

# Oakland Democrats regroup, pick '86 targets

By Tim Richard  
Staff writer

Democrat Mary Ryan Taras agrees wholeheartedly with the Republicans: "This is a very even county."

Taras, who chairs the Oakland County Democratic Party, admits "we got creamed" in 1984. But her organization is gearing up for a comeback in 1986, when Gov. James Blanchard, a Pleasant Ridge resident, is up for re-election.

And she has hopes of recapturing several state legislative seats and three or four county commissioner seats which the GOP took over in the past two or three elections.

DEMOCRATS use the same statistics Republicans use. Democratic U.S. Sen. Don Riegle collected 52 percent of the Oakland County vote in 1982, so it's unquestionably a marginal county.

That year, Democratic candidates for the Oakland County Board of Commissioners won 50 percent of the vote, she said, but captured only 10 of the 27 seats because of an apportionment plan which favored incumbent Republicans.

Taras of Birmingham and Darlene Berent, the paid executive director of the party, talked frankly of their goals and methods recently in their new office at 806 Liverpools, between Eight and Nine Mile roads in Ferndale. (They'll hold open house from 3:30 to 7 p.m. next Thursday, Oct. 3, with champagne punch and hors d'oeuvres.)

Party headquarters used to be in Birmingham. "We moved our office to the south end because it's our traditional vote base, and this is a larger office with more work space. It's evidence we have been successful in fund raising," Taras said.

"We want to have a satellite office in the north end, somewhere in the Pontiac-Waterford area, our other vote base."

EACH MONDAY evening, Democrats gather socially in Machine Gun Kelly's, a watering spot on Main Street north of 12 Mile in Royal Oak owned by a friendly Democrat.

"We have something planned each time — an indoor golf tournament, a '50s party, a euchre tournament," said Berent. "More gets done in bars than in a formal meeting."

Taras, a Birmingham Seaborn High School history teacher, agrees, pointing to the precedent America's Founding Fathers set in Virginia's Raleigh Tavern. "You don't pass formal resolutions, but you do get a lot more done," she said. "If this seems successful, we hope to do it in different parts of the county."

A regular Bingo game in Green Acres Hall on 13 Mile "keeps the office alive and helps us have full-time paid staff," Taras added.

The staff includes Berent, a former UAW activist and '84 candidate for drain commissioner; Wanda Reager, office manager; Kay Brady, commun-



Mary Ryan Taras substance and tactics

ications; Lee Myren, office secretary; Don Falkenbury, field worker with clubs; and Tina Reager, clipping and general assistance.

MORE FORMAL Oakland Democratic meetings are being held to equip the faithful for the 1986 campaign.

On an August Saturday, 75 precinct delegates attended a half-day training session addressed by Lt. Gov. Martha W. Griffiths.



Darlene Berent Bingo pays the staff

"Precinct delegates are the most important people in the party. They are the party. That was Martha Griffiths' message," Taras said.

Besides being elected by voters to attend district conventions, Berent said, precinct delegates also are expected to identify friendly voters in their neighborhoods, deliver material and call them on election day to remind them to vote.

An October session, Taras said, will be on the state Democratic Party — its role in campaigns, finance and public relations. In January the topic will be the precinct organization, and April's session will be "Putting It All Together."

"BY THAT time, they (party workers) should not only have identified the Democrats but go through the registered voter list. If they're Republicans, we leave 'em alone. If they're marginal, we try to swing them."

Local clubs are key to the structure. There is one for southwest Oakland, Farmington-Farmington Hills, Birmingham-Bloomfield-West Bloomfield and so on.

"We meet regularly with the club chairs — every other month," said Taras. "They stimulate one another, and it gives all of them a county identity."

At county committee meetings, on the second Tuesday of every month, County commissioners report on their minority efforts to bend the GOP's priorities. Blanchard's office has sent spokesmen to brief them on the governor's economic accomplishments.

"That is consistent," said Taras, "with our effort to educate party people in the substance of politics as well as the nuts and bolts. If we only know nuts and bolts, we can't effectively counter arguments."

About 2,000 persons hold Democratic Party memberships. Most pay \$10. Retirees and students pay \$2.

WHERE WILL Oakland Democrats target their efforts in 1986? Favorite son Blanchard is a priority, and his recovering popularity will be counted on to strengthen the ticket. No U.S. senator is up for re-election in '86. U.S. representatives seem locked in place until the 1990 census, but Democrats see chances for legislative gains.

Priority: ● 65th House District, in Madison Heights and Troy, which Republican law student Gregory Gruse captured from former educator Willard Webb.

● 68th House District, Royal Oak, held by two-term Republican Shirley Johnson.

● 20th House District, Waterford and White Lake townships, held by Claude Trim, in his first term as a Republican after switching parties.

● 9th Senate District, Rochester and Pontiac areas plus northeastern Oakland, won in a special election by Republican Rudy Nichols after '83 winner Philip Martin was recalled in a tax revolt.

● 16th Senate District, Troy, Birmingham and Royal Oak areas, held by freshman Republican Doug Cruce.

"I'd like to give Cruce a fight. It's a marginal district," said Taras.

● A Ferndale area seat and two or three unspecified seats on the Oakland County board, where Democrats are an 18-9 minority.

## Tough state curbs sought for ATVs

States would be required to license and provide for the training of operators of all-terrain vehicles, under a bill sponsored by U.S. Rep. John Conyers, D-Detroit.

"Since 1982, there have been some 285 deaths and 155,000 injuries caused by motorized three-wheeled tri-cycles commonly known as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs)," said Conyers in introducing HR 3325.

"A shocking fact is that 22 percent of these deaths and injuries involved children between the ages of 5-12. Additionally, 46 percent of the fatalities and injuries are associated with children age 16 years and under."

Noting that sales have increased from 136,000 in 1980 to a projected 780,000 this year, Conyers said:

"AS SALES of ATVs have risen, so have the rates of deaths and accidents. . . For example, an estimated 28,000 ATV-related injuries were treated in hospital emergency rooms nationwide during the first quarter of 1985 — 80 percent higher than the estimated injuries treated during the same period in 1984."

"HR 3325 would require states to adopt a minimum age standard for operators of ATVs. The legislation also requires licensing of ATV operators after completing a training course, and prohibits the operation of all-terrain vehicles on the roads and highways."

"ATVs are inherently unsafe," Conyers said. "Their design structure, which includes the use of oversized soft tires, makes them very unstable and prone to flipping over backward, tipping over forward or sideways."

"The Consumer Product Safety Commission is currently examining the safety problems of ATVs, and among the options being considered is a total recall of all three-wheeled ATVs."

"MOST STATES have no age, licensing, and safety requirements regarding the use of ATVs, and children as low as 5 years old are permitted to operate them, despite the fact that one needs special skills to cope with the unique handling requirements associated with operating all-terrain vehicles."

"Furthermore, some states consider these vehicles as motorcycles and permit them to be operated on roads."

"Even the manufacturers of all-terrain vehicles say that they were not intended for road use because of the design characteristics which make them unstable on paved roads."

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