

# Voters choose challenger, veteran incumbent for OCC board

BY MIKE MALOTT  
HOMETOWN NEWS SERVICE

Challenger Phillip Abraham won a seat on the Oakland Community College Board of Trustees Monday, ousting incumbent Jeanne Towar in an election that took a controversial turn at the end.

Towar contended the campaign deteriorated to "character assassination" in an anonymous mailing conducted only days before the vote. That mailing accused her, as well as incumbent Sandra Ritter, of "fiduciary corruption" and urged votes for Abraham and challenger Rose Couture.

Towar said she plans on filing a complaint to the state over the mailing, on the grounds she believes it violated campaign finance regulations.

Abraham said he had no knowledge of the mailing, and that he "would fully support" Towar if she decides to make a complaint to the state.

But he also contended it was

"outrageous" that the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers had endorsed Towar in her bid for reelection. "I've never heard of a newspaper endorsing one of its own high-level, senior managers in an election. That's very unusual," he said.

Towar is vice president of editorial for HomeTown Communications Network, the parent company of this newspaper, and publisher of the Birmingham Eccentric.

Ritter won the other seat up for election in Monday's contest. She called it a "bittersweet victory" because of the loss of Towar from the board.

Six candidates, including the two incumbents, had sought two seats, each with six-year terms, on the seven-member board.

Abraham placed first with 11,237 votes and Ritter second with 11,181. Towar came in third with 9,334 votes; Sandra Tyndell was fourth with 7,057; Couture fifth with 6,406; and Michael McGuinness sixth with 6,102.

Royal Oak dominated the voting, Abraham said, because the local school district had a bond issue on Monday's ballot and that prompted a heavy voter turnout. For OCC, 18,826 votes were cast for the two OCC seats in Royal Oak, far exceeding the number cast in any other community. The closest was the Rochester Schools community, where 4,790 votes were cast. Royal Oak is also the home of most of the candidates, including Abraham, Towar, Couture and Tyndell.

Abraham attributed that turnout, in part, to his victory. "These are the people who are my friends and family. They're the people whose kids I coached in Little League football. It was incredible. It was very touching," he said.

A CPA with offices in Royal Oak, Abraham also served two

terms on the city commission and has been active in a number of local judicial campaigns.

When he takes a seat on the board in July, Abraham said he'd "work to get more citizen involvement, put more money into the classrooms and put students and taxpayers first. It will be the things I campaigned on."

Abraham also attributed his win to a "grass roots" campaign, in which his supporters worked hard to get his message out. Overall, he said the campaign had been a positive one, run "professionally" by the candidates, who avoided single-issue campaigns.

Ritter, principal of a charter school in the Burton area and a retired administrator from Waterford schools, will take on another six-year term on the board beginning in July. She's served on the board since 1978.

Ritter agreed with Towar that the election will result in a shift in the direction of OCC's board, producing a 4-3 split among trustees. She predicted that the board will soon move to settle an outstanding contract with the Teamsters Local 214, which represents deans and administrative employees at the college.

That contract has been unresolved for six years, and has resulted in unfair labor practice charges being traded by both sides in the negotiations. Ritter and Towar argued that, if settled as it stands now, the contract will cost the college more than it should.

The contract dispute, Towar and Ritter said, is what resulted in the distribution of the anonymous mailing. The mailing accused Towar and Ritter of using "tax dollars to obstruct the legal rights of OCC employees"

and "to appeal their illegal actions in the hopes employees will abandon their legal rights to pursue fair and equitable working conditions."

Towar said the mailing contained similar language to a letter written to OCC employees by Teamsters Local 214 President Joe Valenti on June 4.

Towar said she intended to file a complaint over the literature. Chris Thomas, director of elections for the Michigan Secretary of State, said campaign finance laws require organizations which issue campaign literature to identify who paid for the printing and distribution of that literature.

Couture declined comment about the flyer, other than to say she did not believe it was a violation of campaign finance laws. Valenti could not be reached for comment.

## Botsford Hospital holds blood drive June 14

Botsford General Hospital will hold a blood drive for the American Red Cross on Friday, June 14. Blood donations will be accepted between 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. in the Community Room of the hospital's Ziegler Center.

Donors are urged to call the Botsford Employee Services representative at (248) 888-2610 to schedule an appointment.

For more than 20 years, Botsford has been a site for American Red Cross-sponsored blood drives. Despite a surge in blood donations immediately following the Sept. 11 disaster, hospitals across the nation are again feeling the effects of a national shortage of blood products.

Statistics show that 95 percent of men and women who reach the age of 75 will have had a

blood transfusion but only five percent of the people who can donate blood do so.

Thousands of people rely on blood products to help them battle conditions like cancer, heart disease, sickle cell anemia and leukemia.

In order to donate blood, you must be at least 17 years old, in good health and weigh at least 110 pounds. While there is no

upper age limit for donors, some medical conditions, medical histories, prescription drugs and recent travel to some foreign countries limit donor eligibility.

For more information on these restrictions, call the Great Lakes Blood Services Region at 1-800-GIVE LIFE or American Red Cross website, [www.givelife.org](http://www.givelife.org).

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