

Patagonia Votes For A Change In The Status Quo

by PRT Staff

When the town of Patagonia sold 594,600 gallons of water to mining contractors last June, it initiated a public reaction that has led to the election of two new council members. Ron Reibslager and Michael Stabile were elected to the Patagonia Town Council on August 30, along with Melissa Murrietta, who had been serving on the council as a stand-in. Reibslager and Stabile received 60% and 62% of the votes respectively, in comparison to Murrietta (51%) and incumbent Quiroga, (36%).

The town's decision to sell such a large amount of water, despite recent drought conditions, raised the concern of residents, and a public meeting was held on July 27 to allow for public comment about this issue as well as the town's failure to enforce its overweight vehicle ordinance. However, the meeting's agenda was overshadowed by many people wearing neon yellow T-shirts that referred to the agenda as "fabricated paranoia." They dominated the call-to-public with comments about the jobs that mining has brought to the town, and those who sought answers as to how the town would protect its water and resources were referred to as "protesters" by one of the council members.

Many frustrated residents left that meeting with the perception



Photo by Donna Reibslager

Voter turnout on August 30 was "slow but steady" throughout the day, according to the women who oversee the process at the voting booths

that their town council was "one-sided" and unwilling to consider the questions that they raised. The upcoming election came to be seen as an opportunity to introduce new council members who would be more willing to listen to their concerns. The campaign platform of Stabile and Reibslager, which focused on protecting Patagonia's water and resources, made them

the candidates of choice for these voters.

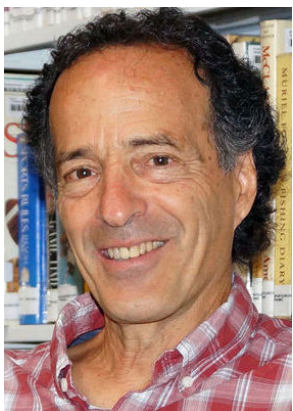
Quiroga responded with a campaign that seemed to focus on "keeping the newbies out." In the weeks before the election, his slogan prevailed in word-of-mouth campaigning by some of the town's native residents who would like to see the town return to the way it was before all the (mostly retired) newcomers decided to make their home here. Despite support from this faction, Quiroga received only 75 votes, and was not re-elected.

The attitude of some long-time Patagonians about the newcomers is height-

ened by the town's need to strengthen its economy. Those who favor mining are keenly aware of the scarcity of jobs here, and the jobs that the mine might offer. For those who oppose mining, the answer to securing the town's economic future is to be found in ecotourism and land restoration--and the employment those industries would provide.

Whether or not mining proceeds, it would seem that all its residents want to be sure that Patagonia's water and natural resources are protected for the future. Perhaps the new council will be able to bring the town together around that priority, so that the town can begin to work together towards a common goal.

Both Stabile and Reibslager have said that they hope to provide "more balance" in the council, and that they represent "a fresh perspective." Murrietta will continue her duties as a council member, and the new candidates will take office in January.



Michael Stabile



Melissa Murrietta



Ron Reibslager

The Lending Shed

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hospital beds, crutches, shower
benches, toilet lifts, mobile
commodes, incontinence supplies
and much more

Free of charge to Patagonia,
Elgin & Sonoita residents

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The Reality of *Flash Flooding*

By David Ellis

On August 8, I awoke around 5:30 a.m. to the sound of heavy rain. Weather radar confirmed intense rain centered on Red Mountain. Winds aloft usually move showers across our watershed. This time radar showed motionless orange and red radar reflections. Even though the rain abated by 7:45 a.m., it was obvious that Harshaw Creek would rise to flood stage. Driving out Naugle Avenue I saw a crowd, including ADOT trucks, on the Route 82 bridge over Sonoita Creek..

Branches behind the recycling lot were being crushed against the bridge. Officials looked worried. Returning to the house, I snatched my phone and returned to the scene. The flash flood crest seemed to have passed; officials were visibly relieved. But Ike Isakson ex-

pressed concern about Sonoita Creek water arriving later from Casa Blanca wash.

The story of Patagonia's flood response is much richer than one person's narrative. Spirit Tree Inn recorded 4.2" of early morning rain. The rain gauge on Red Mountain has been clogged with dead "flying ants" for some time, so it recorded only 0.04" of rain that day! Useful information was lost -- the entity responsible for this vital piece of infrastructure needs to pay attention. ADOT crews from Nogales somehow had an early warning of the flood.

Kathy Pasierb has a streamside view of Harshaw Creek. She reported "an awesome display of nature!" Carolyn Shafer said 10 out of 14 certified CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) members assisted fire department personnel by assum-

ing responsibility for setting up and staffing the emergency shelter.

Georgette Larrouy on Sheard Drive reported water on her lawn and in the crawl space under her house. Thane Larkin's home at the lower end of 4th Avenue, was flooded, and town crews moved vehicles near the treatment plant to higher ground. Floodwaters didn't reach the new animal shelter or the treatment plant itself.

After the flood crested, a large tree lodged itself sideways across the Route 82 bridge support columns. Brent Bowden arrived around 10 a.m. with a big backhoe, hooked the tree trunk, and slid it carefully over to the bank behind the recycling facility where Harry Hower sliced it into chunks.

Downstream, Audubon's Paton Center experienced some creek-side erosion, and the TNC site had extensive trail damage. Interim TNC site manager, Kathy West and ultra-volunteer, Clark Lydick reopened the site the following Thursday. Work on flood-damaged trails continues.

As 2010 newcomers, this was our first Patagonia flood experience. Long-term resident Fred Moreno commented that floodwater was higher than his recollection of the 1983 hurricane flood. We were gratified to see the town's response to this potentially dangerous event.

Update - September 7

More rain today -- but very different. Between midnight and 6 p.m. today we averaged only 0.1 inch per hour compared with 4 inches in one hour for the flash flood. Sonoita Creek water didn't rise until late morning. The water was brown from creekside erosion. Around 4 p.m. most of the water was coming from Casa Blanca and Adobe canyons. That makes sense because they reach far west into the Santa Ritas. And surface water around here moves much slower than your car and faster than you can comfortably walk. Given the wide swath of this gentle rain, it is not surprising that Sonoita Creek under Route 82 ran a little high for a long time today.



Photo by Dave Ellis

Looking towards town at 8:02 a.m. on August 8