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Aquinnah Incumbent Returns to Office in Close Vote Cast by Record Turnout

By JULIA WELLS

Incumbent selectman Michael Hebert squeaked back into office this week, beating challenger Camille Rose by just six votes in the Aquinnah annual town election. The final count was 108-102; Mr. Hebert will begin a third term as selectman this week.

The election saw a record turnout of voters in this tiny town that is the second smallest in the commonwealth and home to the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah). A total of 211 voters cast ballots, or 57 per cent of the 368 registered in town.

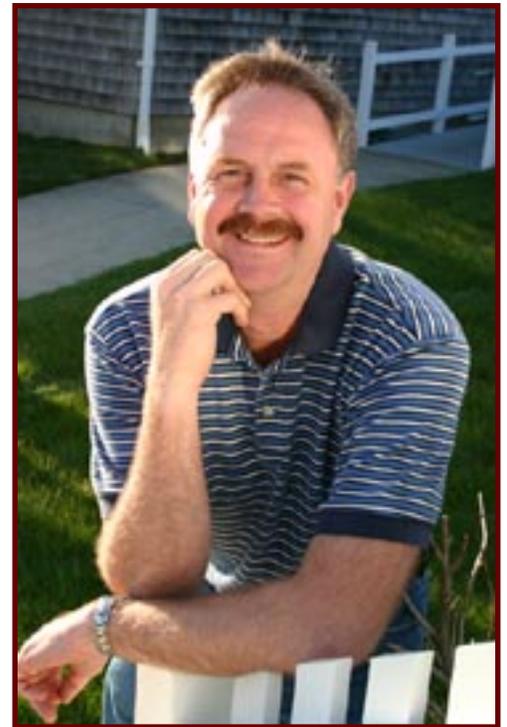
Heavy voting by tribal members was thought to be a factor in Mr. Hebert's win over Ms. Rose. Mr. Hebert was at the center of a town divided late last year when he voted to not pursue a town appeal of the sovereign immunity case with the tribe.

"It's sobering that it was so close," Mr. Hebert said yesterday. "It leads me to believe that I am doing the best thing for the town and most people believe in me, but there is clearly room for improvement and I need to make more of an effort to include people who didn't support me," he added.

"I just want to thank everyone who voted for me and I hope that we can all work together. I think we have some very serious financial problems and we need to look at them actively and look for solutions actively," said Ms. Rose, who has led the town planning board since its inception in the late 1970s.

Mr. Hebert complimented Ms. Rose for running a hard race against him and said he had extended an invitation to her to join a working group to explore ways to address the town's financial pinch.

"I made the offer to personally invite Camille to attend these meetings, and it is true that we do need to see what we can do about increasing town revenues," he said.



The election was held on Wednesday afternoon in the Aquinnah town hall, one day after the annual town meeting. The weather was unseasonably warm, and across the road from the town hall a small collection of campaigners stood in front of the town library in shorts and shirtsleeves, hoisting signs for their candidates.

Voting was steady all afternoon.

"You just don't see a turnout like that in this town very often," Mr. Hebert said.

In the only other contest on the ballot, longtime town moderator Walter E. Delaney also survived a challenge, but not by much. Mr. Delaney beat John Walsh 104-98.

Mr. Delaney has been the town moderator for 30 years; in three decades he has missed only one meeting. "Maybe some people thought it was time for a change, but I am glad that I'm still here because I really enjoy it," he said yesterday.

The following candidates were elected without contest:

Carl M. Widdiss to a three-year term on the town board of assessors; Richard Skidmore to a three-year term on the town board of health; Martha Vanderhoop to a three-year term as a town library trustee; and Joanne Eccher and Daniel Smith to three-year terms on the town planning board.

Asked yesterday if she will continue to serve on the planning board, Ms. Rose replied: "You bet." She added: "And of course there's always next year."

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