



Alamo Heights 09'ER

Issue 1, Volume 10
October, 2010

NEWS FOR THE RESIDENTS OF ALAMO HEIGHTS

Fall for Fall Gardening

By Donna Fossum
of SAWS

The time of year that every gardener has been looking forward to since the beginning of summer has officially arrived: Fall.

The cooler temperatures and shorter days make this the perfect time of year for gardening. And, the nurseries are luring us back to gather plants to renovate our landscapes. There are so many reasons to get out and garden. Take your pick!

- It's the perfect time to plant trees and shrubs because the root systems have ample time to recover from transplanting and grow new roots.
- Cooler temperatures reduce overall plant stress and increased rainfall this time of year reduces watering needs for new plantings.
- Plants that barely survived the summer heat will celebrate the season with a new rush of fall color.
- Pesky pests — especially mosquitoes — retreat due to cooler temperatures.

So get out and enjoy the wonderful fall weather. Your landscape will love you for it!

*Donna Fossum is a conservation planner
for San Antonio Water System.*

Alamo Heights – May 8, 2010 Council Election *Anatomy of an Election*

By Bill Kiel

In many ways, the council election last May was a major departure from earlier elections. We saw much more money spent and with a higher level of outside contributions. For the first time, a political action committee – The Alamo Heights Neighborhood Committee – backed a slate of candidates and the AHNC candidates won. In a sense, it was new politics smashing the old, and it is important for us to know how this happened and why. It may be with us for a long time.

The Candidates' filings of Campaign Finance Reports are a vital source of information. They have only been completely available since July 15, 2010. (These can be viewed at myalamoheights.com along with other detail.)

From these reports we can learn who paid for the campaigns, how much was spent and on what, and maybe something about campaign coordination and strategy. Let's start with the money.

How much money was raised and spent on the campaigns?

Six candidates and one Special Purpose Political Committee (AHNC) spent \$23,473 on three council seats. Outside contributions to the campaigns totaled \$11,197, or 48% of total expenditures.

(Continued on Page 2)



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ARTICLE INFO

The *Alamo Heights 09'ER* is mailed monthly to all Alamo Heights residents. Residents, community groups, churches, etc. are welcome to include information about their organizations in the newsletter. Personal news for the Stork Report, Teenage Job Seekers, recipes, special celebrations, and birthday announcements are also welcome.

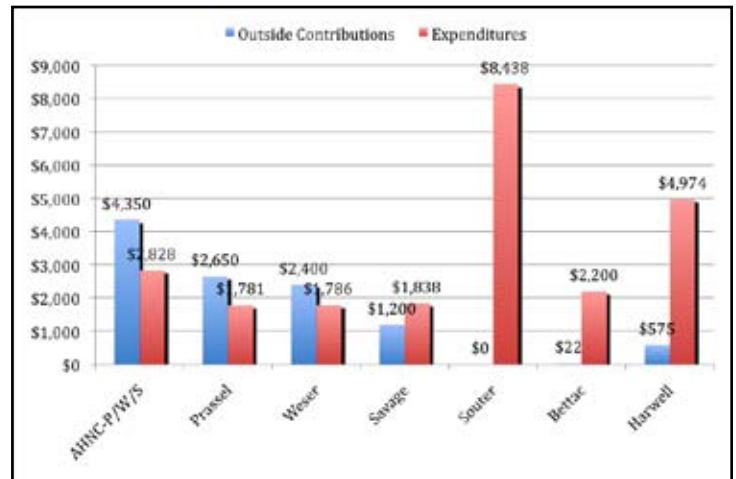
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CAAH Mission Statment

CAAH is dedicated to maintaining and improving our quality of life, sense of community, and pride in our urban neighborhoods by promoting goodwill and community spirit in an atmosphere of friendliness, cooperation, and fun; and to prepare our City for the future, while preserving and protecting our history.

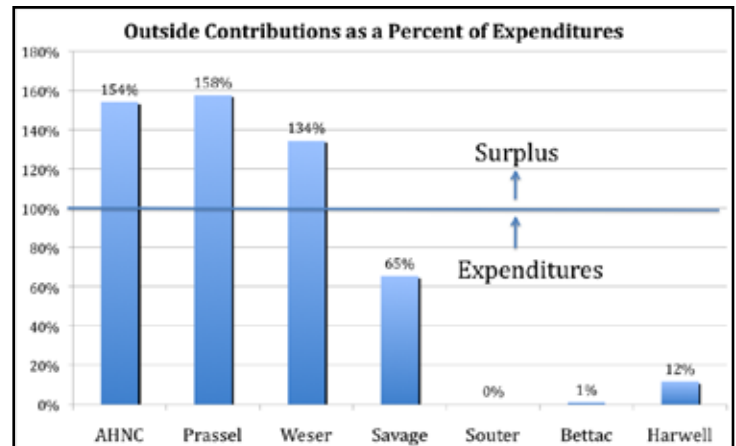
Anatomy of an Election. - (Continued from Cover Page)

From the graph below we can see that contributions were not evenly distributed among the candidates.



