

Incumbent County Supe Readies for Race

By Dan Abbott

This is the second installment in an ongoing Alameda Sun series profiling Alameda County Board of Supervisor candidates. The election will take place June 6.

As the race for supervisor of Alameda County's Third District heats up, candidates are jockeying for position. But at the center of the storm, Supervisor Alice Lai-Bitker sits calmly, working as if there were no storm at all.

"I have been doing a good job," she said, reflecting upon the four years since her election in 2002. "I've accomplished a lot, and I look forward to accomplishing a lot more."

On June 6, the voters will decide if they agree. In the meantime, three other candidates are eyeing her position, one that oversees a \$2 billion budget: San Leandro Mayor Shelia Young, businessman Jim Price, and San Leandro city councilmember Glenda Nardine.

But if Lai-Bitker is nervous about the competition, she gives no sign of it. Instead, she quietly touts her accomplishments, the centerpiece of which is the No Wrong Door program. No Wrong Door was a coordinated effort to streamline the bureaucratic tangle people sometimes face when seeking county services. The program was lauded by the National

Election Watch

Association of Counties, and has been emulated in other counties throughout the United States.

"It's important to make a difference in people's lives," Lai-Bitker said. "The county is basically the safety net provider." Her voice has the soft, unobtrusive cadence of a social worker, which is no coincidence. Lai-Bitker got her bachelor's degree in sociology from Shue Yan College in Hong Kong, and her master's degree in social work from San Francisco State University. She has been a licensed social worker since 1990, and this background colors her approach to the job, she said.

Lai-Bitker says one of her pet issues is domestic violence. She helped pass a bill to raise marriage license fees by \$2 to help pay for the Family Justice Center, which centralizes a "spectrum of services for families in crisis."

"In the past, a battered woman would have to stand in a lot of lines," said Lai-Bitker, who lives in Alameda with her two daughters and husband, radio-host Steve Bitker.

Though the election is still three months away, the first salvos have already been fired. Last month, her opponent Price unveiled a health care plan designed to cut costs and pay for

seismic retrofits. Lai-Bitker dismisses the plan as too simplistic. "(Price) would get rid of the Board of Trustees (which oversees county hospitals)," she said. "He doesn't understand the complexity of the issue."

Mayor Young has criticized Lai-Bitker's approach, calling for better coordination between the Board of Supervisors.

"This job is a generalist job. You can't micromanage it," Young says. "The five Supes together must make decisions."

Budget woes have been on the front burner for Lai-Bitker, with financial wells running dry on both the state and national level. Still, she remains cautiously optimistic about what is possible.

"The budget is still tenuous," Lai-Bitker said. "It's a zero-sum game."

She says her overall vision is to be able to provide health care to all county residents, regardless of income.

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Courtesy Photo
Alice Lai-Bitker

Mythbusting Duo to Slay