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## Batter up: Players prepare for new election season

By GERRY GOLDSTEIN, Valley Breeze & Observer Correspondent

SMITHFIELD - A 7-year-old Little Leaguer recently pulled off a fielding gem that erased three baserunners and a potential candidate for State Senate.

The triple play engineered by Billy Hawkins so thrilled his dad, William J. Hawkins III, that he decided on the spot against forcing a Democratic primary for the Senate seat that incumbent John J. Tassoni Jr. will relinquish this year.

The elder Hawkins, a state securities examiner, had been weighing whether to challenge former Town Council President Stephen Archambault, whom Tassoni is backing as his successor in Senate District 22.

Hawkins, 50, had been on the fence about running. He comes from a family that has long been involved in politics, but domestic obligations were also paramount for the father of four and stepfather of three.

He said the deciding factor came May 13 when Billy, playing third base in the Little League's division for 7- and 8-year-olds, speared a line drive with the bases loaded, stepped on the bag for another out, and threw to second to complete the triple play.

The moment was as memorable for Hawkins III as it was for Hawkins IV: Billy's father, who coaches his son's baseball team, recalls thinking as he cheered, 'I can't miss this stuff - this is precious to me.'

Hawkins also had other issues to consider, including finding the time to help his wife, Linda, as she establishes the photography business that sponsors Billy's baseball team.

He also wondered whether his state employment would place any political restrictions on him, although he says he would have quit the job if running presented a conflict.

But the triple play made all that moot.

Says Hawkins: "I asked myself, 'What more would I miss if I were downtown in that chaos?'"

Confirmation that he won't seek a primary comes as both major political parties in town are working on their slates for November, with the dates for filing declarations approaching June 25-27.

Much still remains unresolved, including whether Republican Town Council President Michael Flynn, long a fixture on the local political scene, and in fact Tassoni's predecessor in the Senate, will seek another council

term.

Flynn says he's thinking it over.

His three GOP colleagues on the council, Vice President Richard Poirier, Maxine Cavanagh, and Ronald Manni, are all seeking re-election, as is lone Democrat Bernard Hawkins - William Hawkins' brother.

Their father, the late William J. Hawkins Jr., was Democratic Party chairman here, Town Council president and chief of the state Division of Parks and Recreation. Their uncle John P. Hawkins was the State Senate's majority leader and state lottery director, and an aunt was also a state senator..

With the June 14 Financial Town Meeting high on many minds, neither party was ready to make political announcements this week, but one potential newcomer on the Democratic side, Suzy Alba, announced on her own and has put up a campaign website, Suzyalba.com .

Alba, 29, is a Rhode Island College graduate and East Providence native who has lived in town for six years and is working on a masters of public administration degree at Roger Williams University.

She is assistant director of annual giving in Brown University's Office of Advancement.

A veteran of the AmeriCorps national service program, Alba volunteers on many community organizations and says she wants to enhance her public service, especially in an era when many municipalities have fallen on hard times and need effective leadership.

Democratic Party Chairman Lawrence Mancini says he has spoken to her and considers her a strong candidate for endorsement.

Beyond that, neither party had yet filled its slate for council.

Two previous Town Council candidates who have run variously in recent years as both independents and unendorsed Democrats, Robert Esposito and Ernest Begin, say they won't be on the ballot this time.

They were unsuccessful in recent elections, but won enough votes to influence the outcomes.

Begin, who in the past served four terms on the council as a Democrat, says he's bowing out because the current Republican administration has kept taxes under control and "You can't argue with that."

On the School Committee, where two of the five terms are expiring, it's likely that Joan LaFauci, part of the 3-2 Democratic majority, will run again, but odds are that Republican Alberto LaGreca will not.

It's believed that LaGreca, a former Town Council president, would consider another council run if the GOP doesn't otherwise fill its ticket.

As for Capitol Hill, incumbent Democratic Reps. Thomas Winfield (Dist. 53) and Peter Petrarca (Dist. 44) say they'll run again.

Winfield's unsuccessful opponent in the last three elections, John English, says he has other obligations and will not be running this time as Winfield completes 20 years in the General Assembly and seeks an 11th consecutive term.

Baseball was also on English's mind as he explained his reasoning, noting with a chuckle, "Three strikes and

you're out."

No potential opponent for Winfield has yet been announced, nor has one come forth to oppose Petrarca, who has held office since 2002 and is currently the senior deputy majority leader.

His opponent in the last two elections, Jennifer Hirons, won't be running despite a strong showing last time, said her husband, Republican Town Committee Chairman Philip Hirons Jr.

As for whom Republicans will put up for State Senate, that remains unresolved.

David Bibeault, who has twice opposed Tassoni without success, says he's planning to build a home in Warren, far outside the district, but is unsure of the timetable for construction.

The status of any repeat bid by Bibeault right now lies between not completely ruled out and unlikely.

Archambault, a strong candidate for endorsement by the district selection committee, raised his profile considerably in 2010 with an active campaign for state attorney general, finishing second in a three-person primary won by current incumbent Peter Kilmartin.

He has the backing of Tassoni, who will push for Archambault's endorsement by a selection committee that is being reorganized because district lines changed in the recent statewide redistricting.

A portion of North Smithfield was previously part of the district, but was dropped in favor of neighborhoods in Johnston and North Providence.

Smithfield will dominate the new selection committee, which must include five of its residents to one each from Johnston and North Providence.

As for that triple play, it may have had more of an affect on politics than it did on the game itself. Unlike in elections, where numbers are everything, at Billy's level they don't keep score.

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