How did the candidates fund their campaigns?

An analysis of the candidates' and AHNC filings shows that Prassel and Weser were completely funded by outside money and even retained a surplus after the election. Souter and Bettac received no money from outside sources. Savage and Harwell received 65% and 12%, respectively, of outside money. Of course, All AHNC contributions were from outside sources and, like Prassel and Weser, retained a significant surplus.



Because of the AHNC support to three of the candidates, the election boiled down to two tickets, the AHNC supported candidates: Prassel, Weser and Savage and their opponents: Souter, Bettac and Harwell. Souter and Harwell were the incumbents.

In total, the AHNC candidates, including the AHNC SPAC, received 129% of their expenditures from outside contributions (\$10,600). In other words, collectively, they had a surplus of 29% above their total campaign expenditures (\$8233). Their opponents received only 4% of their funding (\$597) from outside contributions and 96 % of their total expenditures (\$15,590) was funded by the candidates themselves.

(Continued on Page 3)

Anatomy of an Election. - (Continued from Page 2)

Who gave the most money and where did it go?

Looking at the largest donors, those that gave >\$250, there were eleven people/families that gave 71% of the total contributions for the election.

Donor	Amount	Campaigns Donated To
A	\$3400	AHNC, Prassel, Weser, Savage
B	\$1000	AHNC
C	\$800	AHNC, Prassel, Weser, Savage
D	\$500	AHNC
E	\$500	Savage
F	\$350	AHNC
G	\$300	Prassel
H	\$300	Prassel
I	\$250	AHNC
J	\$250	Weser
K	\$250	Harwell
Total	\$7900	

10 of those large donors contributed 97% of the contributions donated to support the Prassel, Weser, Savage ticket. These large donations represent 72% of all donations to the AHNC ticket: \$7650 of the \$10600 received.

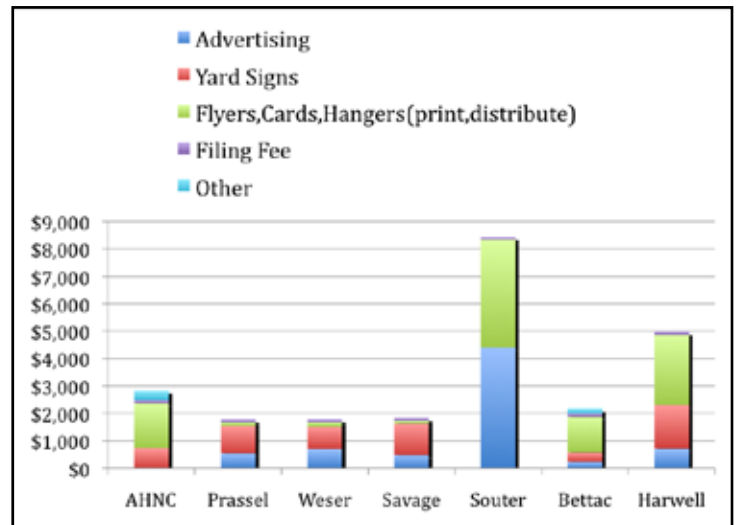
How was the money spent?

The use of AHNC money in the last week of the campaign for yard signs and flyers to support their ticket allowed AHNC to avoid any public reporting of campaign expenditures until well after the election (7/15/10). In my opinion, it probably isn't a coincidence that the first expenditure just happened to fall one day after the reporting period for the election. This was a sophisticated campaign strategy not normally seen in small town elections. Another anomaly was the Souter campaign. Because of an early start, Souter spent the most of any campaign and relied heavily on flyers and ads. She had signs left over from a previous campaign so did not have that expense, or the total would have been greater.

It is interesting to note how different the expenditures were for the two tickets. The levels and categories of expenditures for the AHNC ticket (Prassel, Weser and Savage) were very consistent in both level and category, suggesting, in my opinion, the possibility of coordination from the beginning of the campaign. Souter, Harwell and Bettac were all over the board - again, new politics versus old. I think we might have had some "pros" in town for this election.

