In this, the 30th year of The Athens NEWS Best of Athens Readers' Choice Awards, for the third consecutive year we employed a two-round voting process.

In previous years, Best of Athens offered a single round in which participants wrote down their choices, and the top vote-getters won the category, with second- and third-place finishers also being recognized with certificates. From 2017 to this year, we have started with a nominating round, similar to the single round from past years. Then, the five top vote-getters from the nominating round are listed in the final round for each category (though in some cases, where entries tied for fifth place, we offered six or seven choices). In a few cases, where only three or four finalists received votes, we offered fewer than five choices.

Online voting at www.athensnews.com took place during much of January and early February, with voting in the final round ending at midnight on Feb. 7.

This year we received 2,828 validated votes in the final round, more than twice as many as the 1,392 validated last year. All told, some 146,376 votes were entered in all categories (meaning the system notched a vote each time someone made a selection in a category). That number last year was 51,212, so obviously we did something different this year to boost the voting. As was the case last year, we required participants to vote in at least 15 categories in order for their votes to be counted.

Like last year, in the “People” section, “Public Figure” category, somebody who’s not exactly a person won first place: A cat, in fact, Pumpkin the Cat at the Athens County Board of Elections to be precise. Pumpkin not only won this category but notched the most votes of any other selection in this year’s Best of Athens, some 1,458. Second place for “Public Figure,” DJ Barticus, drew 346 votes. So congrats, Pumpkin!

In the Best of Athens write-ups that we include in today’s issue and the next issue, on Feb. 18, we list the winners, along with in most cases, second through fifth place (or infrequently, sixth or seventh). Today’s section results include “People,” “Places” and “Foodies Favorites.”

We thank our readers who devoted their valuable time to completing the ballots and returning them before the deadline. We also give a very big shout-out to Cheryl Powers, interactive media coordinator for APG Media of Ohio, who set up the online survey and tabulated the results.

Thanks again for your help with our survey this year. Without you, we’d have a survey with zero votes, and what fun would that be?

Find Best of Athens Round 1 results on pages 10-20 of today’s issue