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County leaders mourn colleague, choose successor

Schillerstrom taps Glen Ellyn resident

By Joseph Sjostrom and John Biemer
Tribune staff reporters

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DuPage County Board members eulogized colleague John Noel, who died of cancer two weeks ago, as Chairman Robert Schillerstrom announced Tuesday his choice to fill the Glen Ellyn Republican's seat is J.R. "Jerry" McBride, who won a GOP primary election in the same district.

McBride, a Glen Ellyn insurance broker, narrowly defeated incumbent Grant Eckhoff, a Wheaton attorney, in the March primary for one of the three seats in the 4th District, which represents the center of the county.

Schillerstrom said he expects to call a special board meeting next week to submit the appointment to the full board, which has final say. McBride would finish out Noel's term, which ends following the November election. He will remain on the ballot for the other seat and is likely to be elected because there is no Democratic candidate. Another candidate will be chosen to run in Noel's place in November.

McBride's primary victory "made the decision very easy for me," Schillerstrom said, although he had backed Eckhoff in the race.


"[McBride's] been selected by the people of that district, and I've had an opportunity to observe him in his campaign and since then, and not only was he a fine candidate, but he will be a fine County Board member," Schillerstrom said.

A three-person committee of Republican leaders will choose a candidate to replace Noel on the fall ballot, but Schillerstrom's preference is likely to carry weight in that decision as well.

So far, four candidates have expressed interest in running: Eckhoff, Milton Township precinct committeemen Chris Edwards and Sal Falbo, and Pamela Mitroff, a Wheaton consultant who lost the GOP primary for an Illinois House of Representatives seat in March.

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Noel, 59, died of prostate cancer. An attorney serving his second term on the board, he had distinguished himself as an advocate for public transportation in the suburbs as chairman of the Public Transit Committee.

At Tuesday's board meeting, the first since Noel's death, his fellow District 4 board member, Debra Olson (R-Wheaton), described him as "a statesman" who was a team player and a leader who worked to make life better for the citizens of DuPage County. When she visited Noel some days before his death, they talked about their respective successes and regrets, and Noel was proud of his many accomplishments, she said.

"But his one regret was that there are so many needs out there, and that he didn't have any more time to help solve them," Olson said.

"He lived by a code," said board member Linda Kurzawa (R-Winfield), "and that was to do something good for someone every day. ... He was the best example of dignity through his life, dignity through difficult circumstances, and dignity at life's end."

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