



*Before 1992, there was no local Republican Party in Putnam County. Not as many people here voted Republican in those days and, in fact, when someone asked for a Republican ballot in a primary election, it created quite a stir. Poll workers had to search for blue ballot slips, perhaps all the while hoping to convince the voter he really wanted to vote in the Democrat primary. Voting machines had to be reprogrammed so that Republican voters could use them. If Republicans ran for local elected office in Putnam County, they qualified to run as Democrats. These occurrences are now just memories, thanks to a handful of visionaries who believed things could, and should, change.*

## **A HISTORY OF THE PUTNAM COUNTY REPUBLICAN PARTY 1992-2014**

**T**he PCRP was formed in 1992 by Eatonton lawyer Frank Ford who, together with a few other Putnam County conservatives, decided to try to influence that year's election. Apparently, it was still a little early for most Putnam County Republicans to "come out," and the party became dormant in 1993. It was revived in 1994 with a handful of members and has been active ever since.

**D**uring much of the 1990's, the PCRP was largely a social organization. There were still few members, and they met infrequently. Although the PCRP leadership made no real organized attempt to recruit Republican candidates, through the efforts of individual PCRP members, Republican candidates

qualified to run in the 1996 election and again in the 2000 election for county commission seats, sheriff, and clerk of court. None were successful, but Putnam County voters saw *two* political parties involved in local elections for the first time in recent history. Change was in the air.

**I**n 2001, the party became very politically active. A slate of new officers was elected at that year's county convention, and the party's first Chairman, Frank Ford, again took the reins. A Steering Committee consisting of Ralph Perdomo, Wayne Merritt, Lloyd Brown, and Ford began to meet monthly to chart the party's course. Beginning in 2002 and continuing into 2004, the general membership began meeting four to five times a year in ever-

increasing numbers. A PCRP website was established, the party obtained a telephone number and P. O. Box, and a newsletter - The Light - was launched.

**M**embership dues were collected for the first time in 2001, and still the party grew. Initially, 99% of members were newcomers to the county and most of them lived on Lake Oconee, although this would eventually change. The party's focus was entirely local – the Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education. Party leadership devised recruiting strategies to identify candidates for those two boards and began to set their sights on the 2004 elections. One successful strategy involved providing facts to the electorate about important local government issues.

**I**ndividual PCRP members became subject-matter experts in various facets of local government: Lloyd Brown and Dick Dalton scrutinized county taxes, spending, and budgets; Kelly Galvin became the PCRP's redistricting guru; Alan Foster shone the light of common sense on the county's proposed, new administrative office building and abandonment of the courthouse square; and Steve Hersey became a special friend of the School Board, attending every meeting and learning so much about the school system that he was appointed by board members to fill the unexpired term of the former chairman toward the end of 2002.

**I**n those days, the PCRP had elected no local officials but still managed to effect positive change on the "Good Ol' Boys" system that had controlled Putnam County government for well over a century. The Steering Committee organized campaigns to write fact-based and informative letters to the local papers and to give reporters story leads. Numerous PCRP members attended all local government board meetings and, more often than not, spoke out publicly at the meetings. The PCRP was able to attract such dignitaries to party meetings as then-

State Senator Sonny Perdue, Putnam County Sheriff Howard Sills, and business man and well-known radio talk show host, former U. S. Senate candidate-now Presidential candidate Herman Cain. In 2002, the PCRP helped elect the first Republican Governor of Georgia since Reconstruction, Sonny Perdue.

**A**s a result of three-plus years of hard work, the PCRP brought much-needed light to the local political process during 2001, 2002, and 2003 and gained many prominent native Putnam County members in addition to the ever-growing list of newcomers. By 2004, two of the worst members of the county commission did not even attempt re-election. Republican candidates qualified for every local seat up for election that year. For the first time, the Board of Education saw three Republicans become members, and two Republicans were elected to the County Commission. One of them, 4<sup>th</sup> District Commissioner Billy Webster, attributes his education on local government issues and his decision to run for office to the letters and commentary of the PCRP during 2003 and 2004. Also in 2004, the PCRP helped to elect State Senator Johnny Grant.

**T**wo Constitutional Officers and a popular member of the county board of Commissioners left the Democrat Party in 2004--2005. In 2006, the PCRP helped re-elect State Senator Johnny Grant and saw longtime Democrat State Representative Mickey Channel join the Republican Party. Almost all of the state-wide office candidates visited Putnam County at least once in 2006, and several, such as Georgia's first Republican Lt. Governor Casey Cagle, visited here many times at the invitation of the PCRP.

**B**y 2007, Republicans held almost as many elected offices in Putnam County as did the other party, and PCRP members continued to affect public opinion and effect political change in Putnam County.

**T**he 2008 election resulted in a shift in Putnam County government at every level. All but two candidates for partisan local offices qualified to run on the Republican ticket. Local Republicans were not fooled by the sudden “change of heart” of some of the party switchers, however; and Tom Thompson soundly trounced the chairman of the Putnam County Commission, Alan Foster easily defeated the incumbent in District 3, and Billy Webster made his decisive defeat of his two opponents look effortless. In 2008, for the first time in Putnam County history, the Clerk of Court, the Tax Commissioner, the Coroner, and the Solicitor General of State Court – Sheila Perry, June McLeroy, Gary McElhenney, and Michael Gailey - were elected on the Republican ticket.

**T**he election of 2012 resulted in the re-election of Foster and Webster to the County Commission and the addition of Steve Hersey as board chairman; the re-election of Lawrence and Weiner to the School Board, with Weiner elected as Board Chairman; the re-election of Sheila Perry and Gary McElhenney with Pamela Lancaster elected as Tax Commissioner; Michael Gailey elected as Judge of Putnam State Court; the appointment of Russell Thomas to State Court Solicitor General; and the appointment of Trent Brown, III as Judge of Putnam Superior Court. That year, Republicans qualified to run in every partisan office in Putnam County. Although not all GOP candidates were elected, all ran vigorous campaigns and gained new members for the PCRCP.

**T**hanks to more than a decade of concerted effort by local Republicans, Putnam County finally has a true two-party system. The PCRCP moves into 2014 with eleven members holding local elected office and many others holding appointed positions on county boards, commissions, and committees.

### PCRCP Chairs

1992-1997	Frank Ford
1997-1999	Dick Dalton
1999-2001	Max Lewis
2001-2003	Frank Ford
2003-2005	Alan Foster
2005-2007	Larry Hone
2007-2015	Dorothy Adams