

Democratic primary for Pender commissioner seat

Lashaw and Royal are running to represent District 1

By Bill Walsh

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PENDER COUNTY — The Democratic primary race for Pender County commissioner District 1 has drawn two candidates who are squaring off in hopes of advancing to the November election to face Republican incumbent Republican Commissioner David Williams.

Morgan Lashaw and Dorothy Royal are running to represent District 1, which includes Surf City, Topsail Beach and much of Hampstead.

Commissioners make \$12,935 annually, with the chairman making \$16,214. They also receive \$4,800 a year travel allowance.

1. Relations between the school board and the commissioners have been strained for years. What can be done to improve this relationship?

Lashaw: We need to make education a priority in Pender County. Our children need updated books, better access to technology and to continue to promote early college and vocational programs. We need to listen to the requests of our school board and work to fulfill them. Based on their requests we can work with the state and federal government to find grants or better fund Pender County resources. We are on the right track with two new schools. We need to continue to focus on education.

Royal: The future of our country lies within each of these students and it is our job as commissioners to make sure that they have the best chances for success possible while supporting and encouraging our teachers. With two children in the Pender County school system I can tell you that when a new residential development is proposed and comes before the commission for approval one of the first questions asked should be, "Has the board of education been contacted and can the school systems accommodate that much growth." This is not being restrictive, this is being practical.

2. Water — and wastewater — are increasing problems for eastern Pender County. What needs to be done?

Lashaw: We need to implement better zoning. Pender County is exploding with growth which puts a strain on water and other resources. Zoning is one tool the county commissioner has to help alleviate resource pressure including water. We should find other alternatives to pumping water from Cape Fear River or use better water filtration systems.

Royal: Coastal North Carolina is wet. There are no basements in most of the homes because you hit water within a foot of the surface. This leads to problems with run off, mold and mosquitoes that are just part of living in a coastal, sand-based area. Stormwater runoff needs to be controlled to prevent flooding and ditches need to be kept clear of debris and overgrowth. While residential development is on an increase, so are the complaints of residents with flooded yards and homes. Undeveloped open space needs to be a priority and must be a part of every large development.

3. For years, there has been a rural/urban divide in Pender County. What can be done to erase this tension?

Lashaw: To start we need to stop treating Pender County as two counties. We are a large county with both rural and urban areas. This is one of the many things that makes our county great. We need to level the playing field when it comes to funding for schools and infrastructure. We need to remember we are one great county with a diverse population.

Royal: Nothing can be done to erase the tension since there are two separate priorities for the people that live in the coastal, tourist-based areas and the rural, farm areas. Asking people to all think the same when their homes and lives are drastically different is not practical. The right answer is to work with both groups to make sure both have sufficient services and say in how things are handled in their county.

4. Pender County is among the fastest-growing counties in the state. How does the county deal with this challenge/opportunity?

Lashaw: Pender County draws a lot of people in from Wilmington and surrounding areas. They find the beauty in our county and decide to stay. We will need to save our tax dollars to build additional schools to handle the additional children. Growth is a double edge sword and working as one community we will enjoy the prosperity that can come with it.

Royal: The county needs to constantly be involved with cities and communities within the county. A cooperative effort needs to be made where county commissioners attend town council meetings in their district at least quarterly to better understand the growth and to work with the future needs. Many of our major roads have exceeded their capacity for easy flow traffic and when the bypass in Hampstead is completed it still won't address the congestion that is at the Topsail High school entrance. My hope is that DOT will view adding a bypass between Holly Ridge and Surf City on highway 17 to connect with the Hampstead/ Wilmington bypass to allow more flow away from the area.

For more information and to see all candidate profiles, visit www.StarNewsOnline.com/news/politics.