

Prairie Township trustees race headed for a recount after close call

By Shawn Olson
Staff Writer

The question still remains: Who's going to lead Prairie Township in 2002?

It was a close call on Election Day, when Teresa Keller and Joe Wharton took home more votes than incumbents John Hart and Larry Worthington in the township trustee race. An official recount is under way because Wharton won over Hart by a margin of only 17 votes.

Keller collected 1,284 votes, Wharton 890, Hart 873 and Worthington 733.

"I feel pretty good about it," said Keller, regarding collecting the most votes. She said her steady, persistent campaign paid off.

"I intend to work as hard as I can to do a good job," Keller said.

First on her agenda is creating a com-

prehensive plan, which she believes will help thwart annexation of township lands into the city of Columbus.

Wharton, though still unsure how to respond to the media while the recount is underway, said "I'm pleased to be a supporter of Prairie Township."

Relatively unknown, Wharton surprised many voters when he helped to nudge out the incumbents.

Wharton commented, "People felt it was time for a change."

Question marks are floating around Wharton, though. His campaign literature was much more negative than that of the other three candidates. The names of Hart and Worthington floated around almost every comment he made. Numerous invalidated statements were made in his literature.

Wharton said in one flier that Prairie Township Fire Chief Ronald Lavelly is

"Larry Worthington's cousin." The statement rightly raised eyebrows, but none more than Lavelly's and Worthington's. Lavelly and Worthington are not cousins.

Wharton claimed Worthington had agreed to help pay for a traffic light at the Galloway Road and Hall Road intersection.

Worthington said, "I'd really like to know where he comes up with this stuff."

Wharton defended his campaign strategy. As for the misinformation, Wharton said, "I was misinformed."

Worthington, who got the most heat from Wharton, is filing a complaint with the Board of Elections because of the literature Wharton distributed.

"It's a shame that in the last two elections out here it's gotten to the point where it's not about what you can do, but about bashing people," Worthington commented.

Worthington tipped his hat to Keller. "I think Teresa ran a good campaign,"

Hart agreed. "I think Teresa will be out there doing a good job."

With 15 years of being a Prairie Township trustee behind him, Worthington said he hopes the best for Prairie Township. He did say that voters ought to remember what the new trustees got voted in on—primarily stopping annexation. Wharton's campaign claim was bringing sewer and water to the township.

Keller said she will put in the hours needed for her position.

"I don't pretend to know everything," she said, "but I'm a very good learner."

Wharton said that if, after the recount, he is elected, he will work on creating a public agenda.

"I think we need the community to be more involved in the township," Wharton commented.