote for him because he is too unconventional say they like a lot of what he says.

He has suggested that if the city is serious about providing affordable housing, it could set up a non-profit housing agency. Such an agency could purchase houses and apartment buildings to maintain a stock of low-cost housing, he said.

Chacanaca said the city needs to plan for earthquakes and make sure existing buildings are safe.

He thinks the City Council really failed when it came to the last year's frozen-food strike. If he were mayor, he would have brought a mediator in to try to resolve the strike, he said.

He said the police department needs to launch an aggressive public relations campaign to heal the wounds created during the strike. Healing relations

between all the different groups in Watsonville is one of Chacanaca's top priorities.

He pledges to go out knocking on doors to find out what's on people's minds — not just during the campaign, but once he's in office, if elected. He has also pledged to do what he can to fight all forms of prejudice in the city.

Chacanaca has urged people to vote for him because he's young and has fresh ideas. He also has said, "You're not voting for me for life."

His term would be only four years, he said, and he doesn't expect to be a career politician, which he thinks both of his opponents are.

Clark aims to finish at the top

By NANCY BARR
STAFF WRITER

Rex Clark thinks a promotion to mayor would be the perfect end to his many years of public service.

He gave it a shot four years ago, and lost. Now he's trying again and thinks his chances are much better.

He is running against fellow council member Betty Murphy and Robert Chacanaca, a Salinas High School employee, in the May 12 election.

Clark was a planning commissioner from 1962 until his election to the City Council in 1967. After three terms on the council, the voters turned him



Rex Clark

out of office in 1979 — the same year Betty Murphy was first elected to the council.

Two years later Clark won back his place on the council.

Then Mayor Bill Johnston called it quits, and Clark faced Ann Soldo for the city's top post.

Clark was soundly defeated, taking 29 percent of the vote to Soldo's 44 percent. (The winner in mayoral elections need not garner more than 50 percent of the vote; he or she simply must get more votes than anyone else running.)

Clark thinks the outcome will be different this time around.

Clark said he thought Murphy wasn't quite as formidable an opponent as Soldo, even though the two women are close political allies and Soldo has endorsed Murphy for mayor. Clark pointed out that the margin by which he lost to

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03

WATSONVILLE
Register-PAJARONIAN
May 4, 1987

Murphy in 1979 was rather narrow, so he thinks he can beat her in this race.

Clark said everything about this year's campaign felt better than four years ago. Last time, it was an uphill battle. This time, people he doesn't even know are calling to ask how they can help, he said.

He also has the public endorsement of two of his council colleagues — Joe Marsano and Roy Ingersoll. Clark said in a recent interview that two other members of the council "while publicly remaining neutral, are privately supporting me."

The two council members he referred to, Gwen Carroll and Vido Deretich, adamantly denied they gave him any such support.

"I'm not supporting anybody's candidacy," Deretich said. When told what Clark said, Deretich responded, "That's his opinion. I don't know where he got that bright idea."

Carroll also denied Clark's assertion that she has thrown her support behind him.

"That isn't true," she said. "I'm not coming out supporting anybody (in the mayor's race)."

I like both of them. I'm going to have to work with one of them — or both of them."

Even if Clark loses his bid for mayor, he still has two years left in his current council term. His council spot would be filled by appointment if he wins the mayor's race. Murphy, if she loses, is off the council because her current four-year term is expiring with this election.

Clark, 54, and his wife, Jeanne, live on Brewington Avenue. They have two children. Clark worked for many years in the family real estate business and now does appraisals in a business he runs with his wife.

Aside from his own home, he owns one commercial property at 361 East Lake Ave.

Clark said his experience in government and his general background combine to make him the best choice for mayor. He also has the advantage of personal contacts in state and federal government, he said. For instance, he said, U.S. Sen. Pete Wilson is a close friend from the days when the two worked together in the League of California Cities.

Clark also said that the fact that league members chose him to serve as their president in 1978-79 shows he is recognized for his leadership abilities.

He sees himself as a "moderating force," and predicted that if he were to be elected, the council would be much more united than it has been in the past.

"If Betty wins, I think you'll see a lot of 6-1 votes," he said, with Murphy's vote the one. "Her record speaks for itself and for the most part has not been in tune with the majority of the council."

An "open door policy" would be fundamental to his tenure as mayor, he said, and he would try to have regular office hours when people could drop in to see him. Likewise, he'd like to improve the communication among council members