

Electoral fingerprints



By Nate Smelle

At one time or another, everyone of us bites up more than we can chew. Now that our Special Election editions of Bancroft This Week and The Bancroft Times have been sent to press, I can tell you that the process of putting together the 2022 Municipal Candidates' Questionnaire was definitely one of these uniquely frustrating, humbling, and eventually enlightening experiences.

Having managed several election questionnaires between three different papers, I have noticed that each one produces its own unique meta-data. Acting as a sort of fingerprint at a crime scene, the information derived from each questionnaire leaves behind a trail of clues, that help us gain insight into: who each of the candidates are; why they decided to run; and, their priorities should they attain office.

As anyone who has worked on and analyzed such a political questionnaire will tell you, the meta-data comprising these electoral fingerprints can be extracted during every part of the process of putting it together. From coming up with the questions and tracking down the candidates, to sending out the questionnaire and reading it after its publication, there is important information waiting to be harvested.

Considering the extensive scope of the 2022 Municipal Candidates Questionnaire; and the unprecedented response from those running, I am certain that it will serve as benchmark source of useful information for the politically engaged moving forward throughout the next term. Never before have our local newspapers provided our readers with such widely encompassing election coverage.

So... why did it take so long for our papers to cover all the municipal races throughout this entire region? Basically, because until the federal government launched its Local Journalism Initiative in 2018, we simply did not have the resources. It is also because of this initiative that we have been able to cover all the local councils, and a wider range of community events over the past few years. Nonetheless, with these resources available, and the increased awareness of municipal affairs in our communities, we have approached the upcoming municipal election in a new way.

Although we had to delay the release of the questionnaire due to editorial space limitations caused by the unprecedented response we received, in the end it will be worth the wait, since our readers will have a better opportunity to make an informed decision on Oct. 24.

To shine a light on the campaign trail ahead, last month we asked our reporters to come up with a few questions that addressed what

they considered to be the top issues arising from each of municipal councils they cover. Realizing that we would never have enough editorial space at our disposal to ask questions pointed directly at each municipality, I sent the following four relatively open-ended questions to each of the candidates on the ballot:

- 1) Why did you decide to run for office; and what are your personal goals if you are elected?
- 2) What do you see as the top issue or top two issues your municipality faces, and what will you do if elected as a member of council to address it/them?
- 3) If elected to council, what steps would you take to bring or enhance the Internet services within your municipality?
- 4) As a member of council, what will you do to encourage a speedy recovery of the local economy, which fosters sustainable economic growth in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic?

If you are reading this and happen to be one of the undecided voters still making up their mind regarding which candidates deserve your vote, I highly recommend picking up a copy of this week's edition of The Bancroft Times. There you will find the candidates' responses to the three remaining questions not featured in Bancroft This Week.

With so much at stake ? our personal and communal quality of life ? debates between differing points of view can, and should become heated. Still, no matter which side of the political fence we stand, this line is more valuable to us as point of connection than it is as a divider. As someone who has thrown their hat in the political ring a couple times, I personally find common ground with every political candidate in the respect I have for the courage they exhibit by publicly defending their personal political philosophy, just for a chance to serve the community.

Rather than getting into which candidates I perceive as having the most to offer us and our municipalities over the next term, instead I will provide you with glimpse of the meta-data arising so far from the 2022 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire.

In our efforts to help community members cast an informed vote, Bancroft This Week/The Bancroft Times reached out to 89 candidates running in each of the nine local municipalities. Chewing on the numbers more thoroughly, we received a total of 66 responses from candidates. Among the 40 incumbents seeking re-election in our area, 25 took time to connect with their potential constituents through our questionnaire. At the same time, we received 41 responses from the 49 new candidates we reached out to. Out of the 14 acclaimed candidates in this crowd, five seized the opportunity to introduce themselves to the people they will soon represent.

While the participation award means very little in sports, when it comes to democracy it is what matters most. I will not speculate as to why some candidates chose not to participate in the 2022 Municipal Candidates Questionnaire. However, to those who did make an effort to enhance their connection with the people and communities they intend to serve ... thank you!