

# Can Horatio Alger govern Michigan?

## Chrysler: State like business

Fourth in a four-part series on the Republican gubernatorial candidates.

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

**I**F HE can become a millionaire in 10 years doing automobile conversions, then Richard Chrysler can manage Michigan better than Democratic Gov. James J. Blanchard — right?

That's the Horatio Alger "American Dream" question that Chrysler hopes voters will answer with a "yes" in the Aug. 4 Republican primary.

Chrysler, who has never run for public office in his 43 years, is making it The Issue. Except for an outline position on liability insurance, he has almost no platform. He fields as many questions as possible with excerpts from his autobiography.

"I'm the only candidate with that real life experience of building a business in some of the toughest economic times the state has ever witnessed," he told an Economic Club luncheon in Lapeer last week. "Jim Blanchard has never held a private sector job."

HIS FIRM, Cars & Concepts, is on Grand River Road in Livingston County's Green Oak Township. Privately held, the firm issues no earnings statement.

But indications are it's profitable, or at least desirable: 1) Some executives are seeking to buy shares of ownership, and 2) Chrysler has built a dream house on Woodland Lake in Brighton Township.

Polls vary, but all show Chrysler either leading or sharing the GOP lead against candidates who have been in public office a decade or more. The showing is based on Chrysler's self-financed television commercials. His appearances in newspapers, however, have been less flattering.

In luncheon and social conversation, the Lapeer business and professional people were aware of the

many controversies in Chrysler's private life — his out-of-court settlement in a sexual harassment suit, his problems with late payments of the single business tax, the incident when he took a state representative's marked parking slot in Lansing, his two divorces, the suit against him over the drowning of a construction foreman's son, his speeding arrests.

But no one asked the speaker publicly about them, even in unsigned written questions.

**AN EARLY** staff member on the campaign was Elaine Donnelly, Livonia publicist, anti-abortion activist and vocal ERA opponent. She quit on May 28, one day before the Detroit Free Press' expose headlined "The Man and the Image."

In an interview, Donnelly insisted the timing of her departure was "a coincidence." She said she knew about Chrysler's three marriages, but that the rest "really quite surprised me."

Donnelly said she resigned in order to do other things but added, "I still wish him well. I've heard him say he's had to fill out the balance sheets, had to let people go in the rougher times."

"It (the expose) has had its toll. It's stalled his momentum — just like Lucas and the Denny Nystrom thing. He may recover momentum later on."

"He's gutsy. He just might surprise people."

**FIRST QUESTION** at the Economic Club luncheon comes from a person who had heard William Lucas, the Wayne County executive, say his key issue is crime. What does Chrysler think?

"The four issues are jobs, taxes, education, crime," Chrysler answers. "Put people to work and you have less crime. Something like 67 percent of the meanest crimes are committed by repeat offenders and career criminals." He favors prison sentences mandated by law.

The next question zings him on his

position favoring "caps" for jury awards for non-economic damages in medical malpractice cases. "This must have come from a lawyer," Chrysler smiles.

The questioner wants to know what benefits should be awarded a 12-year-old quadriplegic who has suffered "no economic loss." Is \$250,000 enough?

"Did I say \$250,000?" Chrysler asks rhetorically, eyebrows raised. State Senate Republicans, whose position Chrysler followed, had favored a \$250,000 cap, but the gubernatorial hopeful never had used that dollar figure.

He answers briefly that the injured 12-year-old would indeed be eligible for actual economic damages because he would never be able to work. Then Chrysler changes the subject to welfare:

"We spend more on welfare than on education," he said, referring to the state general fund budget. "We need to judge welfare by how many we take off welfare, not how many we put on."

**ANY IDEAS** on how to improve funding of public schools? he is asked.

Chrysler zeroes in on lottery money. "They" said the money would go for education, he replies — an argument not actually used by the chief proponents of the constitutional amendment that allows a state lottery.

"Money from the lottery needs to go to increased funding for education," he goes on.

He says that when lottery proceeds were added to the school aid fund, the Legislature simply voted less of the general fund for education; hence, the amount for education wasn't improved.

**WHAT SPECIFIC** liability insurance reforms does he advocate?

Chrysler's only campaign position paper is on this topic:

• "Caps on non-economic losses," as other states have.

• Sanctions for "frivolous" lawsuits.



BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Richard Chrysler, on the stump, answers most questions with excerpts from his autobiography of business success.

suits. If a damage suit is later proven to be frivolous, the plaintiff would have to pay attorney fees for the defendant.

• An end to the "deep pockets syndrome" — where plaintiffs sue a government or corporation only 10 percent responsible for their damages but expect to collect 100 percent of the judgment from that defendant.

• Making doctors "police their own."

• Arbitration of some medical malpractice claims.

The compromise bill passed in June by the state Legislature he calls "a laughing stock. It caps jury awards at \$225,000 except for death, dismemberment and disfigurement" — in other words, the exceptions are so broad as to make the cap meaningless.

**CHRYSLER IS** facing a governor with three college degrees, a Wayne County executive with two, a state representative with one, and an Oakland County executive with four years of college but no degree.

He is a Brighton High School graduate. Most heroes of Horatio Alger's turn-of-the-century novels had no college.

"My parents had no money for college," Chrysler said. "I went to work for Chevrolet, crawling in and out of 480 cars a day installing left-hand defroster cups."

"I got out — but I'll never forget those who are still there."

His lack of governmental experience is no handicap, he insists. "In government it's no different — it's dependent on the people you bring together."

## 3 hopefuls to face TV

Republican gubernatorial candidates Richard Chrysler, Colleen Engler and Daniel Murphy will discuss campaign issues in a live television program produced by WDIV-TV in conjunction with the League of Women Voters of Michigan.

"The Republican Gubernatorial Candidates Speak" will air at 7 p.m. Sunday, July 27, on Ch. 4 for one hour.

Live from the studios, the candidates will discuss key issues facing Michigan and answer questions from anchorman Mort Crim and a studio audience. Candidate William Lucas will not attend.

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Air, rear wiper, alloys

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Air, cassette, rear wiper

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