

Upward bound

From intern to Blanchard campaign aide

By Tim Richard
staff writer

'I want to communicate a good message to the public and have it interpreted correctly — and do it well.'

— Lisa Grayson
press secretary for
Gov. Blanchard's re-election bid



Press secretary Rick Cole got in touch with her and hired her.

Grayson said she was hired as assistant press secretary for special events and special projects.

Part of her work was the routine task of calling local media in corners of the state where Blanchard would be appearing.

BLANCHARD HAS gained a reputation of doing more cultivating of local media than preceding governors — sometimes to the annoyance

of regulars in the State Capitol press corps.

But there have been more important projects for Grayson. Among them: the Midwest Governors' Conference, the "solvent" project and the widely-publicized State of the State preview, in which Blanchard went on public TV to answer questions before presenting his 1986 speech to the Legislature.

The "solvent" project was her most interesting one. It involved a week of events across Michigan to celebrate state government's paying off its accumulated debts.

"They could have signed a bunch of papers at a desk," said Grayson. Instead there was an event in Frankfort to emphasize tourism, another in Macomb County to emphasize prison construction, another in Traverse City, and so on.

"THE THEME was brought through in each of those events," she said. "I want to communicate a good message to the public and have it interpreted correctly — and do it well."

Being a campaign press secretary can be a springboard to another important job. Blanchard's 1982 campaign press secretary was Elizabeth Howa, a veteran Democratic leader and corporate manager who now directs the state Department of Labor. Press secretaries for other governors have wound up as department heads and even horse racing stewards.

But Grayson said she has no governmental or political ambitions.

At Gov. James Blanchard's side these days is a 24-year-old former West Bloomfield resident who worked her way up from intern to campaign press secretary. She was on hand to help explain why Blanchard chose to make his announcement for re-election from the gymnasium of Roosevelt Elementary School in Ferndale, a school Blanchard attended as a child.

"We seek a very creative way to tell the people of Michigan what we're doing," she said.

Grayson, who is married to Jim Mitzel, a UPI reporter who formerly lived in Birmingham, will handle press relations, reporting to campaign manager Gary Bachula.

SHE WAS raised in West Bloomfield, attended Bloomfield Hills Andover High, and in 1983 earned a degree in communications from Michigan State University, Blanchard's alma mater.

She served a six-month internship in the governor's news office. She was working for PR Associates, a Detroit public relations firm, when a full-time job opened up on the governor's public relation staff.

3-level I-696 interchange will cost \$30 million plus

A three-level interchange on the new I-696 freeway will cost more than \$30 million, the Michigan Department of Transportation said.

Walter Toebe Construction Co. of Wilcox was apparent low bidder at \$30,263,000 to build the interchange taking the freeway over Woodward in Pleasant Ridge and Royal Oak.

Scheduled for completion in summer of 1989, the job also includes nine bridges, service roads and retaining walls.

The project is one of the few remaining segments of the I-696 freeway, which provides a northern bypass around Detroit from Lake St. Clair to Novi.

EIGHT MILE from Telegraph to

the Southfield freeway will be widened and resurfaced under another contract, MDOT said.

The new width will be eight lanes in a 2.8-mile segment in Detroit and Southfield. Low bidder was Cadillac Asphalt Paving Co. of Novi at \$3.1 million.

Besides widening, the work involves curbs, gutters, resurfacing, concrete sidewalks, upgraded signs, traffic signals, sewers and drainage structures.

It is scheduled for completion in November.

Final approval of both contracts is required by the State Transportation Commission and State Administrative Board.

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