

Lapierre, Fitch return in Dieppe, Riverview

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■ Metro Moncton voters stay with status quo on election night

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Metro Monctonians opted to stay the course last night, re-electing Riverview Mayor Bruce Fitch and Dieppe Mayor Yvon Lapierre, while Moncton Mayor Brian Murphy was returned by acclamation.

The results mean the three leaders will have a chance to further the co-operation they have said in the past was a key to Metro Moncton's continued success as one of the leading growth centres in the province.

"Call it a three-peat," laughed Fitch after learning the mayors for all three communities had been returned.

"We have gotten to know each other over the past three years and we have a very good rapport with each other," the



Riverview mayor said. "I have put issues before Brian and Yvon many times about some of our concerns and they know where I stand on these issues and what my values are based on."

Fitch also knows where Murphy and Lapierre stand on the issues, a fact he said will assist the three communities in continuing to work together for the betterment of all three.

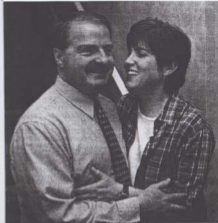
"This is a big advantage over starting from scratch with new people."

Lapierre was also excited about the opportunity to continue to work for his community and the tri-community as a

whole.

"I think it's a great victory," he said. "I think we have a good team that's been put together, that's going to be able to go and continue with the work that was started in the last three years."

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BOB WARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Riverview Mayor Bruce Fitch receives a congratulatory hug from his wife, Nancy, after he was declared re-elected last night. Fitch defeated councillor Bob Hyslop.

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The return of the three leaders was also vastly different from the results three years ago, when residents in the tri-community opted to replace all three municipal leaders by choosing Murphy over Leopold Belliveau, Lapierre over Bill Malenfant, and Fitch to replace Dave Richardson, who opted not to re-offer in 1998. In this year, it was long-time councillor Joe Cormier going down to defeat at Lapierre's hands and long-time councillor Bob Hyslop failing in his attempt to dethrone Fitch.

The stability factor did not play so well in nearby Sackville, however, where Jamie Smith grabbed the reins of power from veteran municipal politician Jim Long.

Smith suggested afterwards there had been a strong mood for change in the university town in recent weeks, primarily because of the controversy surrounding the delay in construction of the Tantramar Regional Civic Centre.

"My main focus when I get to work will be on getting the civic centre built as soon as possible, and in the best spot possible," he said last night.

In Miramichi incumbent mayor Rupert Bernard outdistanced challenger Terry Whalen to hang onto the mayor's seat.

In Fredericton, voters ousted incumbent mayor Sandy DiGiacinto in favour of former city councillor Les Hull. Hull walked away with 7,918 votes while DiGiacinto took home 7,171 votes.

In Saint John, meanwhile, the race was still tight at 1 a.m. With 70 of 153 polls reporting at that point, incumbent Mayor Shirley McAlary was holding a slim lead in a battle with five challengers. She held a 642 vote lead over businessman Bob McVicker, who appeared to be winning McAlary her biggest challenge.

Although actual figures were not available last night, reports from around the province indicated voter turnout was steady and probably up from the roughly 50 per cent participation by eligible voters in recent municipal elections — a fact some were attributing more to the province-wide referendum on VLTs than to municipal council contests. There were even reports that line-ups at some polling stations were so long when the 4 p.m. closing time rolled around that some stations were forced to remain open until as much as an hour later.

Chief electoral officer Annise Hollies pointed out the province's election legislation ensures that anyone standing in line at the time the polls are supposed to close must be given their chance to vote.

"Late this afternoon I was getting calls from Saint John that there were a lot of people (at the polling stations)," Hollies told the Times & Transcript late last night. "But at 8 o'clock everyone that was standing in line got a chance to vote."

The late closing times at some polling stations may have been partially responsible for the to the electoral offices last night. By 10 p.m., two full hours after the official closing time for the vote, many districts had counted only one or two out of as many as 30 or 40 polling station results.

That fact meant many candidates did not know until late into the night whether they had been victorious, and in fact some candidates watching for results on television or via radio actually learned of their victories or defeats from reporters calling for comments.

Yesterday's voting was also marred slightly by problems at many polling stations when many would-be voters found they were not on voters' lists. Moncton returning officer Francis Doucette said the problems arose as a re-

sult of using the provincial voters' lists from the 1999 provincial election.

Rather than re-enumerate everyone in the province for every election, officials have decided to use those lists and update them each time. That left many people who might have relocated within the last two years off the lists for their electoral districts this time around.

Diane Thomas of Moncton was one of those who had to deal with that frustration yesterday, having moved to her current residence since the last provincial election. When she didn't get a card telling her where to vote, she called the returning office and was advised of her polling station location. But upon arriving she found she was not on the list. Not having two pieces of identification with her, Thomas was forced to go get that identification before returning and filling out paperwork before being able to cast her vote.

"It took us an hour," she said. "I just couldn't believe it."

The experience was doubly troubling since Thomas owns the Neighbourhood Pub on West Main Street and specifically wanted to cast her vote on the VLT question. She said one polling station worker told her she couldn't believe the number of voters showing up who weren't on the lists, and Thomas said she hoped that wouldn't affect the VLT referendum results.

Council members, meanwhile, weren't the only names on ballots across the province yesterday. Residents were also given the choice of voting for those they want to serve on the province's District Education Councils, although 73 of the 158 education seats were filled by acclamation. Another 24 will have to be filled later, since for those seats there was nobody offering for election, leaving 61 education seats contested yesterday.

Results of those contests, however, were not available at 1 a.m. today.