

Nichols savors close victory

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

As returns Wednesday morning show Sheriff John F. Nichols in a virtual dead heat with Democrat Matt Hogan, the incumbent made a telling prediction.

"The southern tier will determine the outcome," Nichols said, referring to southern communities where heavy turnout slowed the tabulating process. "I expect to carry cities like Troy and Birmingham, but Southfield usu-

ally goes Democratic."

When supporters at the Santa Banquet Hall in Keego Harbor offered congratulations, Nichols responded cautiously. "Not so fast," he said, "let's see what happens."

Caution was in order, as final uncertified results show Nichols the victor by a 2 percent margin. Nichols pulled 240,728 votes, or 51 percent of the vote, compared to Hogan's 229,261.

Hogan too was cautious as precinct after precinct showed a

neck-and-neck race. The Democrat jumped into the lead when results from Pontiac went his way, 12,915 to 2,906.

But the lead narrowed — and eventually changed — as results trickled in from Republican strongholds like Birmingham, Troy and Bloomfield. The final tally wasn't known until early Wednesday.

"I have no regrets," Hogan said. "I lost the race, but I'm no loser. I fought a heck of a race for a Democrat in Oakland County."

"I met thousands of good people," Hogan continued, "and it was a positive experience all the way."

At his party at the F.O.E. Hall in Waterford, Hogan congratulated supporters on a job well done. "We did a good job getting my message out," he said, "Now it's up to the voters."

Throughout the campaign, Nichols — who turns 78 later this month — insisted neither his age nor his health was a crucial issue. "I have the experience

and the vitality to do the job," he said time and time again.

As if to underscore his vitality, Nichols was in his office by 8 a.m. Wednesday, a mere two hours after confirming that he had won.

"People were waking me up at home," Nichols said. "So I thought (they) might as well give me the news here."

By winning his fourth consecutive term, Nichols assured himself a unique place in county history. He had already tied the longevity mark of his predecessor, Democrat Johannes Spreen, at 12 years.

Thus, even without Tuesday's victory, Nichols was tied for second as the longest serving sheriff in Oakland County. If Nichols serves out his fourth consecutive term, Nichols will be within two years of catching Frank Irons, who was Oakland County Sheriff for 18 years, from 1955 to 1972.

When asked about Irons' record, Nichols shrugged. "I'm not looking for any longevity records. I just want to finish the



Showing support: Sheriff's candidate Matt Hogan gets a reassuring hug from his wife after finding out he had won the election.

STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMAN

job I started."

That job, Nichols said, includes looking for new jail space and initiating some special units to deal with emerging problems such as gang activity. Hogan, who was making his first bid for public office, said there are few, if any, things he would have done differently.

"I never attacked Nichols personally," said the 26-year career officer with the Michigan State Police. "I had too much respect

for the man, personally and professionally."

He'd like to have had more money, Hogan said. Furthermore, the Democratic Party could have offered more support, he said.

"But I ran an honorable race, and I can hold my head high," he said.

As for future political races, Hogan was philosophical. "For the time being, I'm just going back to being a good state police commander."



Waiting patiently: Oakland County Sheriff John Nichols, bottom left, and his team wait for results from the polls.

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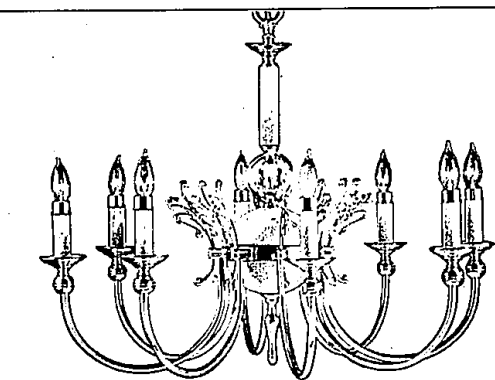
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