

# Simonsen, Testa, McClellan seek 1st District nod

By ERIC AVEDESIAN  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — The three Republican candidates for the First Legislative District schmoozed with voters at a “coffee with the candidates” event March 8 at Coffee 101 & Carvery.

If victorious in the June primary, Senate candidate Mike Testa and Assembly candidates Erik Simonsen and Antwan McClellan would face Democrat incumbents Sen. Bob Andrzejczak and Assemblymen Bruce Land and Matthew Milam in the Nov. 5 general election.

Former Sen. Jeff Van Drew resigned after being elected to Congress last year. Andrzejczak was chosen to fill Van Drew's former Senate seat, while Milam, of Cumberland County, filled Andrzejczak's old seat.

The First Legislative District includes all of Cape May County, part of Cumberland County and Corbin City, Estell Manor and Weymouth Township in Atlantic County.

Testa, 42, was born in Vineland and graduated from Vineland High School in 1994, Villanova University School of Law in 2001 and Temple University School of Law in 2006.

An attorney with Testa Heck Testa & White law firm in Vineland for 17 years, Testa is the current Cumberland County Republican chairman, a position he's held since 2014.

He was the former chairman of the Vineland Downtown Improvement District, where he elevated the bud-

get from \$48,000 a year to \$400,000 per year with help of Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) funding.

From 2015 to 2016, Testa was on the board of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Cumberland and Salem counties.

His campaign literature describes him as an “unapologetically pro-gun, pro-taxpayer, pro-Trump conservative.”

Testa said he's running for state Senate to make a difference in the district.

“I think for far too long, even though we live in a Republican district, we've had Democrat legislators, which doesn't make sense to me. I think it's time to flip those seats back to Republican and I think we need it,” Testa said. “I think we have a vulnerable candidate who's holding that position and appointed to that position right now. It certainly wouldn't be easier if Jeff Van Drew were still holding that seat. We know that. Jeff Van Drew was a mega-popular senator and was able to get elected to Congress. I don't feel that Bob Andrzejczak has the talent and the popularity of Jeff Van Drew.”

As senator, Testa said he would champion expanding Route 55 from Cumberland County into Cape May County. The road narrows at Route 47 in Maurice River Township, Cumberland County, prompting many legislators over the years to propose widening and extending the road into Cape May County as an express route.

“I've looked at the origi-

nal plans for Route 55. It's supposed to end down the street at the Cape May Court House Diner and feed into the parkway,” Testa said, adding the extension is “absolutely necessary” for emergency evacuations and economic growth.

He said the district has potential for economic expansion and job creation with unused buildings and underutilized airports.

“Testa said the district is “one of the worst areas” in the country for economic growth, and blamed “poor leadership” at the state level.

Testa called school funding “horrible” for Cape May County residents and criticized a school funding plan Gov. Phil Murphy initiated that takes money from districts that are considered overfunded and gives it to those that are considered underfunded. Testa said the funding plan is a “disaster” for local school districts.

Simonsen, 50, the Lower Township mayor and athletic director for Lower Cape May Regional High School, was a teacher at Cape May County Special Services School District for 18 years.

Simonsen graduated from Lower Cape May Regional High School and the College of New Jersey, where he earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts. He attended Rutgers University for specialized education studies and has a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Scranton.

“Having been involved in almost a decade in Lower Township, I see some of the problems that we're dealing with, especially in Cape May County, Cumberland County and Atlantic County. The further south you are, a lot of times you get forgotten,” Simonsen said. “I think as an educator my whole life — I've been in education for 26 years now — just seeing some of the things that are happening to our schools, this new formula is going to crush most of the schools in Cape May County over the next six years.”

Simonsen said Lower

Township has two school districts that will be adversely affected by Murphy's education funding formula. The state budget includes a \$206 million increase in formula aid to school districts that will be distributed according to the new formula that boosts aid in some districts while reducing aid in others.

“The schools are probably at the top of my list ... to see what it's going to do to our schools and the surrounding local schools,” Simonsen said.

He noted that the “immigrant issue is big” and affects him personally.

Simonsen said his wife of 20 years is from Kurdistan and immigrated to the U.S. “the right way.”

“She was here before I met her and went on to get her green card and her citizenship. She's a nurse at Shore (Medical Center). We brought her mother and brother over. They both went through the process the correct way,” Simonsen said, adding his brother-in-law is serving with the U.S. Navy overseas. “He joined the Navy as a U.S. citizen and we're proud of that.”

According to Simonsen, people who want to immigrate to the United States for a better life should do so legally.

“I'm a Christian and I love everybody, but there are rules for a reason and people have to follow the rules,” Simonsen said, adding he opposes financial aid and voting rights to undocumented immigrants. “If you're here legally or are a citizen, you have a right to vote. I'm all for it.”

Simonsen said lawmakers should get creative with solutions to lowering taxes. He said in Lower Township, he oversaw efforts to use shared services with other municipalities to save taxpayers money.

