

## Collier sheriff candidates differ on issue of agency turnover at forum

By RYAN MILLS

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Whether discussing the importance of deputies interacting with parents and children, the need to send a law enforcement officer to all 911 calls, or the benefits of allowing deputies to take their patrol cars home while off duty, the three candidates for Collier County sheriff found much to agree on Friday night at a forum hosted by the League of Women Voters of Collier County.

But even though Friday night's forum lacked the fireworks that have been common at past forums featuring the sheriff candidates, many of the candidates usual disagreements were brought up as well.

About 50 people attended the 45-minute forum, which was held at 7 p.m. in the commission chambers on the third floor of the Collier County Government Center. A smaller crowd stuck around for a forum featuring the Democratic candidates for state representative District 101.

The League of Women Voters canceled its forum featuring the Republican candidates for Collier County Commission District 5 because only incumbent Jim Coletta agreed to attend.

The three sheriff candidates — former Collier Undersheriff Kevin Rambosk, private investigator Victor Ortino, and local businessman Vinny Angiolillo — agreed that it was important to send a law enforcement officer to all emergency calls and said it was to the county's benefit that deputies be allowed to take their patrol cars home.

"By allowing the deputies to take their vehicle home, it does help us as far as reducing the response time," Angiolillo said.

The candidates also agreed that it was important to maintain the services of deputies who work in Collier schools. Those deputies can help prevent school violence, Rambosk said.

"More important is to develop that relationship with our young people so that when they grow up, they have an appreciation for law enforcement," Rambosk said.

Still, the forum was no love-fest.

Rambosk maintained his support for red light cameras, while both Angiolillo and Ortino disagreed with their use. As they have done in prior campaigns, Ortino and Rambosk squabbled over turnover rates at the Sheriff's Office.

Ortino said he has documentation that 137 Sheriff's Office employees resigned or were dismissed in 2007, about a 10 percent turnover. Those 137 employees include student clerks and students going through the academy who drop out, Ortino campaign manager Andy Hall said after the forum.

"That is a high turnover rate," Ortino said. "When you have that many people leaving, you end up getting people in supervisory positions with two years of experience. ... That needs to change. That is a major problem in this department, the morale and the resignations."

Rambosk called Ortino's numbers baloney.

A Sheriff's Office turnover analysis provided by Rambosk after the forum showed a total 8.04 percent turnover for

the agency in 2007, with a 6.84 percent turnover when retirements and deaths are excluded. The turnover rate is even lower for law enforcement deputies versus civilians employees and corrections officers, according to the analysis.

“The turnover rate in the Collier County Sheriff’s Office is absolutely not a problem,” Rambosk said.

Golden Gate resident Scott Cooper, who is not aligned with any candidate yet, attended to forum to learn about the candidates. He said red light cameras are a concern of his, because he believes they will cause more accidents in the long run.

Cooper was impressed with what he saw Friday.

“Overall, I thought they had pretty good answers,” he said. “I’m still just gathering information on them.”