

Former Brigantine mayor announces bid for state assembly

By AMANDA AUBLE Staff Writer

After ending his 26-year run as the mayor of Brigantine this year, Phil Guenther (R) has now decided to vie for one of the two state Assembly seats up for election.

"Over the years, I've seen how state government can either help or hinder our residents, our municipalities and our schools, and I certainly want to be on the side of helping to improve the economic prospects of the residents of Atlantic County and the success of our municipalities and schools," Guenther said.

Guenther, 60, said he believes it's a pivotal time in Atlantic County as leaders work to diversify the area's economy. Specifically, he said he supports county's aviation park, which has been designated as a growth zone.

"We need to make sure those incentives that are part of that program continue into the future," Guenther said.

Guenther also noted the importance of continuing the revitalization that Atlantic City has seen in the past year with the opening of Stockton University Gateway campus as well as two new casinos.

"We need to make sure that we can sustain that kind of investment in Atlantic City and that those conditions are right and that there's stable leadership," Guenther said.

Guenther, who is currently the superintendent of the Atlantic County Special Services and Vocational school districts, has been involved in public education since he joined the teaching staff at Atlantic City High School in 1981, where he taught both English and social studies.

If elected to the office of assemblyman, he plans to address what he has seen as problems with education funding distribution.

"The formula and the law as it's written has to be implemented the way its supposed to be implemented, but I also think it may be time to look at the formula to see if it still is equitable for all districts at this time," Guenther said.

Guenther said he believes that districts that will be losing money based on the formula and others increase and receive aid they need.

"It's very difficult when you have winners and losers with a formula like this and the ultimate impact is on the tax payers," he said.

Guenther said that if he does not receive the nomination from the republican party at the convention in March, he will not enter the primary race.

"It doesn't seem to make sense for Republican candidates to waste resources fighting each other in the primary when the convention process would work to provide everyone with an opportunity to speak to the delegates at the convention and move into the general election from there," her said.

Guenther acknowledged that there could be a learning curve moving from a city to state governmental position, but he hopes to remain as accessible to constituents as he did working as a local official.

"I look forward to the challenge and I'm motivated by trying to do the best for Atlantic County."