

Final Project: Spotlight Your Internship
Campaign Manager for Melanie Barrett
Candidate for Oro Valley Town Council

My political internship has been somewhat untraditional in that I took the job first and then applied for internship status. I had known Melanie for several years and knew her to be smart, articulate, and compassionate. As the vice-chair on the Planning and Zoning Commission for Oro Valley, she had shared her insight into an issue which concerned me. So when I heard she was running for Town Council, I immediately thanked her and lent my support by inviting her to be a guest at a benefit dinner for a public school foundation. We hoped it would give her exposure and an opportunity to meet residents of Oro Valley. We also invited another candidate, Joyce Jones-Ivey. They sat together and shared ideas. Eventually, Melanie and Joyce would join Joe Winfield and Josh Nicolson to form a slate of candidates poised to unseat the mayor and three council members in Oro Valley leadership.

The first task was to gather and submit signatures to be placed on the ballot. Melanie was about finished when I joined her campaign. Her goal was to submit the maximum, not minimum, of signatures. She wanted to appear to be a well-supported candidate, which she was. On May 26th, she submitted her 500+ signatures to the Town's administrator and we released our first press release. It was the first press release I have ever written. Luckily my sister is a professional writer, who gave free editorial input.



Once registered as an official candidate, Melanie wanted to talk to as many residents as possible and she needed to raise money. Her goal was \$5000. I worked to schedule and create invitations for meet-and-greets. In the week prior to a meeting, the candidates canvassed the neighborhood and delivered the invitations. Our goal was to schedule at least one per week. We exceeded our goal but questioned if the end objective of winning over voters

was being achieved with this strategy. The turn out at these events was very low. Time spent canvassing was not a waste, though, as it provided an opportunity for voters to meet the candidates and hear about the issues. We

Campaign Events

5/23	Library Meet the Candidates
5/29	Copper Creek--Crosby Home
5/31	Centerpointe
6/8	Women's Republican Club
6/9	Sun City Democratic Club
6/9	Verde Ranch--Pickard Home
6/12	SCOV
6/13	Heirs of the Republic. Jeff Utch.
6/23	Community Center Poolside
7/4	Riverfront Park
	Naranja Park
7/7	Walk along Tangerine
7/9	Sunset Room Community Center
7/10	Zpizza Volunteer appreciation/recruitment
7/11	Horton Residence
7/14	Walk along La Canada
7/17	Civil Discourse at Library
7/17	Meet the Candidates at Library
7/20	Joe on Garrett radio
7/21	Walk from Safeway



surmised that after speaking with a candidate for a few *minutes* on their doorstep, most of the residents had made up their minds and

saw no need to come to the meeting.

Meeting people and asking for their vote proved easier than asking friends and supporters for money. We brainstormed to come up with a list of 100 people from whom Melanie would ask for \$50. That seemed easy. Who would not give a friend 50 bucks to help her get elected to the town council? It turned out the majority of friends and associates would not do that. Thankfully, residents in community who are passionate about changing the town's leadership stepped forward and helped Melanie reach her fundraising goal, which was \$3000 from the community. Community meetings were helpful in this regard. With money in the bank, she could pay for signs, palm cards,

mailers, and social media boosts.



One event, in particular, that took some time to prepare was the 4th of July event at Naranja Park. I knew from experience that hundreds, maybe over 1000 residents, would come to the free

event hosted by the Town. To draw attention to the candidates and make it more celebratory than political, I borrowed a large Plinko game to invite kids over to our corner. They had to try and answer a question from American history to earn a playing ball. We had prizes and personalized swag with the candidates' names. It was a feel-good event that enabled the team to talk with hundreds of possible voters. Things were looking up!



