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Dozens of Republicans set to square off

Marni Pyke Daily Herald Staff Writer

DuPage Republicans just won't play nice this primary.

Dozens of GOP candidates crowded the DuPage County Election Commission offices bright and early Monday, the first day of filing for the March 21 contest.

Democrats are expected to offer challenges in the fall election. But in the meantime, the GOP faces a war within for at least six county races.

DuPage Chairman Bob Schillerstrom was philosophical about the lack of unity.

"What I want at the end is that we can all come together," he said, while waiting to file his own nomination papers. "Our ultimate goal is to win in November."

At the head of the line that snaked out into the corridor was Sheriff John Zaruba, who showed up at 5:30 a.m. to guarantee top spot on the ballot.

"I'm running on my record. I'll focus on what I've done for the past eight years," he said.

Sheriff's Deputy Tim Connell is challenging Zaruba in the GOP primary. He plans to file his petitions later this week.

"I've been on the street for 19 years. I know what the officers want and need," Connell said.

Another countywide primary pits Republicans Gwen Henry and Bob Heap for retiring Treasurer John Novak's spot.

District 5 board member Heap, a Naperville attorney, was second in line.

"I want to make sure our investments get the best yield they can," Heap said. "If we can increase the yield, that could be millions of dollars. To the county, a couple million extra could fund more court programs or the health department."

Forest Preserve Commissioner Henry, a Wheaton accountant and former mayor, said she's running on her experience and record as an independent.

"I want to establish a committee to look at investments and see if they can be done differently," Henry said. "I want to make sure we offer world-class service."

Four Republicans are already circling the county board seat Heap is vacating: Naperville residents "Erin" Busche, Rick Tarulis and Joe Wozniak, plus Lisle's Michael Connelly.

"I've gained experience being an attorney for school, park and township boards," said Tarulis, Lisle Township clerk. "I've learned a few things."

Wozniak, a member of the county regional board of school trustees, called himself

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"somebody with the interests of the public at heart."

"I'm running on my record not against anybody," said Connelly, a Lisle village trustee and attorney.

Busche, a Naperville Township trustee, said she'll bring a business perspective to the county board.

In District 4, incumbent Grant Eckhoff got a wakeup call with a challenge from fellow Republican Jerry "J.R." **McBride**.

"I think I've done a good job supporting lower taxes," Eckhoff of Wheaton said. "I've been involved in the DuPage Museum trying to raise money on its own without reliance on property taxes."

McBride, a Glen Ellyn insurance broker, wants more openness on the board and greater fiscal restraint.

"It's a tough time to raise taxes," he said referring to a proposed increase in the county levy.

Taxes are also what encouraged Addison Township Trustee Paul DeMichele to run against District 1 incumbent Donald Puchalski.

"I'm wary of an increase in property taxes. I'd prefer increasing sales taxes over property tax," said DeMichele who lives near Elmhurst.

Puchalski of Addison said he's worked hard to reach out to constituents and protect their quality of life since being appointed to the board in October.

The Forest Preserve District of DuPage also has a primary battle in District 2 between incumbent Joseph Cantore and David Fichter.

Cantore of Oakbrook Terrace said he's worked hard to protect the taxpayers interests, especially in light of a possible referendum to raise taxes for open space.

"It's got to be thought about long and hard," Cantore said.

Fichter, a former Oak Brook Park District board member, said his background as an environmental consultant makes him a good fit for commissioner.

First day to file DuPage County Sheriff John Zaruba was first in line at 5:30 a.m. Monday to ensure a top spot on the March primary ballot. Behind him are county board member Bob Heap, who's seeking the treasurer's job, and numerous other candidates, as filing opened at 8 a.m. Monday for county and state offices. Scott Sanders/Daily Herald

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