

Soronen looks beyond city politics

This is the first in a series about the race for the Republican nomination for the Oakland County Board of Commissioners 27th District seat, Democrat Steven Hill of Farmington Hills is in the Aug. 2 primary.

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Throwing her hat into the Oakland County Board of Commissioners 27th District race was no overnight decision for Jody Soronen.

"It was a difficult decision because I enjoy city politics," said the Farmington Hills mayor. "I had to consider that because should I succeed, I would have to give it up."

The 53-year-old Farmington Hills veteran councilwoman and community activist is running a downtown campaign with headquarters centered on her kitchen table and credenza behind her desk.

"My strategy is to be at as many places and let as many know as possible that I'm running and ask for their support," Soronen said.

Knocking on doors is about the only facet of campaigning she

County COMMISSION

doesn't plan to do. She will mail campaign leaflets and schedule at least one fund-raiser for the \$5,000-\$10,000 Soronen believes she will need to raise.

She is quiet about endorsements; she has received and is uncertain whether she will include them in her campaign literature. A lifelong Republican, she describes herself as "moderate-to-conservative."

THE MOTHER of three sons, ages 19, 21 and 24, Soronen calls her informal campaign a conscious decision. As in past campaigns, she is quite confident her husband, Rusty, will be right there pitching in whenever help is needed.

A 45-year Hills resident, Soronen is a familiar face in the community and not simply because of her 10 years on the city council. She is the executive director of the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce and a board member of the Farmington Downtown Development Authority. And then there is the list of community organizations, including current membership in the Farmington Exchange Club.

Soronen admits her familiar face and high visibility should be an advantage in her primary election campaign against opponent and former city councilman Donn Wolf. "I don't intend to take advantage of it (her position). It's not my desire to put the DDA or chamber board in a position to make statements about my campaign."

But she said she fully intends to use her resume of community and governmental service at the local, county and state levels to illustrate her capability to serve as the district's commissioner.

She is a veteran member of the Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments and Michigan Municipal League. Soronen also serves on the county's Private Industry Council and Community Growth Alliance.

WHILE SOME of her council colleagues are supporting Wolf, Soronen said she is not worried that the election will split the city council. "I think most of us have known each other long enough that I don't believe that will be a problem."

Soronen is not seeking major changes in county government. "Very honestly, I think Oakland County is quite well run. I have no idea to go in and upset apple carts," she said.

Nonetheless, Soronen has priorities: roads, solid waste, crime, jail facilities, parks and continued support of diversified business within the county.

Soronen's education and much of her professional work has been in the business world. Her experience in politics has been nurtured as an avocation and by hard work and interest. With no great political ambitions, Soronen began her community involvement "as the neighbor down the street."

She began working with her neighborhood homeowners association and homeowners council. She then stepped up to the city's beautification commission.

After working with people she has known for years, Soronen said she is aware of the changes the county commission election will bring. She will probably have to give up some of the involvement she has on state and regional organizations. Can she get in the gutter and play hard, partisan politics? "I honestly don't know, I'm not in the middle of it yet."

DESPITE HER years of involvement, Soronen said she has not forgotten how it feels to be newly elected. "You have the tendency not to want to make people angry," she said. "When you're first elected, you are extremely conscious of every

vote out there. But you have to make a decision of what is right."

Soronen recognizes that the public often sees county government as distant and unfamiliar territory. She would like to change that. She expects her high visibility in the community should help in bringing county government closer to home.

But she is developing some ideas for keeping in touch with residents and keeping residents in touch with county government.

"I had thought that one good possibility is a periodic newsletter with four-to-six items briefly letting people know what's happening," she said. "Working downtown will help. People often find through my office."



Jody Soronen
'difficult decision'

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Clarencville Board of Education members just can't find anything bad to say about Superintendent Michael Shibler.

"We talked for about a half hour and no negative comments came out," said board vice president Michael Manore, following a board meeting June 16. Board members conducted their annual review of the superintendent's performance at the meeting.

The board unanimously rated Shibler's performance "excellent." Manore praised Shibler for putting together a competent administrative staff, for providing timely information to board members and being available for questions, for good communication with the public and for working hard to urge voters to pass the recent Headlee override to

head off severe budget cuts.

Shibler also was cited for his knowledge of education issues, ability to handle difficult problems diplomatically, ability to identify potential weaknesses in the schools and propose solutions that can be implemented and for attending extra-curricular events.

Manore praised the superintendent's "110 percent commitment to the Clarencville School District." Shibler started as Clarencville schools superintendent in July 1984.

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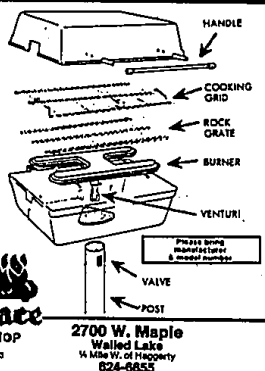
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