

# Crouse takes over in Stonington as Haberek steps down

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**Stonington** - For the first time in seven years, the town has a new first selectman as Democratic Selectman George Crouse was sworn in Friday afternoon in an acting capacity.

Crouse, a retired teacher who has served five years as selectman and is well known for coaching the high school tennis teams for the past 40 years, takes over for Ed Haberek, who resigned Friday. It is unknown what Haberek will do next as he has not elaborated on his plans since announcing in October he was stepping down to take advantage of an opportunity he said was too good to pass up.

If Crouse and Republican Selectman Rob Simmons cannot agree by Jan. 5, 2015 on a replacement to serve the remainder of Haberek's term which ends in November 2015, the elected Democrats in town are then expected to appoint Crouse to serve out the term. Once that occurs, voters will have 15 days to collect the signatures needed to file a petition to force a special election. Simmons said his supporters are ready to collect the signatures as he too wants to be first selectman.

Simmons said he is looking forward to having this discussion and others with Crouse when the two remaining members of the Board of Selectmen meet next on Dec. 16. Crouse said he has canceled this Wednesday's regular meeting in favor of the Dec. 16 meeting to ensure there is full agenda.

Crouse's was sworn in Friday by regional probate judge and former first selectman Nick Kepple at a short ceremony attended by Town Hall workers.

Crouse said Sunday that while he's been in the background the past five years he became very familiar with the issues facing the town and now just has to get up to speed on some of details.

"I've always been for the people of Stonington and making this town better," he said.

He said there are several big issues facing the town such as renovating the elementary schools, revising the town charter and completing roads and fields projects all while putting together the proposed 2015-16 budget.

"I'll be right in the middle of it to make sure things gets done," he said. "I'm going to make this town better."

In addition, he may have to run a campaign against Simmons.

Democratic Town Committee Chairman Scott Bates issued the following statement after Crouse was sworn in.

"George Crouse is a strong and steady leader of proven integrity. It's a new day for town government in Stonington."

Haberek stepped down after a controversial tenure in which he won praise for keeping taxes down, showing leadership during storms and power outages, undertaking projects to upgrade town roads and athletic fields and bringing the \$32 million Masonicare assisted living project to Mystic.

Haberek, though, has been involved in a number of controversial issues in recent years. He and the town were sued by a woman who claims he sent her sexually explicit photos of himself using his town-issued BlackBerry and then employing the town labor attorney to block release of those phone records. He denied the

allegations, but in a sworn deposition he admitted he sent the woman explicit photos of another man using his home computer.

He also was criticized for using his Facebook page - which included photos and links to adult-oriented websites and scantily clad female bodybuilders - to post official town information.

Early in his tenure, Haberek posted blog entries that used material from other people, including the former governor of Maine, without attribution. For the past eight months, Haberek has refused to release text messages and emails sent from his town BlackBerry in 2011 and 2012, resulting in a state Freedom of Information complaint from The Day. A hearing is slated on that complaint for Dec. 16.

Last year, The Day revealed Haberek had been using a town vehicle without authorization and was billing the town for travel expenses when he had a \$6,000 annual expense account that previous selectmen had used for travel.

A number of town employees have complained about Haberek privately and in a letter for what they called intimidating behavior toward them. A former Human Services Department employee accused him of acting inappropriately toward her on a number of occasions.

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