

Incumbents win tight Airport Authority races

Charlotte County . **AIRPORT AUTHORITY — DISTRICT 2, DISTRICT 4**

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Airport Authority incumbents prevailed with narrow victories in Tuesday’s primary election. Rob Hancik will continue to serve as **Airport** Authority District 2 commissioner, and Republican Kathleen Coppola will move on to face nonpartisan candidate Joe Makray in November’s general election.

Hancik and newcomer Stan Smith for District 4 both had extensive backgrounds in aviation, each with 32 years: Hancik as the director of aviation for the Springfield/ Branson National **Airport** and Smith as a United Airlines captain. In the other corner stood Julie Price, a representative for Medtronic, a global medical device company, and Coppola, a former marketing director and Realtor who has dedicated 28 years as an **Airport** Authority commissioner.

Experience won out as both incumbents won.

With mailers digging up dirt from 20 years ago and a bombardment of letters to the editor, both Hancik and Price of the District 2 race have suffered an election season shrouded in negativity. As a result, Hancik and Price’s District 2 race was the second-most voted for race in the county at 31,256 votes, trailing just behind School Board District 1’s 31,603 votes.

Hancik and Coppola won by 51.05 and

52.02 percent, respectively.

“I wish to say thank you voters for your confidence in re-electing me,” Hancik said. “Julie Price’s campaign consortium put together a personal attack with some events which dated back almost 40 years. But Florida saw through this as a desperate attempt to offset her qualifications to be a minion to her endorsers spending tens of thousands of PAC dollars.”

With such a narrow loss, Smith has decided not to run again. “No, the people have spoken. I have other things to do with my life,” he said, such as working with the air show and the experimental aircraft association. “I will continue to support my **airport.**”

Attempts to contact Coppola and Price were unsuccessful.

This year District 4 election was mild compared to its counterpart, but the fight for the commission seat isn’t over. Coppola has graduated to the second set of hurdles to keep her seat, going against no party affiliate candidate Joe Makray in the November election.

“I got all the aviation community behind me out there,” Makray told the *Sun* Tuesday. “We’re going for it, so she needs to buckle up because we’re going for a ride.”

Though each position only pays \$7,500 per state statute, the four candidates have raised almost a

contributions made up 40 percent of these funds.

Punta Gorda **Airport** (PGD) brings in approximately \$46.3 million annually in Charlotte County through visitors alone, according to an economic impact study conducted in 2017. Plus, Allegiant Air, the **airport**’s sole airline, plans on building Sunseeker Resort, an estimated \$600 million waterfront project, according to the Las Vegas Review Journal.

Aside from the **airport**’s significant economic impact on the county, PGD is starting to undergo a serious makeover. With a master plan already being implemented a step at a time, 66 proposed projects are identified to take place over the course of the next 20 years. The plan will cost an estimated \$206 million.

HANCIK

COPPOLA

SMITH

PRICE

combined \$55,000 in monetary contributions.
Price's