

## **American Indian voters pack polls**

*By Sue Halena*

Intense American Indian voter registration efforts made a difference in turnout and some election results, an organizer said this week.

Several candidates with tribal support or membership were elected in the state. Turnout was high in reservation areas, Native Vote 2004 organizer Judy Hanks said. Hanks works for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and coordinated registration.

Voters are not officially tracked by race. Groups that promoted minority voting will estimate American Indian turnout in the coming week, Hanks said. Anecdotal evidence, including voting day transportation programs, suggests strong turnout, she said.

Hanks said she will recommend that tribal leaders start a nonprofit organization to carry on voter registration work in future years.

Voter numbers increased from 2000 in two townships and two cities that have greater than 6 percent American Indian population in Mille Lacs County. However, none of the increases matched the overall 26 percent hike in Mille Lacs County voters.

Voter totals were up 23 percent in Kathio Township, where American Indians make up 54 percent of the population. They increased 18 percent in Isle, where American Indians make up almost 12 percent of the population.

About 1,140 band members live near Mille Lacs Lake.

The band's reservation land is in Mille Lacs, Aitkin and Pine counties.

District 16A Rep. Sondra Erickson, R-Princeton, lost 2-1 in Kathio Township but won narrowly in Mille Lacs County and by eight percentage points in the district. Erickson supports proposed gaming operations that would compete with the Mille Lacs band's Grand Casinos. Her margin of victory this year was slimmer than in her last two elections.

Elsewhere in the state:

- Frank Moe, Bemidji, won the District 4A state House seat. He was endorsed by the Leech Lake Tribal Council, Hanks said.

- Brita Sailer narrowly won legislative District 2A, a race affected by Red Lake reservation votes.

- Peggy Flanagan became the first American Indian elected to the Minneapolis school board. She is a member of the White Earth band.

- Cass Lake Mayor Elaine Fleming, an American Indian, was re-elected with write-in votes after initially opting not to run.