

FREE!

Utila's Monthly newspaper

Utila East Wind

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Dedicated to Utila



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ALTON VICTORIOUS



This years election as most people would agree was one of the tensest ever! Tempers flared, insults tossed between political party members, allegations were made and in general a cloud of speculation and mistrust surrounded the entire electoral process on the island.

A few months previous to election, Shelby McNab, reporter for local TV station HQtv, traveled to La Ceiba and interviewed several residents of the San Judas area who claimed that activists from the National Party visited them in an effort to "buy their votes", in other words they were being offered a round trip passage to Utila plus a few extra lempiras as payment for them going to to vote for the National party's candidate. These allegations stirred up unrest among Utilians who readily made on air calls to express their dislike and disgust regarding the video footage being

presented.

A few days later National party mayoral candidate, Richard del Olmo made an appearance on HQtv in an effort to clarify and put an end to the rumors by providing video interviews with individuals (also from the San Judas area) claiming that the people shown in HQtv's previous news program were paid to make negative declarations against the National party. This put an interesting spin on the original story of "buying votes & importing Spaniards" and at the same time it created a certain degree of confusion for some people.

Confusion however changed to outrage in the days preceding the elections when it became obvious that in fact people WERE being brought from the mainland to vote.

Reporters from La Ceiba exposed on a national level the story of the "im-

portation of mainlanders" not only to Utila but also to the Bay Islands area in general. The media sensationalized the story and it became a heated topic of discussion on Teleceiba's Linea Directa program. Viewers called in to express their opinions and concern. Rodolfo Miralda and Isidro Amaya were later taken to court to clear up threats they allegedly made on air.

In an effort to maintain order and ensure a peaceful election, additional members of the police force arrived causing even more skepticism among the islands residents many of whom considered military presence a threat instead of security. Comments such as "The police ain't here to protect us, they're here to protect the Spaniards" were quite commonly heard.

Finally after weeks of tensions running high, the day had come, Sunday, November 27, Election Day 2005!

Outside the public school which was designated as the voting center, early morning voters gathered and waited patiently for the gates to open. Due to various problems the official opening time of 6:30 AM was delayed by more than an hour. Despite the irregularities surrounding the elections, the day transpired with no major drama (local cameraman's arrest being an exception).

As dusk fell crowds once again gathered outside the public school awaiting the official announcement. Needless to say, anxiety levels were high. At approximately 10:30 PM the winner was declared, Liberal party candidate and current mayor, Alton Cooper had won! The relief was obvious on the faces of his supporters and ear piercing shouts could be heard as the winner was carried downhill. Hundreds of people joined in the celebration parade which lasted until early morning hours.