About this time, the incumbents amped up their campaigns. Social media forums like Next Door and Facebook hosted some intense debate. No one wants to relinquish power. At one point, the mayor posted a long diatribe on Next Door under his daughter's account. To manage the increased speed of the campaign, the managers started meeting every Wednesday morning to work out nuts-and-bolts details like signs, fliers, events, and social media. Friday night meetings with the candidates were devoted to direction of the campaign, vision, and position on the issues. Creating a unified front on key issues is not easy with a mix of Democrat and Republican candidates from varied backgrounds.

Signage plays an enormous influence in local elections. People walk into the ballot box and often vote for the names they recognize. We wanted to win the sign war. Our team opted for an unlikely combination of colors--yellow and black. They also decided on vertical rather than horizontal signs. Both proved to be good decisions. Now that the Primary seasons is in full force, street corners are plastered in red, white, and blue signs. Our tall, yellow and black signs really stand out. I do not think we have more signs than the incumbents, but we have at least as many. I spent many hours installing and maintaining signs--usually late at night after the day's work was over. I preferred the cooler temperatures and reduced traffic.



The core team of campaign managers consisted of six volunteers. Job descriptions were fluid, but one area in which I consistently worked was in creating ways to share information. I began at our first meeting offering to create a Google calendar and to

store volunteer information on a Google sheet. I managed the calendar, scheduling events and deadlines so that the entire team could be informed. I also started a Google photo shared album so that we could upload photos into a single repository that could be used in social media posts and on the candidates' websites. I opened a Google Keep list to track locations needing signs installed or repaired. Lastly, I used the NationBuilder website to "cut turf"¹, save the voter information into pdfs, which I then uploaded into a shared Google file. Now, all the candidates have access to voter information as they go canvassing around Oro Valley. Previously, Melanie (who bought the rights to use NationBuilder) would have to cut turf for a particular neighborhood, print the sheets and give them to a candidate. The convenience of universal access of information for everyone working on the campaign provided by the Google suite of apps proved invaluable.

Early ballots were to be mailed out beginning August 1st. In Oro Valley close to 75% of voters use the early ballot form of voting. This fact really shortens the campaign season. We needed to get mailers into voters' hands before that. We ordered 10,000 mailers and got together to divide them into postal routes so that the post office could deliver them as bulk postage. This saved us quite a lot of money.



The next major event was the first debate. We knew this was going to be tough because it was hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, which has a \$40,000 per year contract with the Town of Oro Valley for services rendered. They committed to hosting a fair debate, and we feel delivered on that promise. The candidates studied.

I researched the 10-year, voter-approved plan to see where the Mayor and council had failed to implement that plan. We held debate prep meetings. Melanie, with her law and speech-and-debate background, provided helpful tips to the entire team. On July 31st the debate was held at the El Conquistador Resort. Hundreds of people showed up. That told us we were doing our job to raise awareness of the election and the issues. The citizens are engaged. Melanie's performance was superb. She was articulate, knowledgeable, and

¹ Cutting turf is plotting canvassing routes for campaign workers to knock on doors.

brought to light facts that put the incumbents on the defense. I made video clips to post onto her social media sites.



I also worked with the wife of the mayoral candidate to organize corner rallies and street walks in our campaign t-shirts. Her goal was to create the same response to groups of people in yellow and black, as educators produced with Red for Ed. Starting six weeks out from the elections, supporters gathered on Saturday mornings to march down thoroughfares in Oro Valley, holding the candidates' sign. Thursday and Friday mornings, we gathered on street

corners. The work is hot but fun and invigorating.

My internship is over but the campaign is not. I will continue doing everything I have described and more. I have learned an incredible amount of information about the inner workings of the town and election laws. I have also learned about working as part of a large team. Follow-through, patience, and perspective are essential. I am hopeful that our many hours, days, and weeks, of work will result in a win for Melanie Barrett and her team.



The first of two debates for Town Council.



Taking the campaign on vacation with me. Atop Mt. Humphreys posted to social media.



Volunteer appreciation dinner at Zpizza. We work for kind candidates.



Vertically positioned signs held up stronger in monsoon storms.