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LCC Board Races

Four candidates in two contested races

Lane Community College is in trouble financially, and the May 15 LCC board elections are providing an opportunity for candidates to promote ideas for salvaging, maintaining and growing the college's endangered educational programs.

Incumbent board member Roger Hall is being challenged by Rob Spooner for the at-large Position 6. Newcomers Stefan Ostrach and Tony McCown are competing for Position 2 representing north Eugene, Coburg, Harrisburg and Junction City. Other board candidates Pat Albright (Position 5) and Bob Ackerman (Position 7) are running unopposed.

Roger Hall, 67, is a semi-retired radiologist who has served on the LCC board for the past 16 years. He says he's frustrated at the cutbacks in state funding in community colleges, and he blames the Legislature's Ways and Means Committee for viewing community colleges as "an expense instead of an investment." He also faults the lack of public support evidenced by the failure of LCC's modest tax levy last November.

"LCC is the most important educational institution we have," he says. "We're an economic engine in the county, and it appears you can't get people excited about it until it goes away."

Despite his frustrations, Hall is optimistic that LCC can grow its programs and enrollment over time through partnerships with employers, developing new revenue streams, lobbying for more state funding, careful expense management and raising public awareness.

Hall also has faith in the innovation and leadership of college President Mary Spilde. "I think she's phenomenal," he says.

Rob Spooner, 60, is a Florence magazine publisher who has little faith in the existing board and administration in dealing with the college's chronic financial crisis.

He describes himself as a "radical populist" who will bring fresh ideas to the institution. "I'm not a pro-faculty, pro-union guy," he says. "I think the way we show we value education is by educating students."

Spooner lost twice to Paul Holman in races for LCC's board Position 1 in 2003 and 2005, but he remains active on the fringes. He has also served on LCC's Florence advisory committee. He says he's frustrated that the reform ideas he has presented at board meetings were ignored. "Nobody takes up my positions," he says. "It's a bottomless well where I drop ideas, and I never even hear them splash."

Spooner has called for more effective lob-

bying, offering half-price classes to fill empty LCC buildings in the summer, hiring more part-time instructors, and cutting what he sees as unnecessary spending.

"Mary Spilde's Neverland list of budget adjustments will decimate the full-time faculty," he says, "and Roger (Hall) has no response except to curse the darkness."

Stefan Ostrach, 60, running for Position 2 race, is a union representative, labor market researcher, former president of the Lane County Labor Council and a Democratic Party activist.

He's a member of the LCC Budget Committee and says he's ready to move up to the board. "I know that serving on the board won't be glamour and games," he says. "I know it will require difficult decisions and creative problem-solving. I'm ready for the challenge."

Ostrach says LCC is essential to the community, and he intends to advocate for more state and federal funding. "Local taxes can't meet the projected deficits," he says.

He wants to boost enrollment, make classes more accessible and "restore community education and enrichment courses." And he opposes cutting career and technical programs.

"As a longtime union representative and negotiator, I have spent many hours sitting across the table from management, working through compromises that recognize the needs of employers without undercutting employees' rights," he says. "Advocacy and negotiating skills will enable me to serve effectively on the LCC board."

Tony McCown, 24, is a planner with Goebel Engineering and a graduate of LCC and former LCC student body president. He says that, as a former student, he has a "profound understanding of the school's importance to this community."

He says budget cuts have "continued to threaten the vitality of an institution that benefits Lane County and its residents immeasurably," and says, "We can no longer accept well-intentioned yet short-sighted answers to problems that are unlikely to subside on their own."

McCown is calling for action on fiscal sustainability, including funding a full-time international student recruitment coordinator, looking at private-public partnerships for student housing, partnering with other schools on purchasing and expanding higher-tuition health care programs.

He also has plans for boosting workforce sustainability, boosting enrollment, making the campus more environmentally sustainable and improving community relations. **EW**

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