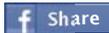


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Most Northern Valley incumbents retain seats

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BY AMANDA BASKIND
NORTHERN VALLEY SUBURBANITE
Staff Writer

Municipal incumbents in the Northern Valley were more successful than incumbents at other government levels on Nov. 2.

According to John Weingart, associate director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, usually 90 to 95 percent of incumbents succeed in being re-elected.

"Incumbents usually have major advantages at all levels and tend to do very well," he said.

But on Nov. 2, the results at all levels, were somewhat less.

"There were a number of incumbent candidates who lost," said Weingart. "But still well over a majority of them still did pretty well." He said that while all of the numbers are not in yet, about 75 percent of incumbents were re-elected.

Although all the incumbents lost in the races for Bergen County offices this year, 86 percent of incumbent mayors and council members in the Northern Valley were re-elected.

Only five incumbents who ran for re-election lost their seats, including Rockleigh Mayor Nick Langella, who lost to write-in candidate, Robert R. Schaffer.

The last couple of elections in Englewood Cliffs have seen a power shift from the Democrats to the Republicans. But this year, the Democratic incumbents Ilan Plawker and Melanie Simon were re-elected to the council. According to Plawker, the residents of Englewood Cliffs traditionally vote Republican. Indeed, on Nov. 2, Englewood Cliffs residents voted straight Republican — except when it came to the municipal government.

"They voted for the Republican folks, but when it came to the council, they shifted over to us by a large margin," said Plawker, who has been on the council for 15 years. "It's really a statement because we bucked the trend dramatically." He attributed his and Simon's victory to their experience and what the voters wanted to



do locally. "I guess they were happy over the last 15 years," he added.

Both Plawker and Simon mentioned in campaigning that they wanted to continue using the street and infrastructure maintenance programs to make improvements. They both also talked about putting an end to discussions on merging the police and fire departments with those of Englewood. "There's not a political philosophy about running a small town," said Plawker. "It's about efficiencies, we don't vote on war, gay marriage or abortion, and people understood that."

Eagleton's Weingart would seem to agree.

"Incumbents are better known, have run for office before, have been in the community, gotten to know people, been of assistance and have a record of accomplishment they can talk to the voters about," he said. "They aren't just promising but can point to what they did."

He also pointed out that incumbents have an advantage because they have more money to spend in a race because they have been in politics for longer and have built up supporters, adding that voters often have the mentality of keeping someone in office unless it is proved that he or she has done a poor job.

In Demarest, three council seats and the mayoralty were up for election. A former councilman, Republican Raymond Cywinski beat Democrat and Council President William E. Connelly for mayor. Democratic Councilwoman Melinda Iannuzzi lost her council seat. The only incumbent to be re-elected was Councilman Stephen Verp. The mayor and council, which was previously all Democrats, now has a Republican mayor and two Republican council members. "'There's backlash to what's going on in the economy," said Verp. "It's the perfect storm for change, if you will."

And that was probably why incumbents lost the bid of ground they did.

"I think there's a lot of worry in the public about the state of the economy and a lot of both confusion or uncertainty about what the right approach should be for government," said Weingart. "There was a mood among significant party electorates yesterday that the government is not working well recently, and it would be good to try different people."

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