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County money race still favoring Dems

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By **Carly Q. Romalino/Gloucester County Times**

Money makes everything move in an election campaign.

Without it, candidates could lose opportunities for exposure with TV ads, signs and mailers. But with a heavy pocketbook, candidates are afforded more options to spread their names and platforms, while attracting other supporters to the prospect of a win.

That's why campaign managers are after as much in contributions as they can get.

Although bank statements are historically an indicator of support, Rutgers University politics expert Ruth Mandel said it's not always a predictor of election outcomes.

But, a big-budget campaign can't hurt.

"Campaigns in some way are like horse racing," said Mandel, director of the university's Eagleton Institute of Politics at the New Brunswick campus. "(Supporters) don't write checks for the pleasure of it, they want to show their support for someone who seems viable, whether it's the winning horse or the winning candidate. ... You bet big for horses that are interesting or have a chance to win."

With a longtime Democratic stronghold on Gloucester County's Freeholder Board, the party could be favored to win the race if campaign contributions translate to odds.

The Democrat ticket – Freeholder Heather Simmons, Logan Township Committeeman Lyman Barnes, and Swedesboro attorney Adam Taliaferro – has raised more than \$234,000 in campaign contributions, with some of the largest donations coming from the state Democratic Committee, which contributed \$4,900. Engineering firm Remington and Vernick and law firm Parker McCay put up \$7,800 each, according to a pre-election report filed with the county clerk this week.

With the horses out of the gate and speeding toward the finish line, Republican fundraising is lagging behind, garnering just over \$28,000 in contributions, according to the party's pre-election report.

The GOP ticket received a sprinkling of \$500 and \$1,000 donations from several professionals, including Elk Township's solicitor, Brian Duffield. The largest reported check, some \$2,500, came from Keith Davis, head of the state Republican County Chairman's Association.

"It's double last year, I take that as a positive," said Republican Freeholder hopeful Mike Pantaleo, an Elk Township committeeman who is running with Wenonah's Barbara Capelli and Penni Heritage, proprietor of a Harrison Township farm and winery. "Am I discouraged? Absolutely not. No matter what we spend, we tend to get a good return on our investment."

Last year, current Freeholders Larry Wallace and Vince Nestore, both Republicans, won the two open seats on the all-Democrat board. They did it with about \$11,400 in contributions, of which \$10,900 was used up in consulting and printing expenses a month before the election.

To date, the Republican campaign has spent only about half of its contributions, including \$2,100 for consulting services and more than \$4,000 on printing.

In 2010, Simmons and Robert Zimmerman – Wallace and Nestore's opponents – brought in \$276,000, and spent under \$21,000 by this time last year.

"In a district that very heavily favors one party, turning that around is an extraordinary thing," Mandel said. "It might make the Democrats focus more intensely on maintaining their stronghold there."

So far, the 2011 Democrat ticket has spent about \$102,000, with expenses listed at \$28,400 for printing campaign materials, \$9,600 in postage, and \$30,500 for polling.

Getting the word out does get to be expensive, according to Sen. Fred Madden, the county Democratic Committee's chairman.

"The bigger expenditures come through mail pieces and mail plans and hiring people to put those mail pieces together, and the postage," Madden said. "Money is important in the sense that the more money you have, it stands to reason, the more reinforcement opportunities there are in putting the message out to the people."

Madden said he'd like to think that repeating a strong message to voters will translate into votes on Nov. 8.

But he admits, after the Wallace-Nestore win, that money isn't the key to clinching an election.

"Look at last year, I know we had more money in our race, but dynamics change from year to year a little bit, and sometimes they shift critically," said Madden, who is campaigning for re-election for the Fourth District state Senate seat. "Regardless of the money, our candidates are out every day ... that doesn't cost a whole lot."

Mandel said even with a light purse, candidates will always use "shoe leather" to hit the pavement. That's the plan the Republicans have taken to, according to Pantaleo. Plus, he said, word of mouth has become a free campaign tool, in addition to carefully selecting where the money is dished out.

"We're being selective. We are depending upon our local supporters to do a "lot of getting the word out," Pantaleo said. "You talk to one person, and they are spreading the message to 10 other people."