Landslide victory for Paul Corbeil

Keowee Key resident wins District 1 council seat with backing from lake-area voters

By CARLOS GALARZA
carlos@dailyjm.com

WALHALLA — Republican Paul Corbeil rode the coattails of his solid supporters from the lake areas of Stamp Creek and Keowee to win the special election Tuesday to fill the District 1 County Council seat.

Democratic Party challenger Jack Collins bested Corbeil in six of the district's nine precincts and tied in another, but still could not overcome his opponent's huge advantage in the lake areas.

The final tally was 1,473 votes for Corbeil to Collins' 490. Only 20.1 percent of the district's 9,797 registered voters turned up at the polls.

Corbeil plans to hit the ground running as soon as he is sworn in during a ceremony in Council Chambers at 5:30 this afternoon.

The 64-year-old Corbeil said he intends to fit in with the other members of the County Council and likes the teamwork, cooperation and planning being displayed by the other members.

"I'll work to continue to do that," Corbeil said.

Corbeil also had kind words for his 70-year-old Democratic rival.

"I want to thank Jack for the tone of the campaign," Corbeil said. "Jack and I certainly will stay in touch."

Corbeil also acknowledged his lake district constituents for his victory.

"We have the numbers and they take voting seriously," Corbeil said. "I'm glad to call them my neighbors."

See CORBEIL, Page 8A

Despite losing the absentee ballot 206-20, Collins remained competitive and actually held a 64-vote advantage in the race until the returns from Stamp Creek and Keowee were announced.

After results were announced from Walhalla 1 & 2, Mountain Rest, Long Creek, Tamassee, Madison and Salem, Collins had 392 votes to Corbeil's 328.

However, a little more than 35 percent of Stamp Creek's 2,367 voters gave Corbeil 810 votes to 18 for Collins to flip the results. He also received 334 votes from the Keowee precinct to 81 for Collins.

The 70-year-old Collins said that as long as the population lines remain as they are in the district, the lake residents would continue shifting election results.

"The way the lines are, it's not going to work," Collins said.

Despite the results, Collins said he enjoyed getting out meeting people. He said the message he's hearing from people he's met is that the county needs to stop its "ungodly spending." He said that's a message the County Council needs to hear.

Corbeil positioned himself as the solid favorite in the special election after winning a lopsided GOP primary victory in July against fellow Republicans Robbie Lee and former Councilman Steven Moore. Corbeil garnered almost 68 percent of the 2,034 votes cast in the primary.

Collins entered the special election unopposed. However, he also came into the race with a big underdog label as a Democrat in a solidly Republican stronghold.

The special election in District 1 became necessary after George Blanchard resigned April 21 after a public falling out with the new majority on the County Council made up of Chairman Reg Dexter, Wayne McCall and Joel Thrift.

The confrontation between Blanchard and the new majority boiled over with the firing of County Administrator Dale Surrett, who was hired in 2007 when Blanchard was still chairman of the County Council.

Corbeil will have to kick into campaign gear once again next year because Blanchard's seat expires in 2010.

Lee and Moore have left the door open to challenging Corbeil again in a primary if they think he's ineffective representing District 1.



Paul Corbeil gets an "I Voted" sticker from Bill Palmer after voting Tuesday morning at Duke World Of Energy. Corbeil won Tuesday's special Oconee County Council election and will be sworn in today at 5:30 p.m.

Jessica Nelms/Staff