Mayoral candidates debate in La Jolla

BY PAT SHERMAN

La Jolla was the site of two recent mayoral debates — the first hosted by the Rotary Club of La Jolla and the second by La Jolla Country Day School, in collaboration with the Preuss School, City Club of San Diego and the National Conflict Resolution Center.

Candidates Carl DeMaio, a Republican city councilman serving San Diego’s fifth district, and Bob Filner, a Democratic congressman serving California’s 51st district, squared off Sept. 4 during the Rotary club’s weekly luncheon at La Valencia Hotel.

Noting that the DeMaio-backed and voter-approved Proposition B — which would replace pensions with 401(k)-style retirement plans for most new city hires and freeze pensionable pay for five years — would be tied up in the courts for some time, moderator Pat Stouffer asked what the candidates would do in the meantime to solve the city’s fiscal crisis.

Filner said if the measure was still in legal limbo when he is mayor he would put a cap on six-figure pensions for city management.

“I invited Carl to join me in supporting that; he’s never favored it or not,” Filner said, adding that the only cost-saving aspect of Prop. B is the five-year pensionable pay freeze.

“If I’m the only one who can implement that immediately; I’ve already talked to the employee groups,” Filner said. “If Carl goes into any negotiations with the people he has said are the enemy of San Diego, he goes into these negotiations as the declared enemy.”

Before answering the question, DeMaio took the opportunity to wish Filner a “happy 70th birthday,” evoking some gasps from those in attendance, to which Filner later responded, “I appreciate the birthday wishes, but like my favorite

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FROM DIRECTOR, A1

director John Bolthouse and interim executive director E.H. “Trip” Bennett, will oversee three fulltime and three part-time staffers at the society, which has an annual operating budget of about $500,000.

Fox’s salary falls within the range of $77,000 to $81,000, which the LJHS board’s executive committee budgeted for the position, said Connie Branscomb, the board’s immediate past president.

Qualifications the board sought for the position included: experience leading a nonprofit arts or cultural organization; organizational management and/or supervisory experience such as strategic planning and staff supervision; financial management experience; and experience managing museum exhibits and archives.

“We are very, very happy with Heath Fox,” said Branscomb, who served on the committee that selected Fox from an initial pool of 46 applicants, five of which were called in for interviews. “He brings to this job all the qualities that we think that we need.”

Fox said he was seeking an opportunity to be executive director of a cultural institution after finishing his consulting job in Los Angeles with the Broad Art Foundation.

“The society is in a really exciting part of its organizational history right now,” he said, nothing a planned restoration of Wisteria Cottage on Prospect Street, where the society’s museum and exhibit space are held.

The building, which once served as a residence for founding La Jolla philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps, has also housed a bookstore and the Balmer School, a precursor to La Jolla Country Day School.

The restoration, designed by Ione Stiegler of La Jolla-based IS Architecture, is expected to begin in February, coinciding with the LJHS’s 50th anniversary year.

Fox said the society is planning additional activities and events throughout the year to mark the anniversary, which falls in June.

“The society is a very strong organization, in large part because of the community leadership and the community support that it has,” he said, noting the strength of events such as the Secret Garden Tour and Concours d’Elegance.

“I’ve been so impressed by the level of activity of the board and the volunteers — the scope of their involvement and the sincerity of their commitment,” he said. “It’s just an extraordinarily strong organization for this community.”

Fox said that while the society has done a great job with its efforts to preserve La Jolla’s beach cottages and other pre-World War II era structures, he’d also like to focus on The Village’s mid-century modern architecture of the 1950s and ’60s, which has now reached the threshold where it can be deemed historic and saved from demolition.

“I want to engage the community in this conversation … and start to come to understand myself where those important structures are, which ones may be under threat,” he said.

“I do intend to be involved in all aspects of what the society does, from the internal management and administration of the society … (to) listening to the community and responding to the concerns of the community on these topics.”

Fox said he sees an opportunity to increase the amount and level of programs offered by the society, once the renovation is complete.

“We’ve just started a young architects program for the summer for secondary schools,” he said. “I’d like to see us be able to grow that and add some school-based programs in the summer, as well as continue to do the lecture series. We’re just going to have a better facility to do it in.”

The restoration of Wisteria Cottage will be the first major rehabilitation of the structure, and will include the addition of a prep kitchen and meeting space to accommodate weddings and functions that will generate additional revenue for the society, Branscomb said.

Other planned improvements include humidity control and lighting upgrades, which are required to borrow exhibits from other museums and archives, and a lift that will allow disabled access to a lower floor that is currently being used for storage. The lift will be funded, in part, via a $30,000 donation from Las Patronas.

• La Jolla Historical Society is dedicated to the discovery, collection, and preservation of La Jolla’s heritage. For more information, visit lajollahistory.org