

The homestretch of Santa Clara's close mayoral race promised to be a return to small-town, grass-roots politicking: The candidates -- out of money after hitting the city's spending cap -- were engaged Saturday in some old-fashioned, door-to-door pressing the flesh.

That changed in the afternoon when the candidates got wind of a full-page advertisement in a new local newspaper, blasting one of them, John McLemore, for "abuse of power."

The ad, paid for by a supporter of McLemore's opponent, Patricia Mahan, drew attention to a \$2,500 fine levied against McLemore in 2000 for campaign finance violations.

McLemore responded in the evening with an e-mail addressed to his "friends and supporters," urging them not to become "discouraged that the mayor's campaign has taken such a sudden negative tone."

The ad, which Mahan said she regretted and knew nothing about in advance, is reminiscent of the Mission City's former days of unruly politics.

To combat that image, the city several years ago launched an ethics in government program, which includes a code of conduct and a spending limit of about \$26,000 per campaign. This is the first mayoral race run under the guidelines.

The candidates, who agree on the majority of the issues facing the city, have been mostly courteous to each other and have stuck to discussing housing, traffic and neighborhood preservation.

Mahan said she first saw the ad in Santa Clara's Mission City News when she returned from walking precincts.

"The first thing I did . . . was to e-mail John saying that I thought this was unfortunate that it had come out," she said. "I had no knowledge of it."

However, she added, "I've read the ad, and the ad is factually correct."

The ad was paid for by a group headed by Kevin Moore, a Mahan supporter who is running for West Valley-Mission Community College District trustee. Moore defended the ad, saying, "I just felt like not enough residents of Santa Clara knew about this."

McLemore was fined by the state's Fair Political Practices Commission for failing to report, on 1995 and 1997 financial disclosure forms, that he held shares in Intel, and for voting on an Intel matter before the city council in 1997.

Mahan had included information about the fine in a recent mailer.

"I gave it the attention it deserved," she said. "It was a very small portion of a very large piece that promoted my qualifications, my vision for the city, my experience."

McLemore said the violations are "ancient history" and said the mistakes resulted from his political inexperience at the time. He said Saturday's newspaper ad "is so far against the rules that we said we were going to follow."

The ad is headlined, "Don't promote the mayoral candidate who was BUSTED" and compares the violations to "political and corporate scandals."

**Tom Shanks**, the city's ethics consultant, called it an "old-style political ad" that relies on some truth, loaded language and too little context.

Shanks noted that the candidates had promised not to send last-minute campaign literature attacking one another. "But third parties did not promise," he said. "Third-party mailers are almost always a problem because the candidates have so little control over them."

Shanks said the city will assess how the ethics and spending guidelines worked at a public hearing next year.

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