

Voters grow their power in diversity



THE COLUMN
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A multiracial, multiethnic group of Nassau County residents recently grilled three county executive candidates on issues ranging from curbing violence to slowing foreclosures.

For the candidates — incumbent Edward Mangano and challengers Thomas Suozzi and Andrew Hardwick, all of whom have held public office — such screenings are part of the campaign process.

But interviewing candidates was new for many of the three dozen or so community members who asked questions and weighed answers over three hours in a Hempstead conference room two weeks ago.

“For most of us, it was something we’ve never done before,” said Sergio Argueta, who, with civil rights attorney Frederick Brewington, has become one of the many faces of The Corridor Counts, a civic group from communities including New Cassel, Uniondale, the villages of Hempstead and Freeport, and Elmont.

Days after the interviews, a judge would knock Hardwick off the ballot in a decision affirmed unanimously by an appellate panel last week.

That left the group grappling with whether to endorse Mangano, a Republican, or Democrat Suozzi for the general election.

Last week, the group — which had endorsed the underdog Democrat, Adam Haber, in a primary

won by Suozzi — announced its decision: There would be no endorsement at all.

“Both candidates had done a couple of positive things while in office,” Brewington said of Mangano and Suozzi. “But neither satisfied our need of having issues addressed in the community.”

The lack of endorsement could be viewed as a blow for Suozzi, who in his first campaign for county executive in 2001 enjoyed substantial support from black and Latino voters.

But if results from the primary are any indication, the lack of an endorsement likely won’t hurt. Turnout was predictably low, but Suozzi won the primary in every corridor community except Hempstead — where the newcomer, Haber, took the village by 125 votes.

At one point yesterday, Suozzi found himself in the position of seeking support from Nassau voters while attending the first-ever Somos El Futuro Black-Brown Alliance Conference in Suffolk.

The goal of the conference, which organizer state Assemb. Phil Ramos (D-Brentwood) said would repeat each year, is to build a coalition among Long Island’s only growing demographic — nonwhites — who together comprise about 35 percent of the region’s population.

Which likely is why the county executive candidates decided to spend time with The Corridor Counts, an organization that’s only a few months old.

While the group decided against endorsing Mangano or Suozzi, it did urge residents to decide on their own. And, on Nov. 5, to turn out to vote.

The Long Island Civic En-

agement Table, a nonpartisan group, has scheduled a debate on Thursday in the corridor community of Hempstead.

According to organizers, Suozzi has accepted and Mangano was what they called “a probable” — although the campaign as of yesterday had not formally agreed to participate.

Should Mangano and Suozzi accept, it would be a Nassau first — a debate for the county’s top elected post held in a mostly black and Latino community.

The sponsoring group held a similar, first-of-its-kind debate in Suffolk two years ago, when county executive candidates Steve Bellone, a Democrat, and Republican Angie Carpenter faced off in Brentwood.

As Long Island’s demographic change accelerates, so will the need to woo voters. At the conference yesterday, one speaker estimated that hundreds of immigrants, many of them East Asians, became Americans during recent citizenship ceremonies in Suffolk.

But, as speaker after speaker noted at the conference in Islip, the growing diversity of the population, in and of itself, is not enough.

“It means moving [educating] people to see what power can mean,” Lucia Gomez, executive director of LaFuenta, said during a panel on the political and policy ramifications of the region’s changing demographics.

But there’s also a challenge in turning out voters, especially this year — when there is no race for president.

“Why,” Gomez asked, “are people not making the connection between their daily lives and local politics?”



Lee Harvey Oswald at police headquarters in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, the day he shot President John F. Kennedy
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wish to become a member so that I may share, as fully as is possible, your trials and tribulations, as well as your glories and victories.”

It is signed “Very sincerely Lee H. Oswald” and bears the same return address — P.O. Box 2915, Dallas, Texas — to which the mail-order rifle that killed Kennedy was sent.

The letter is one of hundreds of Kennedy-related items, including his famous rocking chair, being offered by various auction firms around the country before the Nov. 22 anniversary.

Weiss, who has never handled an Oswald item before, estimates the letter will sell for \$10,000 to \$20,000 based on prices realized by other auction houses for Oswald letters and postcards. A 1962 letter that Oswald wrote to his brother sold for \$9,000 in 2008 and a postcard Oswald mailed from Russia while he was living there sold for \$10,000 in the same auction. The former Marine defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 and lived there until June 1962.

Like much surrounding Oswald, who was murdered by Jack Ruby two days after the assassination, the date he

wrote the letter is a mystery.

The family member who consigned the letter — and asked not to be identified — provided some details. Said Weiss:

“The way she described it was they were in a car a week or so after the Kennedy assassination, and she asked Gus Hall, ‘Did you ever hear from the man that assassinated Kennedy?’ He said, ‘Yes, as a matter of fact I received a letter from him.’ And the family member was shocked and said, ‘Where is it?’

“He said, ‘I put it in a file because when I read the letter I thought he was an agent and didn’t want to respond to it.’ Hall was suspicious of the way the letter was written. It brought up a lot of red flags.”

The family lost the envelope, which presumably had a postmark with a date, when it moved following Hall’s death, Weiss said.

Weiss said his research showed Oswald closed his post office box on May 14, 1963, so the letter had to have been sent before then.

“Having the envelope would have been a slam dunk,” Weiss said. “But this is still neat. It’s an important piece of American history.”

Fire that killed 4 ruled accidental

Suffolk County police investigators haven’t said what ignited the Shirley house fire that killed a mother and her three children, but they ruled the blaze accidental yesterday.

The Oct. 11 fire began in the living room of the single-story home, taking the lives of Jenni-

fer McCusker, 41; Aidan Tarbell, 7; and 2-year-old twins Brendan and Ava Jane Mistretta.

The medical examiner determined the cause of the deaths was a combination of smoke inhalation and burns, police said.

The mother was found hold-

ing one of the twins in a rear bedroom. She apparently had tried to grab the children and carry them from the house.

The funeral for McCusker and her children was held Friday at St. Jude Roman Catholic Church in Mastic Beach.

— CANDICE FERRETTE