

POLITICS

Pine Lake election probed Voters complain they were asked to sign ballots

BYLINE: GUEVARA, CASTRO LILLIAN DANIEL, CARLOUS DeKalb

DATE: November 14, 1991

PUBLICATION: The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution

EDITION: The Atlanta Journal Constitution

SECTION: EXTRA

PAGE: A/2

By Lillian **Guevara-Castro** and Carlos Daniel STAFF WRITERS

While three DeKalb municipalities ushered in new city government officials routinely last week, the election process in the smallest of the county's cities is under scrutiny by the Georgia secretary of state's office. Jeff Lanier, director of the secretary of state's elections division, said his office is looking into allegations of irregularities in the voting process in the Nov. 5 **Pine Lake** election. In Decatur, Stone Mountain and Avondale Estates, the city elections were uneventful. Clarkston had no opposed candidates, and Lithonia's election is next month. But in **Pine Lake**, holding its first city election in six years, a heated campaign returned Mayor Neil Copeland to office by just 11 votes over challenger Tommie Storms. Meanwhile, three incumbent City Council members - Michael Stuckey, Matt Colburn and Warren Parsons - lost to challengers Linda Unger, Judy Weisberg and Alden Thompson, respectively.

Mr. Lanier said that on election day he received several complaints that **Pine Lake** voters were being asked to write their names on a portion of the ballot. "We have an active investigation on the matter," he said. Results will be reported at the Dec. 4 meeting of the state Elections Board, Mr. Lanier said. After voters complained, city officials said they did not have to fill in the name stub on the ballot, said Judy Griswell, **Pine Lake** director of administrative services, who served as poll manager during the election. "The ballots were made wrong, but nobody refused to vote," Ms. Griswell said, adding that the election has not been formally contested.

In Avondale Estates, Mayor John W. Lawson was the top vote-getter in a race for three at-large seats on the city's Board of Commissioners'. Lawson was the only incumbent in a field of six. The other two winning seats on the City Commission were Lucy Durham, a retired receptionist, and Patrick Smith, an accountant with BellSouth. In January, Avondale commissioners elect a mayor from among themselves.

Decatur voters re-elected Elizabeth Wilson easily to her District 2 commission seat. Ms. Wilson, who is the executive director of the Oakhurst Community Center, has served as a city commissioner since 1985. Decatur developer Bill Mealor won the at-large commission seat. Bill Floyd, owner of a contracting firm, ran unopposed for the District 1 post. Mayor Pro Tempore Candler Broom, who heads an electrical equipment company, and Commissioner Lyn Deardorff, an accountant, chose not to run for re-election. Mr. Broom has served for 10 years, while Ms. Deardorff has been on the city commission since 1987.

In Stone Mountain, Mayor Pro Tempore Patricia Wheeler ran unopposed for mayor to succeed Jane Rhodes who decided not to seek re-election so she could continue her education. Ms.

Wheeler has served as mayor pro tem for three years. The turnout in Stone Mountain was just 9 percent, with only 225 of 2,500 registered voters going to the polls. New council members elected are Greg Brand, a retail clerk; Chuck Burris, a systems analyst; and incumbent Bill Taylor, a collections supervisor.

Photo: In **Pine Lake's** first election in six years, Mayor Neil Copeland was returned to office by 11 votes. FILE