Luther Cole wins La. high court seat

By MARK LAMBERT
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Luther F. Cole easily captured a seat on the Louisiana Supreme Court Saturday in a landslide victory as he received about 61.8 percent of the total vote in 12 parishes, unofficial results show.

Cole, a Baton Rouge appellate court judge, walked away with the election in 11 of the 12 parishes. With 627 of 627 precincts reporting, he had received Cole 33,542 votes, Patsy McDowell Cooper received 14,472 votes, and C. Alvin Tyler took 6,259, complete but unofficial results show.

Cooper and Tyler captured 26.6 and 11.5 percent of the votes respectively, the results show.

In East Baton Rouge Parish, unofficial returns showed that Cole received 11,243 votes, or 76 percent of the total. Cooper captured 2,646 votes, or 18 percent of the total, and Tyler won 861 votes, or 6 percent of the total.

Voting in all 12 parishes was very light as little attention was paid and less controversy heard in the race that decided who would be one of the seven judges to sit on the state’s highest court.

In West Baton Rouge Parish, for example, only 7.4 percent of the registered voters went to the polls, officials said.

Three candidates were entered in Saturday’s election to fill the unexpired term of retiring Justice Fred Blanche Jr. of Baton Rouge. The 10-year term expires in 1988.

Cole, a Democrat who sits on the state 1st Circuit Court of Appeal in Baton Rouge, was the only judge in the race. A native of Alexandria, Cole, 60, was elected state representative in 1963 and served until his 1966 election to the 19th District Court. He was elected to the appeals court in 1979.

“I’d like to thank the people who voted,” Cole said from his home Saturday night. “I’m very grateful to my wife, my family and my children.” Cole also thanked John Campbell Jr., his campaign manager, and Wendell Foushee, his campaign treasurer, saying, “They did a marvelous job. They helped me get elected.”

“I’d like to congratulate the other candidate, Ms. Cooper,” he said. “She ran a vigorous and clean campaign.”

When reminded that he neglected to mention Tyler’s name in his statement, Cole said:

“That’s right, I didn’t.”

Contacted at his office, Tyler said he was disappointed the turnout was light, but said he enjoyed the campaign.

“I thought we’d get a better turnout on election day, but when you work for something, you do your best and expect better results.”

Tyler said he wished Cole well in his new position.

“I’d like to congratulate the winner,” he said. “I feel that, in the political process, people have to be given a choice, and the people made their choice tonight.”

Tyler, 64, has practiced law since graduating from the LSU Law School in 1951.

Contacted at the Holiday Inn on Airline Highway, Cooper said she didn’t want to comment on the outcome of the race until the official results had been counted.

Cooper, 55, is a lawyer with 28 years of general legal practice in the Baton Rouge area.

She outdistanced Cole and Tyler in St. Tammany Parish, taking 3,008 votes, while Cole received 2,439 and Tyler had 703.

East Baton Rouge Parish Registrar of Voters Nat Bankston said 22 voters cast absentee ballots.

Cole will be sworn in May 19.