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N.C. House, Dist. 99: Mackey carries out political comeback in statehouse win

After failed attempt to become sheriff, he joins 4 other Dems in winning local seats.

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2/29/2008 Charlotte attorney Nick Mackey files at the Board of Elections to run as a Democrat for N.C. House seat District 99, which covers northern Mecklenburg County and is currently occupied by Rep. Drew Saunders. TODD SUMLIN - tsumlin@charlotteobserver.com

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Democrat Nick Mackey completed his political resurgence Tuesday, winning a seat in the N.C. General Assembly from Mecklenburg County.

Mackey, of Charlotte, defeated Republican Dempsey Miller of Huntersville in the race to represent N.C. House District 99.

With 85 percent of precincts reporting late Tuesday, the 41-year-old lawyer had had 66 percent

of the vote to Miller's 34 percent.

Mackey has been primarily been known for a failed attempt to become Mecklenburg sheriff in 2007 that resulted in much political drama.

In his N.C. House race, Mackey first defeated six-term incumbent Drew Saunders in the Democratic primary. In the general election, he ran a campaign that at times ignored the local media, refusing to answer questions or return calls.

Mackey and Miller were competing to represent a district that includes Huntersville and the University City area.

Joel Ford, Mecklenburg Democratic Party chairman, said a "tidal wave" of interest in the Democratic presidential ticket helped. "Every Democrat on the ticket owes a Barack Obama a debt of gratitude," Ford said late Tuesday.

Miller, the Republican, agreed, saying he lost partly because most people voted straight Democratic tickets. "They did not look at who the candidate was," Miller said late Tuesday.

Tuesday's loss was the third political defeat for Miller, a 50-year-old Huntersville real estate broker who has twice run unsuccessfully for town commissioner.

Mackey has become something of a controversial figure in Charlotte, where he has maintained a steady – if not always flattering – presence in the local media.

Mackey resigned from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department in 2003 while under investigation for falsifying work hours. In 2005, he filed for bankruptcy. Earlier this year, Mackey was convicted of contempt of court. His appeal on that case is pending.

The controversy over the sheriff's vote first put him in the local spotlight. In 2007, Sheriff Jim Pendergraph, 59, stepped down. Mackey won the intraparty election to replace him, only to have his victory thrown out when officials discovered that precincts had been improperly organized.

Chipp Bailey was chosen to replace Pendergraph.

In the other Mecklenburg races for the N.C. House:

District 100: Democratic incumbent Tricia Cotham, 29, defeated Republican Tom White, 32. With 100 percent of precincts reporting, Cotham had 74 percent to White's 26 percent.

District 101: Democrat Beverly Miller Earle, 64, was leading Republican Beth Marlin, 64. With 75 percent of precincts reporting, Earle, the incumbent, had 80 percent of the vote to 20 percent for Marlin.

District 102: Democrat Becky Carney, 63, defeated Republican Gregory Patrick Hill, 35. With 95 percent of precincts reporting, Carney had 81 percent to Hill's 19 percent. Hill had dropped out of the race.

District 103: Republican Jim Gulley, 69, defeated Mark Brody, a 56-year-old unaffiliated