Lake among top issues in mayor’s race

By Pamela Powers
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MENOMONIE — Two candidates with mayoral experience and two who have helped shape city policy are vying to be the next Menomonie mayor.

Incumbent Mayor Randy Knaack is seeking re-election and will face off against former mayor Dennis Kropp, Menomonie City Councilman Clark "Ed" Smith and Councilwoman Mary Solberg.

Solberg, who is also seeking re-election to City Council, would have to resign from her council position if elected mayor. Likewise, Smith would vacate his council position if elected mayor.

The four candidates listed cleaning up Lake Menomin as a top priority. During his two-year term as mayor, Knaack met with Gov. Scott Walker and the state Department of Natural Resources secretary in an effort to clean the lake.

Knaack built a prototype algae-skimming machine to collect algae from the lake.

"I really want our beaches back," Knaack said. "What an asset a clean lake would be to our city."

Kropp, who was Menomonie mayor for 12 years before he was defeated by Knaack for the position two years ago, said there is no easy means of ridding Lake Menomin of algae. Using machines to complete that work isn't feasible, he said.

"It would take a whole flotilla of scum suckers to resolve it," Kropp said.

Instead, he backs creating a long-range algae abatement plant to clean up the lake.

Smith agrees that cleaning Lake Menomin will require cooperation between numerous organizations. He said he believes an algae skimming machine is a waste of resources.

"We could spend $1 million and not ever see results," Smith said.
Solberg said further study of the algae problem on Lake Menomin is needed before the city begins removing algae from the lake.

"The council has not been obstructing the mayor's cleanup of the lake," she said. "We have been behind him, but we want to do the right thing."

Touting experience

Candidates credited their experience with providing them with the skills to be mayor.

Solberg said she brings a broad view, having owned her own business and been the Main Street director.

Smith said his political experience and more than 40 years in business and education could provide the leadership needed to be mayor.

Kropp pointed to his work as mayor when asked why he should be elected. While in that position he developed relationships with community leaders and helped enact numerous projects.

"My past experience has shown I can look to the future," he said. "I can adapt with the times and keep moving the city forward."

Knaack said he brings energy to city operations and an open-minded approach.

"I want people to love it here," Knaack said. "Menomonie has a lot to offer."

Downtown plans

Candidates discussed plans for revitalizing downtown Menomonie.

Knaack said downtown should be spruced up to include colorful awnings and new historical signs. The help of UW-Stout art students could be used, he said.

Downtown also needs a public restroom for people spending time there, he said.

"The downtown needs some pizzazz," he said, noting revitalization should encompass all parts of the city.
Revitalizing the downtown is a cooperative effort between private enterprise, UW-Stout and civic government, Smith said. He believes diversity is needed in the downtown to help spur economic revitalization.

Kropp said the City Council has provided enhancements for the downtown, including Cedarama Park, benches and creating new parking areas.

"At some point it has to be left up to free enterprise," he said.

Solberg said she believes existing downtown property owners can help revitalize the city center by sprucing up buildings. She would like to create an business incubation center or a commercial kitchen and business center to support local growers, producers and entrepreneurs.

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