District 1: You can't win for losing

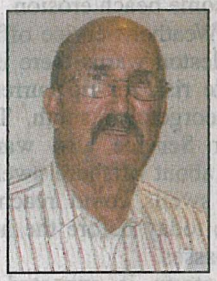
Keowee voting bloc gives Corbeil edge over rural candidate Collins

By CARLOS GALARZA
carlos@dailyjm.com

KEOWEE KEY — Paul Corbeil and his wife, Casey, love life perched on a hillside in their beautiful home on Admiral Lane.

The couple moved in about three years ago, as they followed the migration route of a half-dozen friends who flocked from the congestion of central Georgia to the gorgeous view of the lake and mountains at Keowee Key.

As the Republican candidate in Tuesday's special election for the District 1 County Council seat against Democrat Jack Collins of Madison, Corbeil is sensitive to the so-called "we and they" rumblings that have surfaced over the years in the county.


Jack Collins


Paul Corbeil

"We" are those who have called Oconee home for generations. "They" are those who for the past three decades have built retirement dream homes on the shores of Lake Keowee.

The large number of retirees drawn to Lake Keowee has dramatically fueled Oconee County's population growth over the past 30 years. Since 1980, the county's population has gone from just under 49,000 to more than 70,000 — a spike of 45.5 percent. Much of that growth is concentrated on Lake Keowee.

With the advent of Advocates for Quality Development (AQD), a group that surfaced in 2006 to protect Lake Keowee from high-rise development, the lakeside retirees have become a powerful voting bloc.

According to the Oconee County Voter Registration & Elections Office, there are 10,093 registered voters in District 1, a large area made up of nine voting precincts stretching from the lake areas near Seneca and Salem to the sparsely rural areas of Madison near the Georgia border on Highway 123.

The Keowee precinct is the largest with 3,045 registered voters. Stamp Creek, another lake area, is the second-largest precinct with 2,446 registered voters. There are more registered voters in those two precincts alone than in the other seven precincts combined.

When you factor in the Salem and Tamassee precincts and their share of lake addresses among the 2,518 registered voters between the two, it is clear that Corbeil's advantage is seemingly insurmountable.

Even for a well-liked and respected "Blue-Dog" Democrat like Jack Collins (who could not be reached for comment for this article), the numbers just don't add up in Tuesday's election, although he's as fiscally conservative as Corbeil and shares many of the same views and values as his Republican opponent.

Making Collins' uphill climb steeper is the tendency of lake residents to be motivated voters. Also, being mostly retirees, they find the time to go to the polls.

Judging from the low voting turnout in the other precincts during the GOP primary July 2, in which Corbeil bested Walhalla's Robbie Lee and Long Creek's Steven Moore,

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For more on the candidates and the issues see page 7A

Jessica Nelms/Staff

Lee Holcomb, above, says he's a regular at the stores in Long Creek. However, as the empty parking lot behind him would attest, the rural communities of Oconee County's 1st Council District simply lack sufficent numbers for a rural politician to win an election without the support of Lake Keowee area voters, right.