

Stakes are very high in Spafford election

By MIKE WAHLRAB

What will Spafford be like in five years, 10 years? Should the people of Spafford have a voice in how their town changes? Can growth and development be guided? How can we preserve what we cherish about our town?

There is one thing everyone in Spafford seems to agree on: The town's rolling hills, high vistas, rural character and two lakes - all within commuting distance of several cities makes Spafford a great place to live. Spafford residents also cherish the fact that Spafford is quiet, with open spaces and "out of the way" - a place to enjoy nature and privacy. We have all hoped that none of this would change and for a long time Spafford remained a "sleeper."

But change has come to Spafford. Building permits exceeded last year's total in the first six months of this year. Spafford's vistas are dotted with new construction; old lakeside camps are demolished and replaced by large homes. The Spafford golf course reveals a potential plan to replace half the course with as many as 30 new homes. With sparse, outdated zoning and no commercial zoning, town government is unprepared for the growth, development and change that is well underway.

Residents complain of their wells being compromised as new wells proliferate. Construction displaces soil and rock, downhill

properties suddenly face drainage or storm water problems. Roads are damaged by frequent heavy construction traffic. The town is faced with new expenditures to accommodate growth - what are the options? Shouldn't developers be asked to share in the costs their projects cause our taxpayers? With more expensive homes, is there more tax money collected? How is it spent?

Volunteers and community organizations eager to provide leadership and resources for youth programs, an active library, a community center, support for parks and recreation, lake access for town residents, all backed off in 2005 citing frustrations with town government.

Many are asking: what is that tower erected in a field just off Rt. 41 in Spafford? Inquiries reveal that its purpose is to measure wind - in preparation for a possible wind farm. Rising several hundred feet high, windmills will alter vistas for many miles. What are the pros and cons of such a project? What will be the impact on the community, on nearby residents?

The 2005 Spafford election is our most important town election in many decades. Two local parties present very different platforms. Spafford Party expects town officials to pursue training regarding consensus, planning, zoning, fiscal and management issues and to be highly responsive to citizens. Neighbors First Party seeks to "perpetuate" the existing leader-

ship style and calls for no "agendas." Neighbors First argues that existing regulations zoning are adequate, and questions whether there is any need for planning. Spafford Party states a commitment to preserving rural character, open spaces, lake quality, the agricultural base and balancing the demands these place on the town through the active input of Spafford residents. Spafford Party argues that updating 1970's zoning and a plan to preserve rural Spafford are priorities. Uncontrolled growth should not mold Spafford, the people of Spafford should have a direct and formal say in how their town will develop.

The platforms of Spafford Party and Neighbors First could not be more different and the outcome on Nov. 8 will affect Spafford for the rest of this decade and far beyond.

How will voters know how to make the best choice? How can voters find out more about the issues and the qualifications of the candidates? The public and all town candidates are invited to a public forum and debate to be moderated by the League of Woman Voters in the month of October. Watch for upcoming details.

Michael Wahlrab, a local businessman and resident of Spafford, submitted this article on behalf of Citizens for Spafford, a non-partisan community issues group since 2003, committed to public discussion of town issues and open public forums. He is a chairperson of the Spafford Party.