Conclusions

Although the AHNC ticket spent much less on the campaign than



their opponents overall, the money that AHNC spent at the end had, in my opinion, a "leveraged" effect for all three of the AHNC candidates. In other words, it may have had triple the value because it tied them together on signs and flyers. In fact, the candidates' original signs were removed and replaced by the AHNC signs in the critical last week of the election.

But money was not the most important factor in this election. Both sides had plenty of funding. It is clear the previous Bond election had a major impact, especially on the incumbents who supported the unpopular bond, and this issue was used by the AHNC candidates very effectively. Another important factor was the support and coordination that comes from campaign contributors, especially when they donate relatively large sums for a local election. They have a stake in the candidate, and to some degree, they become "political partners". They energize a campaign, not just in money but sign placement and editorials, newsletters and websites. So the real financial benefits can be much larger than what appears on Finance Reports. Also, candidates that have significant outside financial support tend to get their message out much more effectively and consistently. This is what I believe made a significant difference between the campaigns.

But the "partnership" doesn't end with the election. In American politics large contributions rarely come with "no strings attached." With an election like this one, citizens will have to remain alert.

Alamo Heights – welcome to American Politics.

What a Little Bird Told Me

Submitted by Pamela Morsi, a USA Today bestselling novelist who lives in Alamo Heights.

We went for an early morning walk. It's always nice to get out of the house, but we do it for exercise and the exercise, of course, is mostly for me. I have a very sedentary job and when I'm kind of "in the zone" of a story, I can easily fail to step outside my door for days at a time. My husband tries to see that doesn't happen.

We went down the hill to the track at the Olmos Basin soccer fields. The track and fields are constructed on land that is in the flood plain. I don't know if that's the exact terminology "in the flood plain". It sounds like I'm saying "this land could flood" but in fact this land is supposed to flood. This natural basin was re-engineered in the 1920s to collect water behind a dam to keep downtown San Antonio free of the terrible, tragic flooding that had historically plagued it.

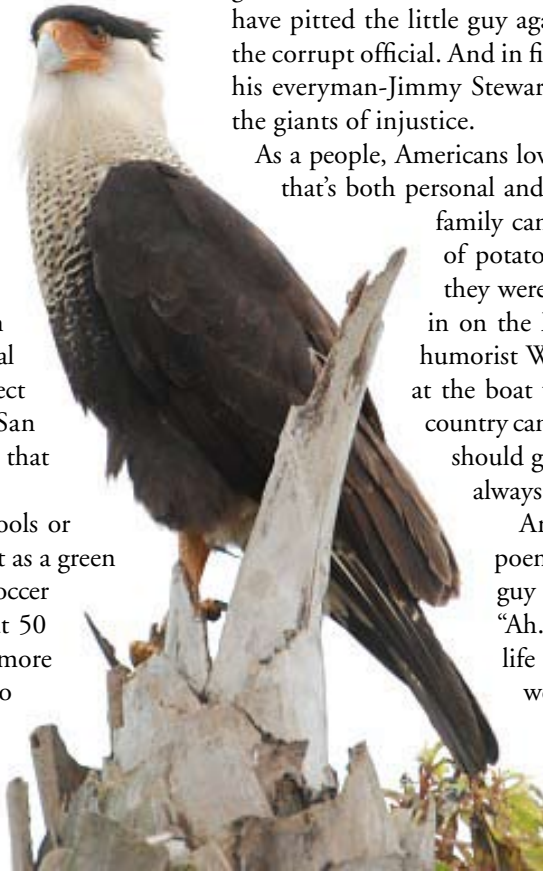
So, the basin can't be used for houses or schools or anything that might wash away. The city keeps it as a green zone with nature trails and fields for baseball and soccer and a partially shaded track that encircles about 50 acres of open land and abuts at least that many more acres of heavily wooded wildlife area, home to coyotes and other critters not usually a part of an urban landscape.

The highlight of the morning's jaunt was that we saw Alonzo, the male partner in the pair of Mexican Eagles that rule the area. Mexican Eagles don't just exist on the Mexican flag. They are real birds, otherwise known as crested caracara.

It actually looks very much like the American Bald Eagle, except the male looks like he's wearing a hat. A sombrero, some say, but to me it looks more like a beret. Or when he's very alert and the feathers stand on end, it resembles something that Davy Crockett might have worn.

