Four battle for two seats on Cabrillo board

By TOVIN LAPAN
tlapan@santacruzsentinel.com

APTOS — The four candidates vying for two spots on the Cabrillo Community College Board of Trustees will be faced with economic and planning challenges as soon as their terms begin.

The winners will join five other trustees in working through budget cuts, labor negotiations and falling enrollment.

During the last school year Cabrillo eliminated classes and staff, froze salaries and cancelled the 2010-2011 month-long winter session. For the fall and spring semesters about 40 classes were cut, while the school had to use reserves and one-time funds to bridge a $2.3 million budget shortfall.

Trustee Areas 1 and 6 are up for election Nov. 2. Each race has two candidates, with no incumbent running in Area 1. Gary Reece, who represents Area 2, is also up for re-election, but is uncontested.

In Area 1, encompassing San Lorenzo Valley and Scotts Valley, sitting board member Claudine Wildman is retiring, leaving the race open for Donna Ziel and Robert Tosto. Ziel was the San Jose State University liaison for Cabrillo transfer students, and worked with the Cabrillo’s administration in that capacity for several years.

“I think it’s important that once the budget situation settles down to be able to do some long-term planning,” Ziel said. “As the trustee for San Lorenzo Valley and Scotts Valley I think it’s important to continue improving our North County offerings and providing access to those that can’t commute to the main campus.”

Robert Tosto is an laid-off technology industry recruiter, who is president of his homeowners association in Boulder Creek.

“I have an intimate understanding of what financially troubled students are going through,” Tosto said. I know what’s like to be looking for work in this environment.”

In Area 6, covering Aptos and Corralitos, incumbent Alan Smith, a Larkin Valley attorney, is challenged by former Cabrillo student and small business owner Martin Avila. Smith has served on the board for 16 years, during which he has worked on last year’s cost cutting and approving the plans for the $36 million Health and Wellness Center in Aptos and the forthcoming Green Technology Center in Watsonville, which will hold classes on green building and energy.

“There are no other attorneys on the board,” Smith said. “There are educators and people from the business and government sectors on the board, but I think I’m unique in that I bring legal expertise.”

Avila runs Terra Eclipse, a technology and political consultation firm. His wife is a nursing student at the college, and he believes the programs at Cabrillo that prepare students to work right away are vital to the local economy.

“My opponent is a 16-year incumbent, he doesn’t know how to live in a world where government is scaling back significantly,” Avila said. “As a small business owner, I know how to make the tough decisions.”

AT A GLANCE

CABRILLO COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Four candidates are vying for two four-year terms on the Cabrillo Board of Trustees.

CANDIDATES

TRUSTEE AREA 1

DONNA ZIEL: Retired associate director of student outreach and recruitment at San Jose State and associate director of the SJU Monterey County Campus, 67, Ben Lomond

ROBERT TOSTO: Technical recruiter, homeowners association president, declined to state age, Boulder Creek

TRUSTEE AREA 6

ALAN SMITH: Incumbent and attorney, 63, Larkin Valley

MARTIN AVILA: Small-business owner, 26, Aptos