

Martha Hawks - Humboldt's first female mayor

BY DANNY WADE

One hundred years ago, Tennessee legislators voted for women's suffrage, giving then the right to vote. This opened doors for future women with opportunities never seen before.

Over the years, more and more women have run for city, county, state and federal positions. Along the way, there were thousands of firsts with women being elected into office.

History was made in Humboldt on December 21, 1993 when Martha Hawks was elected as the first female mayor of Humboldt. It was her second attempt running for mayor.

Her first mayoral race was two years prior in November of 1991 when she challenged incumbent mayor, Jess Pritchard and James Chester. Hawks was the mayor's secretary at the time. None of the candidates received enough votes needed (50-percent plus one) to win the election. It came down to a runoff election between Hawks and Pritchard, who pulled off a narrow re-election bid by 49 votes.

On November 2, 1993, Humboldt voters went to the polls to elect a new mayor and aldermen. Five candidates were vying for the mayor's seat, Billy Couch, Alecia Craig, Jerry Gordon, Thomas "Redd" Porter and Hawks.

It came down to Hawks and Porter in a runoff election on December 21. Either way the election would go, Humboldt would usher in a new era with either the first female mayor or the first African American mayor.

Humboldt voters overwhelmingly went with Hawks, who received 2,378 votes to Porter's 1,325. At that time, mayoral terms were only for two years.

"I think the time is right for a female mayor," Hawks said after the election. "It will be good for Humboldt and good all around to have a woman in office."

Hawks was sworn into office on January 3, 1994 in front of a standing room only crowd in the basement of the Municipal Building.

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Court Judge Mark Agee, who administered the oath, noted, "It is a great honor and pleasure for me to be a part of this historic event and I believe it is the beginning of a great new era for Humboldt."

After reciting the oath of office and vowing to work for the city, Hawks exclaimed, "This is a great day for me and I promise to work hard for the city of Humboldt. As I stated in my campaign, I want to be your public servant."

Acknowledging the large amount of

work ahead of her in the initial days of her administration, Hawks stated, "We have good people working for us and I look forward to working with them. I have a lot of questions to ask and I hope to carry on conversations with all of you."

A short two years later in 1995, Hawks was throwing her name in the ring for re-election, this time with only two other candidates—Porter and former mayor, Marlon Hawks. Results were similar to the previous election with Hawks and

Porter finding themselves in a second runoff election. Hawks was the top vote getter with 1,285 to Porter's 887 and Marlon Hawks' 837.

With almost 60-percent of Humboldt voters going to the polls, Hawks won her second term as mayor of Humboldt with 1,906 votes to Porter's 1,092 votes.

"I want everyone to be involved in moving our city forward," Hawks said after being re-elected. "With

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Judge Mark Agee administers the oath of office to Humboldt's first female mayor, Martha Hawks.

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