Like the American Bald Eagle they are huge birds, majestic and graceful. They soar to great heights over the field. And when they spot a creature moving in the grass, they swoop down at high speed to whisk the hapless prey from the safety of the ground to the nest of sticks in the tall, tall trees.

The absolute beauty of this hunting, this picking off of the smaller and weaker, it is fascinating, almost hypnotic to watch. It's a part of nature. And nature is part of all of us. For the good and bad. We all experience the eagles of this world and sometimes fall prey to them.



The photo here is by wildlife photographer Claude Desrochers. Check out his work at www.Desrochresphoto.com

As I watched, my mind began putting together a plotline with a theme not new to me, nor to American literature. Some of our greatest writers, from Hawthorne through Steinbeck and beyond have pitted the little guy against the landlord, the robber baron, the corrupt official. And in film, Frank Capra created his legacy on his everyman-Jimmy Stewart characters valiantly sparing against the giants of injustice.

As a people, Americans love this theme. It speaks to us in a way that's both personal and rooted in our history. Whether your family came to this country when they ran out of potatoes, or escaped the pogroms, whether they were chained into the hull of ships, sailed in on the Mayflower or, as Cherokee-American humorist Will Rogers used to say, "we met them at the boat when they landed", the ideals of our country can be summed up as: we believe everyone should get a fair shake. For that reason, we are always going to root for the underdog.

And perhaps, for that reason, in our poems, our novels, our movies, the little guy usually comes out on top. "Ah..." I thought with a sigh. "If only real life were more like books. If only nature were a little more nurturing."

Just then, ahead of us near the edge of the trail, the Mexican eagle landed on the grass between a pair of big trees. We heard what was happening before we could see it. A pair of mockingbirds, who undoubtedly had a nest to protect in one of those trees, were frantically charging, pecking, harassing the eagle. Mockingbirds are not tiny,

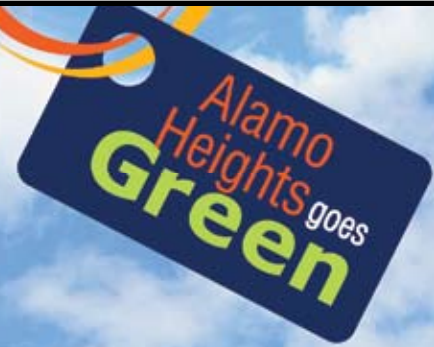
though most of their size is in their extra long tail feathers. Compared to the eagle they were very outclassed. Kind of like a bar fight between an NFL tackle and a pudgy 3 year-old.

But the mockingbirds refused to be intimidated. Again and again they charged the eagle. One would go at him directly while the other fluttered up to poke him sharply on the top of the head. The eagle tried to go after them with his talons, the mockingbirds were too quick. He tried swatting them away with the power of his wing-span, they were knocked down but they came right back.

Finally, the eagle took to the air, with mockingbirds in pursuit. With his size and strength, he quickly left the smaller flyers behind. But he didn't come back.

Sometimes, even in nature, the little guy wins. I like that.

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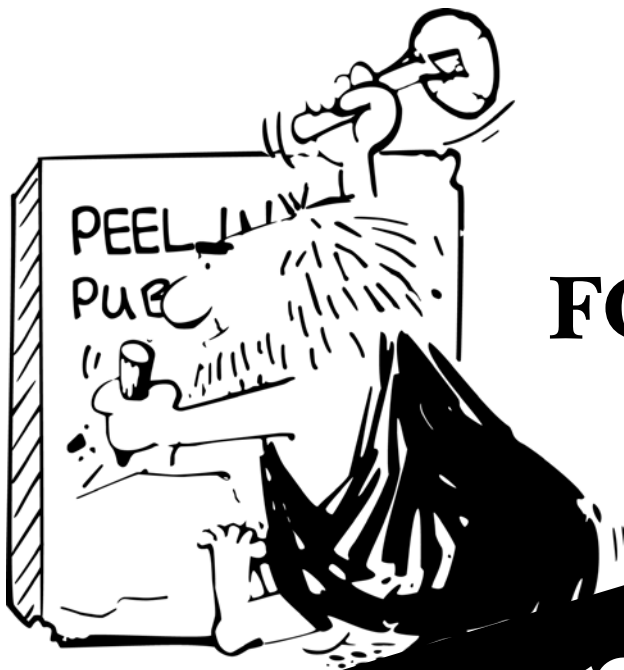
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