

A tale of two campaigns in one hot riding

Liam Casey - Sep 25, 2011



Rosario Marchese, centre, chats with Mike Layton and Olivia Chow at his campaign office on College St. The riding of Trinity-Spadina is one of 28 in the province where a party's lead is under five percentage points, according to a Forum Research poll.

In one corner of Trinity-Spadina stands a large campaign office replete with scores of volunteers, dozens of phones, hundreds of orange signs and the ghost of Jack Layton.

In another corner, five staffers discuss campaign strategies while five students in red shirts earn volunteer hours by pasting stickers on election leaflets.

Despite the stark difference in manpower, Rosario Marchese of the New Democrats and Sarah Thomson of the Liberals are in a dead heat, according to a recent Forum Research poll.

The coveted downtown riding is one of 28 tight races across the province, where campaign teams are fighting for every last vote. Marchese, at 40.1 per cent, leads Thomson, who sits at 37.5 per cent. The riding is a toss-up because of the five per cent margin of error. The poll of 40,750 people had both the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives at 35 per cent, with the New Democrats at 23 per cent.

“The polls (in the federal election) said I was in a dead heat, too, but I crushed my opponent,” said a smiling Olivia Chow, the NDP MP who beat Liberal candidate Christine Innes by more than 20,000 votes in May. “Rosario will win, easily.”

Marchese is the longtime incumbent — having been an MPP since 1990 — and holds court with NDP glitterati such as Chow and Mike Layton.

“The volunteers are our lifeblood,” said Joe Cressy, Marchese’s campaign chair. “And because of them, we’ll be able to touch every single part of the riding multiple times.”

By touch, Cressy means contacting voters through phone calls, leaflets dropped in mailboxes, old-fashioned door-knocking and mainstreeting.

“I just stood outside the grocery store today hugging people,” Chow said of her campaign contribution Saturday.

Cressy said about 1,000 volunteers will contribute before “e-day.” And another 1,000 will help out on Election Day. The orange army managed to plant 900 signs on the first day of the campaign. On Saturday, five sign crews were out planting more — campaign manager Nathan Jackson said about 2,500 signs were already out and they expect to have a total of 4,000 by the election.

About 60 volunteers spread the NDP word Saturday through a highly coordinated effort tracked on giant charts posted to the wall. Another 10 worked the phones, reaching 40 people per hour using computer-assisted “robo-dialing machines.” Nine other volunteers were out delivering 3,000 leaflets in a “lit drop.”

“We’re feeling very good and very comfortable with the campaign,” Cressy said.

Meanwhile, Kate Holloway — who ran for the Liberals and lost in the last provincial election — spent part of Saturday examining a secret map detailing where fliers have been dropped and where Thomson has visited.

“Well, we can’t reach the entire riding,” Holloway said. “It’s just too big.”

Holloway’s team estimates there are 130,000 eligible voters in the riding.

“But there are about 10,000 new voters in all those condominiums in the southern part of the riding,” Holloway said. “If we can take the majority of those, we can win this riding.”

“I think we’re winning the sign war,” Holloway added, saying the small team aimed to drop off 4,000 leaflets by the end of the weekend. “I think we have about 900 up.”

Thomson recently reached her Facebook friend limit, so the team created another page to keep the campaign moving on the social media front.

“You know, we could use a bunch more volunteers,” Holloway said. “You can never have enough.”