Bigelow: The next generation – Son follows in father’s footsteps wins District 2 seat on Lee County Commission.

By Charlie Whitehead (Contact)

Wednesday, November 8, 2006

Brian Bigelow became a Lee County commissioner on Tuesday, just like his father before him.

Bigelow, a lifelong Lee County resident, bested Gerard David Jr., 99,869 votes to 39,775. He pulled in 71.52 percent of the vote compared to David’s 28.48 percent.

Bigelow, 42, had already gotten past 16-year incumbent Doug St. Cerny in the Republican primary. David ran without party affiliation.

Bigelow is a former urban planner for the city of Fort Myers. His father, Charlie Bigelow, was a county commissioner from 1986 until 1990, when he resigned after facing misdemeanor charges that he failed to timely file and pay his taxes.

Bigelow ran on a platform of growth management and environmental protection, saying the county had strayed from the path his father had helped to blaze with the first Lee County growth management plan in the 1980s. He’s advocated filing suit against the Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District over Lake Okeechobee releases and damage to the Caloosahatchee River and coastal estuaries.

“I’m ecstatic. I’m overwhelmed,” he said. “I’m thrilled for the voters, for the residents and for the future of Lee County.”

Bigelow said the environment and growth management will take center stage.

Bigelow qualified for the office at the last minute, filing papers on the final day of qualifying. He beat St. Cerny in a Republicans-only primary that saw a paltry 17 percent turnout, posting only 17,875 votes in a county with almost 330,000 registered voters.

He beat David in a much wider race. His defeat of St. Cerny was a shocker, but no unaffiliated candidate has ever won in Lee County and David spent but about $6,000 on his campaign, much of it his own money. Bigelow spent around $65,000, virtually all of it before the primary.

Bigelow said the first thing to do is challenge the Corps of Engineers and the water management district.

“My position does not change on that,” he said. “We’ve got to take them to court.”
David, 53, is a former actor who runs a small taxi company with his father. He had small parts on TV shows like Dynasty and Knots Landing and played the part of President John F. Kennedy in the 1992 movie “Ruby” in which Danny Aiello played the assassin.

David said he decided to run because he didn’t like the way commissioners treated taxicab companies at Southwest Florida International Airport. He said he was thrilled with his showing.

“I got 40,000 votes. Can you believe it?” he said. “I said before if I got 10,000 I’d be thrilled. I’m shocked. In retrospect, I guess I did as good as him. He’s like the Kennedys with the name.”

David said he will be eyeing a commission seat again in 2008.

Bigelow joins a board that could be radically changed. St. Cerny and John Albion, who resigned mid-term to run unsuccessfully for state representative, had sat on the board for a combined 30 years. Albion was replaced by Frank Mann, a longtime politician who served as a state representative and state senator as a Democrat, then switched parties a few years ago.

Commissioner Ray Judah, long seen as the environmental voice of the board, says he looks forward to increased support for his ideas.

“I think Brian is going to be a valuable addition to the Lee County commission,” Judah said. “He has a strong background in urban planning and he’s a bright and energetic young man. He’ll provide significant energy as well as dedication and skill to the job.”