

Drain candidates agree on merger

By LINDA TAYLOR

The race for Oakland County Drain Commissioner is gaining importance as more duties of the department of public works (DPW) are being splintered into the drain office.

Running for drain commissioner are Republican incumbent George Kuhn of West Bloomfield, 31, a former state senator, and political novice Paul Cavanaugh of Troy, 23, the surprising winner of the Democratic nomination.

Both candidates favor merging the drain and DPW offices into a public works commission. But Cavanaugh qualifies his support by saying more study is needed before a merger actually takes place. He cites that neighboring Macomb County is realizing a savings of almost \$200,000 by merger of its departments.

Kuhn, a strong advocate of the merger, to the chagrin of GOP county executive incumbent Daniel Murphy, has gradually been granted more and more responsibilities formerly associated with the DPW office.

In a meeting Sept. 30 the county board of commissioners tabled action on giving the drain office control over solid waste disposal. The tabling was requested by Murphy, Kuhn said.

On June 3, the drain commissioner was designated the agent for water and sanitary projects, formerly handled by DPW. "We have two-thirds of the DPW projects now. But there's still duplication all over," Kuhn said.

OTHER DUTIES of the office include lake-level control of 33 lakes, administration of the County Soil Erosion Program, operation of aquatic weed harvesters, inspection of subdivision plans for storm water facilities, serving on the county parks and recreation commission and serving as agent and administrator for a sewerage disposal system which serves more than half the county's population.

Kuhn emphasizes the office deals with "big dollars," adding that the county sold \$25 million in bonds for drain projects in 1973.

He said his own "major project" is fighting water and sewer rate hikes set by the Detroit Water Department so far upheld by the courts.

If re-elected Kuhn hopes to complete merger of the drain and DPW offices. He continues to be "a catalyst for the state" in drain and environmental projects, and "get government back the industry-on time schedules."

His interest in scheduling is a carryover from years at Ford Motor Co., where he

on leave from Ford and expects to return there if defeated.

Kuhn and Cavanaugh share common interests in saving the environment. Kuhn describes the drain commissioner's responsibility as involving "construction and moving of earth equally balanced with an attempt at ecological protection of the land."

CAVANAGH, WHO is seeking his first political office, said he chose the drain office "because of its monumental impact and its being instrumental in environmental protection."

He said if elected he would work closely with the State Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, Michigan Conservation Commission and the state legislature in encouraging preservation of resources and land-use planning.

Cavanaugh, a native of Warren, said he has been involved with city politics at a supportive level since 1971.

"I've always been too young to seek office and have just worked for other people. Now I have a BA in business management from Eastern Michigan University and am 23."

The proposed merger of the drain and DPW offices is on the Democratic platform and he, therefore, supports it.

But he says before any merger is approved, he would like to see figures on how it would affect unemployment, contracts already let and any ecological considerations.

He thinks "new concepts in drainage" need to be studied including water retention basins.

He sees a subtheme of the drain job as "promoting community relations."

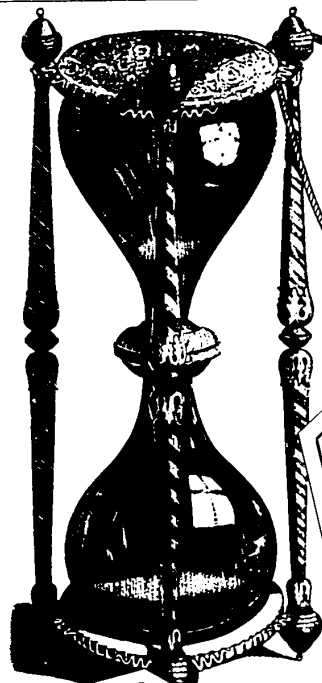
He favors civic associations and having county officials "more accessible to cities."

The president of an environmentalist group, the Society for Preservation of Bogs and Other Natural Resources, he pledges to enforce wetlands ordinances if elected, and help form lake associations.

"I'm all for expansion and development," Cavanaugh, a former parks and recreation worker, said. "I realize it's needed for a tax base. But it has to be balanced with a degree of environmental concern. Every lake and pond can't be saved, but we need balance."

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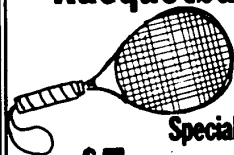
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