

Ontario Liberals? election sweep not mirrored in Dufferin-Caledon

By Bill Rea and Tabitha Wells - While last Thursday's provincial election produced a surprising Liberal majority, there were no surprises locally in Dufferin-Caledon.

Sylvia Jones won her third straight victory, garnering a few more votes than she did in 2011, when the Liberals failed to win a majority.

The main difference this time was that all five parties with candidates in Dufferin-Caledon wound up with more votes than they managed three years ago, Libertarian Daniel Kowalewski more than doubling his votes ? to 540 from 250.

In the end, Ms. Jones received 18,030 votes ? up from 17,833 in 2011, while Liberal Bobby Daid got 13,862, compared with just 10,162 received by Lori Holliday in 2011.

For the second straight time the Green Party was in third place locally, candidate Karren Wallace garnering 7,535 votes compared with the 5,540 former Orangeville councillor Rob Strang managed in 2011.

And the NDP also improved its local showing, Rehya Yazbek polling 5,243 votes compared with the 4,200 managed in 2011 by Karen Gventer, who this time was the party's candidate in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and placed third behind PC incumbent Bill Walker and Liberal Ellen Anderson.

As a result, there were mixed feelings at the Jones campaign headquarters on First Street, the satisfaction at the local MPP's return being accompanied by her supporters shock at the fact she will have only 27 colleagues sharing the seating for the Official Opposition. The Liberals wound up with a solid majority of the 107 seats, winning 28 ridings while the NDP stayed in third place with 21 seats.

As results rolled into the Jones campaign headquarters, supporters' spirits were buoyed by indications she'd earned close to 40 per cent of the ballots marked.

Ms. Jones entered the headquarters to strains of Pharrell's song Happy that was counterpointed with the claps and cheers of Dufferin-Caledon's provincial party faithful.

?We did it again,? said Kevin Weatherbee, the Jones Campaign chairperson. ?You've selected again an amazing candidate and an amazing MPP in Dufferin-Caledon in Sylvia Jones.

?All of you, our volunteers ? you made this happen.?

For her part, Ms. Jones said the outcome wasn't exactly what the campaign had hoped for. She referred, specifically, to the Liberal majority won by Premier Kathleen Wynne.

However, she did manage to offer a tongue-in-cheek thanks to Premier Kathleen Wynne for enabling the political contest to be held on May. But she said the campaign was challenging for a number of reasons. But, throughout, her camp had managed the high road.

?You were respectful when others were rude,? said Ms. Jones. ?You were honourable when others chose to sling mud. And you chose the truth when others chose to make things up.?

Among the throng gathered on election night was David Tilson, the federal Conservative MP for Dufferin-Caledon. He attributed the Tories' failing to win to the third-party advertising campaigns by various labour unions against the suggested policies of Tory leader Tim Hudak, who later that evening announced his resignation as leader.

Mr. Tilson said Mr. Hudak's suggestion he'd axe as many as 100,000 civil service middle management jobs in Ontario as one of the nails in the provincial Tories' coffin.

?If you're a teacher or a nurse, you'd be frightened by that,? he said.

As for the Liberal majority, the riding's federal representative said, ominously: ?You get the government you vote for.?

Mr. Tilson, who recently won a hard-fought nomination battle for his job, said he isn't worried the Ontario result could be foreshadowing of things to unfold in Ottawa in 2015 when the writ is to be dropped for the next federal general election.

?A lot can happen in a year,? he said.

One town councillor who didn't want to be named said indications were the local political race would have been tighter between the Green Party and Ms. Jones. In the end, he blamed Mr. Hudak for some of the PCs' shortfall.

?They say you can't judge a book by its cover,? the councillor said. ?Well, you can with Hudak.?

While she won't be going to Queen's Park, the prospect of a Liberal majority put a big smile on the face of local standard bearer Bobbie Daid.

?We were in it for a majority,? she remarked shortly after arriving at her victory party in Bolton. ?Unfortunately, the people of this riding didn't see it the same way.?

?We don't have to go to the polls again any time soon,? she added.

Ms. Daid said transportation gridlock and aggregates were the main issues she was hearing about during the campaign.

?I think we made a lot of heads turn,? she commented. ?This was truly a grassroots campaign.

She also promised to stay active in the area.

?I definitely want to make changes to this riding,? she said. ?There's a lot of great community members I met.?

While the Green Party waited at the Mill Creek Pub on election night for the results, the atmosphere was calm and hopeful. Despite the fact that it was clear fairly early on in the evening that the Green candidate Karren Wallace would not be Dufferin-Caledon's next MPP, everyone remained positive as they witnessed higher than ever voter numbers rolling in for the Green Party.

?The voters have spoken and we respect their decision,? said Ms. Wallace after the full election results were in, confirming Ms. Jones' re-election. ?As a candidate, this loss is on my shoulders alone. I couldn't have asked for a better team. Our numbers were up from 2011, the Green Party's numbers are up all over, and I think that is sending a message to the big three parties that the status quo is not going to serve our needs anymore.?

She went on to thank the voters, members of her party and campaign, and everyone who helped spread the message of the Green Party throughout the election campaign, as well as thanked the Green Party themselves for helping her start on her journey through their involvement in the fight against the Melancthon mega-quarry in 2011.

She concluded her message with a reminder that it's up to the members of the Dufferin-Caledon riding to ensure their elected representative continues the battle for our land and our livelihoods over the next term.

?What we have to do now is keep the flames to the feet of our elected MPP to stand up for the people of this riding,? said Ms.

Wallace. ?When we are facing quarries and developments in our backyard that we don't want and threats to our source water, there can be no more room to have a lack of involvement, and that will be up to every one of you. Keep those emails coming to Sylvia Jones every single day and force her to get involved. We need protection for our land and we need control brought back to the citizens, so it's all up to you now.?