

4 seek House District 105 seat

Jun. 08, 2008

By Zane Wilson
The Sun News- Myrtle Beach, SC

Voters in the Republican primary for State House District 105 can't say they have no choices.

A vacant legislative seat usually draws a crowd, and four candidates who say their diverse experience is what the district needs are seeking to replace outgoing Rep. Billy Witherspoon.

Witherspoon said his 16 years have been great, but his hearing is deteriorating, and he wants to spend more time with his family.

The Conway-based seat that also includes Loris to the north, Carolina Forest to the east and fields and farmland in between has attracted two current elected officials, an attorney and a student.

The winner will likely take office because no Democrat has contested the race.

Kevin Hardee, who has been on Horry County Council almost two full terms, said the Statehouse needs more people with county government experience.

"There is a lot of things the state mandates that we do that they don't provide the funds for," he said.

"I just wanted to take my experience to Columbia and see if we can get what we need in Horry County," Hardee said.

"If we can get I-73 in here and get some technical, higher-paying jobs in here, that's what we need. We need to diversify a little bit."

He would like to take the vacant slot on the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, he said.

Randy Alford, a certified financial planner, has been on Conway City Council for four years and said he would like to use his experience on a broader level.

"I love community service and civic service," Alford said.

He said he has some solutions to offer, such as working with others in the state and the federal delegation on a proposal to send back to the states all the money they pay in federal gas taxes.

"We need a lot of road help in Horry County and we don't get it by fighting with people down the road."

George Hearn said he is running because after 30 years of practicing law in Conway, he wanted to give something back.

His legal experience as an advocate for clients will help him be an advocate for constituents, Hearn said.

Lawyers are also trained to negotiate, and these are qualities helpful for lawmakers, he said.

"I am a fiscal conservative, and I believe we should not spend money we don't have, and in getting more of the money we send to Columbia back," Hearn said.

He would make the case that Horry County is the second-largest tourism destination in the country and what benefits the area helps the whole state, he said.

Mark Bennett, 22 and a New Yorker until two years ago, believes he has the right approach for the job and the new ideas that people need in the district.

It's not that young, he said. Rep. Thad Viers, R-Myrtle Beach, was 23 when he was elected.

"I don't feel people like me are represented," Bennett said.

He said he believes in limited government but that there are some things the state is not doing that it should be. For instance, some schools in Horry County do not have enough textbooks for all the children, he said.

"I may not have money, but I've got a lot of principle," Bennett said. "Even if I lose, I've had a great time speaking truth to power."