“I just think it's ridiculous that in New Jersey our governor and the Democrats want to keep raising taxes. It's become a joke but it's not funny anymore,” Simonsen said. “There are ways to keep taxes from being raised if you get creative and you look

at working outside of your comfort zone and reach out to people and compromise. That can be done at the state level and it's not being done right now.”

McClellan, 44, is an Ocean City councilman and former member of the Ocean City Board of Education. He's a 1993 graduate of Ocean City High School and attended Virginia State University and Old Dominion University before working at the Sands casino in Atlantic City as a supervisor. After that, McClellan worked as a paralegal at the law firm of Slater Tenaglia Fritz & Hunt before taking a job with the Cape May County Sheriff's Office.

McClellan said his time on Ocean City Council taught him everything about politics.

“I think there are a lot of things that I can do bringing a younger perspective on the needs and the concerns that we have,” McClellan said about applying his political lessons to the Statehouse. “There's a lot of infighting going on. We don't fight publicly as a council. We argue back and forth privately, but publicly we're not fighting. We're making a conscious effort and make sure we're doing what's right for the people. Hopefully I can take that to Trenton.”

He said this election is a chance to get new blood in Trenton with a younger Republican ticket.

“I think it's a great opportunity to bring new ideas,” McClellan said. “Not to make it an age thing, but younger people need a voice also.”

McClellan said his fellow council members were “shocked” when he announced he's running for Assembly.

“I talked to them about it and talked to the mayor and they're supporting me. There are things that we need that they're fighting for in Trenton, and hopefully I can bridge that gap,” McClellan said. “We're having problems with dredging in Ocean City, we're having problems with getting roads and drainage taken care of. If we can get some of that money down

here and try to save some of our local taxpayers some money it'll be a good thing.”

McClellan said raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in New Jersey will undoubtedly hurt seasonal businesses and municipalities who hire seasonal workers.

“Being a shore town with summer businesses, minimum wage is a huge thing. They're looking to take it to \$15 an hour. How's that going to affect the consumers and the businesses? We've got to realize that's going to happen,” McClellan said. “As a municipality, we have seasonal employees. If we have to pay them \$15 an hour, that's a lot. We're probably going to have to pay \$2 million that we're probably going to pay into salaries for seasonal employees. That takes away from the income we expect that can keep our taxes lower.”

Cape May County Republican Chairman Marcus Karavan lauded the three candidates as “a great ticket,” noting McClellan and Simonsen are from “both ends of the county.”

“You've got people who've been in government for a while. They're very popular and very plugged in. Michel is just a great candidate,” Karavan said.

Karavan said Testa defeated former Assemblyman Sam Fiocchi in the Cumberland County Republican Convention 45-7.

Testa, McClellan and Simonsen now seek nominations from Republican organizations in Cape May and Atlantic counties. The trio also won the nomination at the Cape May County convention March 13. Atlantic County's GOP convention is Saturday, March 30.

Downe Township Mayor Robert Campbell withdrew his candidacy for Assembly. Campbell, a Republican, ran unsuccessfully against Andrzejczak in 2017.

Darwin Cooper Jr. a Vineland resident who worked on attorney Seth Grossman's congressional campaign last year, is also running for Assembly.

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## Suspected cocaine, handgun seized in Villas

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — About 1 kilogram of suspected cocaine and a loaded handgun were seized from a vehicle in Villas during a traffic stop.

The Cape May County Prosecutor's Office's Gangs Guns and Narcotics Task Force was conducting a joint narcotics investigation with the county Sheriff's Department and the Lower Township Police Detective Division into illegal narcot-

ics sales in Villas.

During the drug-suppression efforts, a motor vehicle violation was observed and the vehicle was stopped by Lower Township police patrol officers. During the stop, a K9 sweep of the vehicle was conducted by Officer Gomez of the county Sheriff's Office in which the dog indicated the presence of narcotics in the vehicle.

The vehicle was then seized and the occupants

released at the scene pending the issuance of a search warrant. On March 7, a Superior Court search warrant was authorized by Judge Sarah B. Johnson for the vehicle and the subsequent search resulted in the seizure of the suspected cocaine and a loaded .45-caliber handgun.

County Prosecutor Jeffrey Sutherland stated the approximate street value of a kilogram of cocaine is

\$32,000. This investigation is ongoing, and charges are pending for the drugs and weapon that were seized. Names were not released due to the ongoing investigation, according to Sutherland.

He stated his office will continue to work hand in hand with the Sheriff's Department and local municipalities to target anyone selling illegal controlled dangerous substances.

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DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
20	8:11	8:40	1:40	2:18
21	9:01	9:28	2:33	3:05
22	9:49	10:16	3:25	3:51
23	10:36	11:03	4:17	4:37
24	11:25	11:52	5:08	5:23
25	12:15	12:15	6:02	6:12
26	12:43	1:09	6:58	7:04
27	1:38	2:10	7:57	8:02

### MOON PHASES

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