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STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2001

GOP picks Assembly candidate

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ADVANCE BOROUGH HALL BUREAU

Grasmere businessman Matthew Mirones, whose company provided prosthetic limbs to young amputees from Sierra Leone, was chosen last night to be the Republican Party candidate for the vacant Mid-Island state Assembly seat, but not before some grumbling from Borough President Guy Molinari about the party's selection process.



Matthew Mirones

Mirones was unanimously recommended by the 40 or so members of the party's executive committee after three potential candidates were interviewed in the party's New Dorp headquarters, borough GOP chairwoman Leticia Remauro said early this morning.

Earlier in the day, Molinari

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complained that his preferred candidate for the post, Mario Bruno, would not be given serious consideration because he had joined Molinari and backed U.S. Sen. John McCain during the 2000 presidential primaries.

Ms. Remauro flatly rejected that notion.

Bruno, who was Borough President-elect James Molinaro's campaign coordinator this year and is on the short list to become Borough Hall chief of staff, was also interviewed by the committee last night, as was Sean O'Sullivan, a Molinaro staffer who is the head of the New York State Young Republicans.

Ms. Remauro, who was also considering running, said Mirones impressed her with his community and business experience and his knowledge of health care issues. "We need somebody to fight for us," she said, "not for what [Assembly Speaker] Shelly Silver wants."

Mirones could pick up where retired North Shore Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly left off as an advocate for people with disabilities, Ms. Remauro said. Mirones won national acclaim last year when he helped bring the amputees from Sierra Leone to the United States and provided them with prosthetic limbs.

Mirones would take a leave of absence from his company, ARIMED, which makes artificial limbs, to run the race, Ms. Remauro said.

Mirones, who has lived on the Island for 12 years, said he was "very pleased, and very humbled," "I certainly have my work cut out for me over the next few months."

Mirones, a Brooklyn native, said he plans to begin campaigning "today."

The Mid-Island seat became vacant when Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano was elected to Civil Court. The special election to fill it is planned for February.

Ms. Remauro said she expects the Mirones nomination to be approved when it is presented to county committee members from the Mid-Island district for ratification in the near future.

Molinari caused a schism in the party two years ago when he dropped his support of George W. Bush and backed McCain in the New York state presidential primary. Bush won the primary and the nomination, and went on to capture the White House. Molinari publicly excoriated party members who didn't go along with him at the time — including Rep. Vito Fossella, then-City Councilman Stephen Fiala and Ms. Remauro — and said he was washing his hands of borough politics.

Bruno, who ran as a McCain delegate and worked on McCain's statewide campaign, is not in Ms. Remauro's "favor" because of that race, Molinari said yesterday, a development he finds "disturbing" and "distressing."

"Nonsense," said Ms. Remauro. "The Bush-McCain thing has zero to do with it."

She said Bruno, a one-time engineer with the city Department of Transportation, showed an "intricate knowledge" of city government, especially transportation concerns, during his interview last night.

And Bruno, she said, who moved here from Brooklyn only last year, needs to be in the Island community more.

"With all due respect to the borough president, I don't understand how you can represent Staten Island when you've lived here less than a year," Ms. Remauro said.

Bruno's short residency on the Island wouldn't have impeded his candidacy, Molinari countered. "Most Staten Islanders come from Brooklyn," he said. "It's not the problem it would have been years ago."

No candidates were actively discouraged from being interviewed, according to Ms. Remauro, but some who had expressed an interest in the seat, whom she wouldn't name, declined to appear, in the end.

Nominating Bruno would have made "nothing but sense," Molinari said, because of his experience working on campaigns for Fossella, Molinaro and a host of other candidates here and in Brooklyn. The Assembly special election will be all about pulling out the voters, which Bruno knows how to do, Molinari added.

And Molinaro said that Bruno would have had his support.

Molinari went on to say the Mid-Island Assembly race is a "test" of Ms. Remauro's leadership abilities.

"This is a race that should be won," he said. "If they lose this race, I'll be the first one to squawk about it. There'll be no excuses."

Pointing out that Molinaro won Borough Hall with Republican backing and that the Island helped boost GOP candidate Michael Bloomberg into City Hall, Ms. Remauro said, "This race absolutely will be won. My track record of winning as county chair is going to continue into next year."

Molinari would not go so far as to say Ms. Remauro should be ousted from her leadership position if she loses the race. She was overwhelmingly re-elected to another two-year term as county leader this year.

But the borough president did say he was "disturbed" that the party took so long to name a candidate. The Democrats tapped union leader James Hart for the slot the day after Election Day.

"We can't waste time on candidate selection," Molinari said. "It's a golden opportunity for the party. I hope they don't blow it."

It took "a good thought process to find the best candidate," Ms. Remauro said, adding that she was comfortable with the election time-frame.

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