

'Old, seasoned soldier' plans to defend his turf

Three races are contested for Oakland County administrative offices Aug. 4. Candidates for drain commissioner were profiled July 13. County executive candidate profiles will appear Thursday.

By JUDITH DONER BEINE
STAFF WRITER

His office is a pig pen but a neat one at that.

Oakland County Sheriff John Nichols began collecting toy pigs

"when the hippies were calling the police pigs in the 1960s." A couple of hundred pepper his office from a giant piggy bank to the one he began with — a black wrought iron miniature.

He says the vast array serves

more than a decorative purpose. "People come in mad and pretty soon they're window shopping." Nichols has been entrenched as Oakland County sheriff for eight years, but is not taking his re-election for granted. He is planning a full campaign.

"I'm an old and seasoned soldier. I never underestimate my enemies," the silver-tongued Nichols says.

At 73, he doesn't yet know what he will spend to try and woo voters against his August primary opponent, Paul Molin, a Beverly Hills police equipment salesman. If successful, he'll take on Democrat Seymour Hundley, Jr. of Troy in November.

Says he'll stay

He denies running only to resign during his term, leaving it up to the Republican-dominated Oakland County Board of Commissioners to appoint his successor. "I sure as hell wouldn't go through all this trouble to run and then retire," the tell-as-he-sees-it Nichols responds.

"I have no plans of retiring unless the good Lord calls me to his staff

— and I don't think he will."

The sheriff's salary, \$80,341, and \$49.5 million budget is set by the Oakland County Board. But, "My boss is the electorate. Every four years you get a report card."

Nichols' police credentials are impressive: A uniformed patrol officer, he rose through the ranks to head the Detroit Police Department in 1970. He left to run against Coleman Young for mayor of Detroit. "I gave him his closest race," Nichols says, with obvious pride.

He served as undersheriff for Oakland County for three years, then resigned to become Farmington Hills police chief. He won election as sheriff in 1985.

He also has extensive military service.

The combination of police and military training helped shape the concept of an alternative to jail that Nichols can endorse — the heavily militaristic Oakland County boot camp.

He is "100 percent for capital punishment." He is against halfway houses and tethering prisoners. But he offers proof that the boot camp — begun in the fall of 1990 and which just graduated its 10th

group of prisoners — is working.

Of 112 graduates, so far just six have returned to crime, Nichols said.

Its expansion is one of his priorities along with increasing the number of beds in the work-release program; fully implementing the new county-wide communications system and adding to the number of communities serviced by the Sheriff's Department such as Rochester Hills.

Out from under

His biggest accomplishment, he says, was getting the department out from under a consent judgment based on a lawsuit filed by inmates under Nichols' predecessor, Johannes Spreen.

He heads a department of about 700, charged with a number of different duties. Besides the 120 deputies contracted to other communities, a marine division patrols Oakland County lakes, while other officers police the courts, deliver prisoners to the state and man the jail.



DAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Outspoken Sheriff: John Nichols says he has never feared for his life, except: "I wasn't too happy during the war."

Civilian rival strikes out at sheriff's spending, age

By WAYNE PEAL
STAFF WRITER

You've heard the radio spots — a sheriff's challenger ridicules the incumbent as someone who'd rather attend a parade than administer his department.

Pay no attention. That's the Wayne County sheriff's race.

In Oakland County, the sheriff's primary is much quieter.

Still, GOP challenger Paul Molin isn't above taking incumbent John Nichols to task.

For starters, there's the department budget.

"It's growing out of control,"

Molin said. "People throughout the county are complaining they're paying more and getting less."

There's also jail overcrowding. "We're acting like it isn't happening," he said.

Then, there's the issue of the sheriff's age.

Molin, a 49-year-old Beverly Hills resident, is young enough to be the 73-year-old Nichols' son.

His implication: Nichols won't serve out his term, if elected, perhaps leaving a hand-picked successor to run the department.

If anyone replaces the two-term incumbent, Molin believes it should be him.

A manufacturer's representative who sells law enforcement equipment — including body armor — to police departments, Molin is counting on contacts he's made in his bid to unseat Nichols.

"I have a lot of friends in law en-

forcement and they very quietly wish he (Nichols) would retire," Molin said. "But nobody in law enforcement is going to go on the record about that."

Some have questioned how many friends Molin has in the law enforcement community.

"I've known him for several years, but I wouldn't say he's that well known," Farmington Hills police Chief William Dwyer said. Dwyer added he was officially neutral in the race.

Molin is a member of several police organizations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Sheriff's Association and Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police.

On budget issues, Molin said he would work hard to ensure services were performed efficiently.

He also favors expanding patrol operations — a potential de-

partment money-maker.

As for the jail, Molin favors hiring a non-profit corporation to build a new facility — though he draws the line on privatization.

"I don't favor having a jail staffed and operated outside the sheriff's department, but I think the voters will support it (the non-profit corporation) as a new and better way of building a jail."

On other law enforcement issues, Molin favors greater training to make officers more sensitive in handling domestic disputes.

"Many officers don't know what they can do, what they should do," he said.

He favors capital punishment, but only as part of a "comprehensive program" that strictly limits the number of capital offenses.

"Unless it's part of a comprehensive program, I don't see how anybody can support it," he said.



JOHN STORME/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

No problem: Paul Molin says the fact that he isn't a cop is no problem. All but his top officer "would continue to answer to police."

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