Written by Carol Pomeday
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Richard Howells

Winner plans to set up office in Village Hall, extinguish many 'little fires'

The Village of Belgium has a new president — again.

Richard Howells, former chairman of the village's Tree Board and a retired Air Force jet maintenance supervisor, defeated incumbent Kevin Kowalkowski by a decisive 407 to 258 votes, capturing 61% of the 667 votes cast.

Kowalkowski said he's not surprised that he was unseated after one term, although he wanted to see some projects he started to completion.

"I knew going in I wasn't going to make a whole lot of friends," Kowalkowski said Tuesday night. "I know I did everything I could to complete the tasks I set out to complete, and I think we did a pretty good job.

"I hope he (Howells) takes the good and expands on it. We have good trustees — Vickie Boehnlein, John Hise and John Krechel — who are going to be vital to the success going forward. I hope he listens to them."

Howells, who was surrounded by well-wishers at Deano's Steakhouse in Belgium when the election results came in, said he's eager to start.

"I'm ready to jump in with both feet," he said. "I'm looking forward to it. I'm going to be talking to all the trustees and committee chairmen individually to see how they're doing.

"I will be opening up an office (in village hall). The first six months, I will be there every day, Monday through Friday, to put out little fires. It's like I said, there isn't one big thing, but a lot of little fires that need extinguishing. I need to work my way slowly through them."

Howells said constituents can call him any time they have concerns.

“I’m available 24/7,” he said. “Open communication is a big thing.”

Because he is retired, Howells said, he has the time to devote to governing the village.

One reason he sought the leadership role, Howells said, is he disliked how he was treated and decisions that were made regarding donations to the Tree Board and residency requirements for the Tree Board.

Howells resigned from the Tree Board after those decisions were made.

Kowalkowski, who got into office by promising a change in how the village was run, said he learned a lot in two years.

“That took a lot of years off my life. I went through a lot of battles,” he said. “I think I came out a better person for it. One valuable lesson I learned is to calm myself and think before I speak.

“I had fun. I think a lot of the trustees I worked with will say, at the minimum, I was hard-working and held people accountable.”

Boehnlein and Hise, who were appointed trustees by Kowalkowski, were elected to two-year terms without opposition.

Jason Acevedo, the only person to register as a write-in candidate, received 78 of the 111 write-in votes cast for the third trustee seat that was open.
Incumbent Jeff Ritter decided not to seek another term. No one filed candidacy papers, so voters had to write in their choice.

New board members will be sworn in Tuesday, April 19. Howells will make committee appointments as part of the board’s re-organization.