

LET THEM EAT PITAS



DTH/GARRETT HALL

Contractors put the finishing touches on the new Franklin Street business Pita Pit, which is scheduled to open next week in Blue Sky's former location. Other businesses opening include ice cream shop Cold Stone Creamery where Turtle's Music and DVD was, and Penang, a Malaysian restaurant in Pyewacket's former location. New businesses often open during the summer in anticipation of returning University students.

Mayor incumbents shoo-ins

BY JENNY HUANG  
ASSISTANT CITY EDITOR

Lackluster competition among election candidates typically is attributed to voter apathy.

In the case of three local mayoral candidates running unopposed, local experts acknowledge that possibility, but say the situation might be just a coincidence.

While twelve candidates are vying for four positions on the Chapel Hill Town Council this fall, mayoral incumbents Kevin Foy of Chapel Hill, Mike Nelson of Carrboro and Joe Phelps of Hillsborough will run unopposed.

According to Orange County Board of Elections records, the lack of opposition in all three mayoral races has not occurred at any time in the last 30 years.

Local pundits say recent budget challenges, downtown development and University relations might have deterred other candidates from entering the race.

Dan Coleman, former political chairman of the Orange-Chatham Group of the Sierra Club, said it's difficult to pinpoint a reason for the solo candidates because each situation is different. "I think this is coincidental," he said.

Nelson is seeking his fifth term as mayor, and Foy and Phelps are seeking their second terms.

Thad Beyle, a UNC political science professor, said local residents' satisfaction with the direction of the town might be another factor in the lack of opposition.

Phelps echoed Beyle's perspective. "I reckon the (Hillsborough residents) are kind of satisfied with me," he said.

All three incumbents said the lack of competition will not stop them from campaigning this fall.

Nelson said he will still reach out to voters, focusing on promoting the bond referendum that calls for more sidewalks and greenway. Foy also said he will focus on

passing the referendum but will use this campaign as an opportunity for quality control.

"In this campaign I see more of checking in with voters," Foy said.

The mayoral incumbents say their constituents are far from being disengaged from civic affairs. "I think there are plenty of people in Chapel Hill who are willing to tackle tough issues," Foy said.

But Coleman said the lack of competition in mayoral elections might not allow for a thorough discussion of community issues. "It's going to be harder to clarify (the issues) with one candidate," he said.

The absent mayoral competition also might decrease voter turnout, despite the large group of town council candidates, Coleman said. "I think there'll likely be less turnout and the discussion of the issues will be less sharply focused."

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