

Meet the 2017 Darien Democratic Candidates: Intros, Acceptance Speeches from the Caucuses

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Categories : [Government & Politics](#)

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Date : July 20, 2017

If you don't know some of Darien's Democratic candidates for office this year — or even if you do — here's how they were described at the Democrat's caucus on Wednesday night.

For Selectman candidate Pam Sparkman, Selectman Rob Richards gave a nominating speech. For the other candidates, David Bayne, chairman of the Darien Democratic Town Committee, gave the caucus these short descriptions in nominating them (all Bayne's remarks are as prepared, and they're excerpts).

Below the nominating speeches, we've attached speeches from Selectmen Marc Thorn and Selectman-nominee Pam Richards.

The statements and speeches:

Glenn Ritch: Board of Assessment Appeals

Glenn is a commercial real estate professional who will fit in well with the board.

More importantly, Glenn is a passionate democrat who decided after the 2016 election that it was time to get involved on the grassroots level and devote his time and energy to his community. I hope that this caucus will join the DTC in endorsing Glenn Ritch as the Democratic candidate for Board of Assessment Appeals.

Jennifer Leahy: Planning & Zoning Commission

Jennifer is a newcomer to town government, but grew up in Fairfield County and now calls Darien her home, with her two children. She has a professional career in residential real estate.

Like Glenn Ritch, Jennifer is an example of the many men and women who have been energized by the 2016 election to get involved and make a difference in their community. She has energy, passion and enthusiasm for serving the town of Darien.

Mike Burke: Board of Education

Mike is currently finishing his first term on the board and has served with distinction. Mike is a lawyer with Eckert Saemans who brings critical analytical skills to the Board of education with his background.

Mike has a passion for education and is excited about serving another term on the Board of Education.

Frank Huck: Board of Finance

Frank is a graduate of Harvard University and Stanford Law School. Frank is also retired partner of the law firm of Simpson Thacher who was a well-respected practice group chair for many years.

Frank is currently finishing his first term on the Board of Finance, and Darien is particularly fortunate to have someone of Frank's caliber volunteering for town service.

Frank has earned the respect and admiration of his fellow board members from both parties for his thoughtful contribution to Darien's fiscal well-being.

Rob Richards: First Selectman

[David Bayne's full text, as prepared]

Mr. Chairman, it is my singular honor to nominate my friend, Selectman Rob Richards, for the office of first selectman. Rob has served our community as selectman for the last two years and has redefined the role in the process. Rob has shown the importance of listening to Darien residents and building bridges to resolve contentious issues.

Rob ran as a selectman two years ago, advocating for full time paramedics in Darien. This was a controversial issue that divided many people who were concerned that Post 53 might suffer with the advent of professional paramedics. Rob, however, saw it as a chance to improve both the delivery of health services in our community AND Post 53. He worked with all stakeholders to create a solution that served the interests of our community.

He did the same with lights at Darien High School, meeting with neighbors to broker a solution that resolved their concerns and that will soon bring night games to Darien High School.

Rob is a listener, a thinker and problem solver. I hope this caucus will join me and the Darien DTC in supporting Rob's vision for Darien as our next first selectman.

Pam Sparkman: Board of Selectmen

[Rob Richard's full text, as prepared]

Pam Sparkman grew up locally in Rowayton and is a graduate of the King School in Stamford. After 20 years on the West Coast, she and her family relocated to Darien in the fall of 2009 to be closer to family. She received her Ed.M in arts education from Harvard university and her bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary visual arts from the University of Washington.

Pam has taught for five years and was the 2003 Funds for Teachers grant recipient, starting an elementary and arts education program in Raratonga, Cook Islands.

In 2004 she was a speaker and had her research published by the International Conference on Education. Before coming to Darien, she worked as the director of admissions for the Oxbow School, an arts high school in Napa, Ca., and then as the director of admissions for California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. Pam had been elected to the Sausalito Arts Commission and served for two years before the move.

Since returning to Darien, she has worked for Cultural Care Au Pair for almost seven years, matching and managing local families with au pairs. Pam began serving on the Representative Town Committee in 2016 for District 5 and has been a dedicated member of the Education Committee.

Two years ago she joined the Democratic Town Committee and began managing the DTC's social media initiatives, helping with local campaigns and planning fundraising events. In January 2017 she was

nominated to be a justice of the peace for the town.

Pam has been married for 12 years to her South African born husband, Jonathan Buys and is a mother of two children and a sweet dog. Both her daughter, Savanna, and her son, Brett, are in the choir at St. Luke's Parish and attend Holmes Elementary School.

