

Jobs plan was stumbling block for campaign, says Jane Twinney



By Brock Weir

Last Thursday's election results might not have been what she had hoped for, but Progressive Conservative candidate Jane Twinney has no regrets about what unfolded.

As she looks back at the campaign that was, she thinks about the people, particularly the volunteers, who spent 'countless hours' dedicated to her campaign and put their lives on hold in support of getting her to Queen's Park. They are memories and relationships which will stick with her for a lifetime, she says.

Over the seven weeks on the campaign trail, Ms. Twinney, a Newmarket Councillor, knocked on numerous doors in both municipalities, explained her platform 'both skills she had under her belt, but which enabled her to step outside her comfort zone to get her message across.

'I put myself out there in situations I have never been in before, like debates, and it taught me what I needed to learn and which ways I could improve myself,' says Ms. Twinney. 'I learned if you can put your mind to it, you can do anything. Even though we didn't win, even if I didn't know the outcome, I wouldn't take it back and not done it. It was an experience that is unique and until you have actually done it, I have been a municipal candidate, but this level was very intense.'

That intensity, she says, came from just what one campaigns for. At the municipal level, one truly puts themselves out there, explains to voters what they believe in, and shows what they, as an individual can do at the Council table. As a provincial candidate, things are quite different. Although one ultimately subscribes to the party's platform, the campaign becomes about much more than the individual.

'People look at you differently,' says Ms. Twinney. 'People would look at me and say, 'Jane, I love you, I support you, but I can't support this party.' Then, there were people who would say, 'I am supporting you because of your party' even if they didn't really know me.'

It was a relatively brief,

but extraordinarily contentious road leading Ms. Twinney to be Newmarket-Aurora's Progressive Conservative candidate. After Frank Klees announced he would not seek re-election, Ms. Twinney was the first candidate out of the gate to formally declare her candidacy. She was quickly followed by fellow Newmarket Councillor Maddie di Muccio and, later, Aurora resident (and Auroran columnist) Stephen Somerville.

The race took a dramatic turn, however, with social media sniping, a decision made by the PC party to deny Ms. di Muccio's candidacy, and, later, Mr. Somerville dropping out of the race citing threats to himself and his family. Through it all, Ms. Twinney said she tried to stay above the fracas and stay the course.

‘We knocked on thousands and thousands of doors and people who came out and supported me were people who have been a part of the party forever and ever, long-time supporters, and at the end of the day, whatever happened had nothing to do with me,’ says Ms. Twinney when asked if she found support for her among the party faithful what it ought to be. ‘I was there to run a nomination race and, unfortunately, [the race] didn't happen. I just carried on.’

Carrying on after securing her nomination through acclamation in March, just a day after Chris Ballard also won the Liberal nod through acclamation, the campaign began in earnest. With thousands of doors knocked, and countless steps taken, she is confident she and her supporters did all they could to keep Newmarket-Aurora a Tory blue.

‘I don't think anything we could have done differently would have changed the outcome,’ she says. ‘Coming down to the last week, I just wish I had a little bit more time because I hadn't gotten to every single door, but I worked as hard as I could. I was out every single day, all day long, and I wouldn't change a thing.’

But, would she have changed any of her platform planks while pounding the pavement? Probably not. Looking ahead, Ms. Twinney says the reality is that cuts of 100,000 public sector employees proposed by her now former party leader Tim Hudak will become a reality Ontarians will inevitably have to face. She admits that was probably the biggest stumbling block.

‘It scared people and it scared people who worked in the public sector,’ says Ms. Twinney. ‘If you have 1.2 million people who are in the public sector, you are not just appealing to the 100,000 jobs that are going to be cut, you are appealing to 1.2 million people and their families. It didn't matter who you spoke to, obviously someone who was very secure in their position and was definitely not going to lose their jobs, had this fear. The stumbling block was the messaging that got across and I had to explain it at the doors, which was quite time consuming.’

‘Going forward over the next four years, there are going to be public sector job losses and they are probably going to be close to that 100,000 mark, if not at least that. It is going to happen anyway, [Hudak] was honest about it, and I guess we paid the price.’

At the end of the day, however, every cloud has its silver lining. As she returns to her work as a Newmarket Councillor, she is taking the next few months to consider her future. In the meantime, she says, the great thing about the campaign was getting to know Aurora better.

‘I got to know the community better, the lay of the land, I got to meet so many more Aurora residents, so it broadened my horizons out of Newmarket because I have been so focused on here. That was fortunate and in the years to come I will be able to enjoy spending much more time in Aurora as well.’