

Campaign about caring

By PAIGE HILTON
Guelph Tribune

Karen Levenson knows she isn't likely to win Guelph's Sept. 8 byelection, but she said it's important for her to run to initiate dialogue about her party's issues.

"We need to get the issues out. It's not unreasonable today to have a party that would protect animals and the environment," said Levenson, who is running under the banner of the Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada.

She compared her party to the Green Party of Canada years ago "when it didn't have a hope" of winning. The Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada was founded and registered as a federal political party in 2005.

Levenson, 50, is taking her first time running in an election with stride, saying she's saving her glossy flyers and advertising for the general federal election.

"I don't have a crystal ball, but there's a feeling it could be October," she said of the potential for a general federal election to following Guelph's byelection.

Among Levenson's concerns is the Canadian seal hunt. She said the Liberals and Conservatives won't oppose the seal hunt for fear it would cost them votes in Newfoundland and Quebec.

"I challenge (Liberal candidate Frank Valeriot and Conservative candidate Gloria Kovach) to speak out. I wonder

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Karen Levenson

if any of them have the courage to come out against (the seal hunt) — and against their party."

She's also concerned about climate change and humane trapping of animals.

She said right now Canada's humane trapping standards allow a "killing trap that holds beavers for five minutes underwater until the beavers drown."

Growing up in Framingham, Mass., Levenson always had a love for animals, she said.

After getting her master's degree in film and video studies from York University in Toronto, she moved to Guelph in 1999. She's previously worked for an ad agency in the United States. Now she works for the Animal Alliance and the Environment Voters, the two organizations that make up her party.

She's also brought her work

home with her — rescuing three animals in need.

Levenson has a 13-year-old Husky Malamute called Karma, a 10-year-old cat named Ivy and a three-year-old cat named Levi. She found Ivy as a stray kitten. Levi was given to her by a neighbour who no longer wanted him. Karma was rescued from an Inuit village where stray dogs were killed on "dog days," she said.

"They would shoot wild dogs. On dog days they would shoot any dog that wasn't tied up in someone's yard."

Levenson said she hopes that through the byelection and participating in all-candidates debates she can change people's perceptions of animals and start inciting change. "Animals are considered to this day as property," she said.

"We've become a throw-away society," she said. "We take care of the wealthy. We don't care for animals, we don't care for the homeless, we don't care for the weak. That's not the kind of society I want to live in."

She said she has been invited to a debate hosted by Rogers Television and the Guelph Mercury on Sept. 3, but wasn't yet sure if she'd receive an invitation from the Guelph Chamber of Commerce and Rogers Television-hosted debate on Aug. 25.

She added her party will make a complaint to Elections Canada if she isn't allowed to participate in any all-candidates debate. "It's about democracy," she said.

Helpers wanted

Karen Levenson said she's received good community support so far, but is still looking for volunteers to go door-to-door and hand out flyers. To contact her, call 519-821-6163 or e-mail karen@animalalliance.ca.