Pam loves to volunteer in the classroom, help in the school gardens and at home, and is as passionate about composting as she is about her art. She is an avid sailor who grew up racing on the Sound and continues to log hundreds of miles in off-shore sailing.

Pam is honored to be nominated by the DTC and have the opportunity to serve the people of Darien.

Marc Thorne: Board of Selectman

[Full text of remarks as given by Rob Richards (we didn't have the prepared remarks)]

I'd like to nominate Marc. I don't want to get emotional, but Marc has been the most — how do I say this — a rock, a Solomon, an adviser, a father figure.

I've gone through a lot. I pretty much felt like I've had the entire town against me when it came to the paramedics, certainly when it came to the lights, and Marc has always been there to tell me it's going to be OK or give me his point of view, and maybe that's not the right way to go, or this is the right way to go.

And without Marc, I don't think I'd be doing this, and I wanted Marc to join me very badly. And that's why most of our slate has been secret because I really wanted Marc to join me, and he's coming on and he's going to be doing the same thing he's done for this town.

Keep us solid, keep us straight, keep us sane [...] I really implore this caucus, the Democrats here, to elect Marc to join me.

Editor's note: All candidates were endorsed by the caucus by acclamation, without opposition.

Acceptance Speech: Marc Thorne, for Selectman

[His speech, as delivered, was better than his prepared comments, so we've quoted that here.]

Thank you, my fellow Democrats. I'd like to start by thanking the DTC for my nomination two years ago. We've had a blast — we really have. We've had an interesting time.

Serving on the Board of Selectmen is a great experience, for several reasons. Of course, it is a major responsibility, but I feel pride and satisfaction in our board's accomplishments. Darien has a well run town government. We enjoy — let me assure you — substantial value for our tax dollars.

Another reason that I'm so pleased to participate on the board is that the board members are colleagues. We work together, we don't always agree, but differences are handled with mutual respect. and so we're missing some of the anger and ruckus that has occurred in the past.

My last reason is that we have experienced actually — I'm turning back to Rob, now — a productivity breakthrough.

I will never forget our first meeting. I was new on the board. I was advised, you know, keep your head down, see how things go, you know, play it cool, so I was busy doing that over on my corner of the table and Rob announced that we were going to have the most productive board of selectmen, ever!

And there was shock in the room, myself included, of course. Well, we did have the most productive Board of Selectmen term ever, and you've heard about that already.

So now I thank you for choosing me again as a candidate for Board of Selectmen. The next two years will be challenging, exciting.

I want to hear from you. I want to hear your concerns. I want to see if I can answer your questions. I need your suggestions. I don't get enough phone calls, quite honestly. [...] I want to hear from Democrats. [...]

So I'd like to thank the DTC. We're looking forward to the election, believe it or not, we're looking forward to the campaign. What a great Board of Selectman this could be, if it was Richards and Sparkman and Thorn — RST. Imagine that. All right, so thank you again, and let's go to work.

Acceptance Speech: Pam Sparkman, for Selectman

Thank you all for coming out in support of our local Democratic candidates tonight. I'd like to start by thanking my fellow DTC members for organizing the caucus and for honoring me with their nomination, which I humbly accept.

To be recognized by the DTC and to stand on the ballot with Marc Thorne and Rob Richards, and represent the Darien Democrats on Election Day, is truly an honor.

I'd especially like to acknowledge, Rob Richards for driving my local political interests. Two years ago I came to him with questions regarding an issue in my neighborhood.

It was Rob, along with former First Selectman Evonne Klein, who readily made themselves available to me. Rob being newly elected himself, went straight into problem solving mode, and saved the day for us.

It was at that moment, I realized that we all need to have a voice in our community and we especially need compassionate leaders, like Rob Richards, who are willing to listen and help their neighbors.

Afterwards, I asked Rob how I could get more involved in town government. He suggested I join the DTC, and run for the RTM, which I did. I'm proud to say this past November I was re-elected to the RTM in District 5, for a new term. I've learned so

much serving on the RTM and the Education Committee, about our community, its accomplishments and its challenges. I've found working as a team in a bipartisan committee has been tremendously inspiring, mainly because I've heard from so many of my constituents in District 5, who have shared their questions, hopes, and concerns for our town.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank my family for their support, my husband Jonathan, and my children Savanna and Brett. I grew up around the corner in Rowayton, we have over a dozen extended family members in Darien. All of whom have stepped in at one point or another to help with the kids, so I can serve our town.

Thanks again to the DTC, and to all the volunteers serving in the community who are helping move Darien forward.

Correction: An earlier version of this article had an error in Pam Sparkman's name in a subheadline.