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By Celia Cohen  
**Campaign Notebook**

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"Campaign Notebook" is a collection of items from a summer of politics with two special elections, both in Sussex County for the state legislature. It takes a look at a watermelon divide, a prescient photo and a senatorial benchmark.

Sussex County has so much politics going on, even the watermelons are part of it.

Probably the best-known Republican watermelon grower in the county is Vance Phillips, the Sussex County Council president.

Phillips is identified with watermelons so much, he uses "watermelons@" as the beginning of his e-mail address. He hosts a Crab Feast & Watermelon Extravaganza every year at Trap Pond State Park. The 14th annual is Saturday.

Phillips actually dragged his watermelon crop into a spat that evolved from the special election earlier this month to replace Thurman Adams, the late Democratic state senator.

Other Republicans had a sneaking suspicion that Phillips, instead of embracing their man Joe Booth, was pussyfooting around with Matt Opaliski, a Republican running as a minor-party candidate. Phillips claimed otherwise. He insisted he was not bothering with the political field but only his own field.

"It's my watermelon season," he said.

So it was just one of those things. It must have been just another one of those things that Booth, who ran away with the election, planned his "Thank You" party in Georgetown for the very same day as Phillips' Crab Feast & Watermelon Extravaganza.

This is where the watermelons come in again.

Booth is having watermelons at his event, too, but he is not getting them from the best-known Republican watermelon grower in the county. Not on his seed-spitting life.

Booth's watermelons are coming from "Produce Junction," a stand about a mile outside Millsboro. One of the owners happens to be John Atkins, the Democratic state representative.

Atkins is loving it. "They ordered 40 watermelons from their favorite Democrat," he said.

###

A photograph, taken nearly 21 years ago, uncannily foreshadows the special elections in Sussex County, the one Joe Booth won to replace Thurman Adams in the state Senate and the derivative race to fill Booth's old seat in the state House of Representatives.

The picture appears in *A Few Words*, a book that presents the speeches and other public commentaries given by Battle Robinson, mostly in her capacity as a Family Court judge from 1985 to 1998 or as the Republican candidate for lieutenant governor in 1984.

Robinson is also the mother of Rob Robinson, the Democrat -- yes, the Democrat -- running against Ruth Briggs King, the Republican, in the election Sept. 12 to replace Booth.

The 1988 photo shows Judge Robinson speaking at the dedication of the Family Court Building in Georgetown to an array of local dignitaries.

Naturally the state senator is there. That would be Thurman Adams. Ditto for the mayor of Georgetown, none other than Joe Booth.

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The Republicans in the Delaware General Assembly appear to have a modest aim. Relevance.

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It is all but their battle cry in the special election for the House seat. There are 24 Democrats in the 41-member chamber, and the Republicans are arguing that Ruth Briggs King is all that is standing in the way of a Democratic three-fifths supermajority, big enough to ram through tax bills and doom Republican objections to irrelevance.

The clamor has obscured what transpired in the Senate when Joe Booth moved across Legislative Hall. His arrival swelled the Republican minority caucus in the 21-member chamber from five senators to six.

It did not seem worthy of much beyond bragging rights for the Republicans and snickering from the Democrats, but it was.

Booth dropped the Democrats below the three-quarters supermajority required to pass the bond bill for constructions projects and the grants-in-aid bill, two huge money measures combining for hundreds of millions of dollars each year. The Republicans will have some leverage, after all.

It is not much, but their numbers are so depleted, they will take what they can get.

Liane Sorenson, the Republican minority whip, was savoring it. "We're back in the game," she said.



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