

No replacement yet for Blumberg

BY PAT McPHERY
STAFF WRITER

L. Brooks Patterson will likely take his time in naming a replacement for an embattled appointee, Dr. Edwin Blumberg, who withdrew his name for consideration as director of Oakland County Institutional and Human Services. Patterson will likely seek nominations from a number of different sources before picking a replacement, said Carmen V. Talbot, a spokesman for the executive-elect's transition team.

"There won't be any announcement as such," Talbot said Friday. "But Brooks will consult with numerous people before making his decision."

Talbot made her comments about 24 hours after Patterson issued a one-page press release saying Blumberg, a Farmington Hills physician, had taken his name out of consideration for appointment as director of Institutional and Human Services.

Blumberg asked that his name be withdrawn "in view of the controversy surrounding my background," according to the press release. "I wish Mr. Patterson and his new administration well as they prepare to tackle the challenges that face Oakland County in the months and years ahead."

Blumberg is one of 18 appointees named by Patterson to run Oakland County government from the executive's office. Within days after the announcement, however, stories surfaced about Blumberg's twice filing for bankruptcy. Those stories also outlined allegations that he owed money to Internal Revenue Service and the nursing homes he once owned had been cited for unsanitary conditions.

Patterson seemed undaunted by the controversy and remained firm in his support for Blumberg. He attributed Blumberg's difficulties with state health care regulators to "ruthless" state inspectors.

In the press release Patterson said, "I understand the position Dr. Blumberg has taken and I support him in that decision. He is a fine person who I do not wish to see (him) embarrassed nor hurt anymore in the political process. He is a gentleman and professional, and I regret that he will not have the opportunity to prove himself."

Blumberg's withdrawal possibly saved the Patterson administration an embarrassing setback, according to county commissioner Donald Jensen, R-Birmingham, chairman of the General Government committee. On Jan. 7, that committee was scheduled to begin reviewing Patterson appointees.

"Mr. Blumberg probably would have been rejected," Jensen said Friday. "A number of commissioners were very concerned about his administrative ability as well as allegations that his nursing homes were unsanitary."

"Institutional and human services is an important department, and commissioners were concerned about having a director with his reputation."

Had he been approved, Blumberg would have had an annual salary of \$84,212. His responsibilities would have included the medical examiner's office, Children's Village, the county juvenile home, as well as the Oakland County Medical Care Facility, a 120-bed care facility.

'Mailman Jim' hangs up satchel

BY VALERIE OLANDER
STAFF WRITER

Through 40 years of rain, sleet and snow, two dog bites and many worn out shoes, Jim McGraw has hand delivered the good news and the bad in Birmingham.

As a mail carrier, he has brought residents their letters from loved ones, holiday cards, Social Security checks, and, yes, the dreaded bills.

"At some time or another I've delivered a piece of mail to every house in the Birmingham area," said McGraw, who retired last month.

Around town he's known as Mailman Jim, especially among the businesses in the downtown district along Maple and Woodward, where he was frequently seen walking door to door with a sack of mail hanging from his shoulder.

"I remember him coming into the grocery store when I was just a small child," said Nancy Peabody, whose father owned the former market on Hunter which is now Peabody's restaurant.

"He's the epitome of a postman with his friendly smile and warm personality. He's a class act," she added.

McGraw, a tall, lanky man with a jovial demeanor who looks somewhat out of character without his postal uniform, said his route was like having a family. He befriended most, even the dogs with the rare exception of two — Whiskey and Honey.

McGraw may have wanted to take a nip of whiskey himself after Whiskey, the pooch, lunched out at him after the owner opened the door and nipped him in a most delicate place.

"(The other carriers) thought it was pretty funny. They made a big joke out of it. Everyone had a laugh," he said.

Then there was Honey, a small honey-colored cocker spaniel. She also nipped McGraw. That bite, luckily, was in the leg. The bite was enough to draw some blood, which the pet owner apparently was horrified to see when McGraw lifted his pant leg. The woman fainted, McGraw said.

"I love dogs, and I think that they sensed it. They didn't bother me much," he said.

Birmingham has changed dramatically in 40 years. McGraw remembers when he first began his route in 1952.

The city had a small-town flavor, he said. Someone was usually home when he would come by since women at the time hardly ever worked. Now, it seems everyone is working when the mail carrier comes by, he said.

"People who I knew years ago when they were first married . . . now I deliver to their kids. One little girl who was working at a little children's apparel store said to me one day, 'My mother and dad said you brought me my first baby gift,'" McGraw said. "Time sure marches on."

A lot can also be told about a person by what's in their mailbox, McGraw confided. However, that's a privacy issue that only the treasury department can legally get out of him, he said.

"You can't appreciate 40 years unless you do it," he added. "It's like a marriage. You have to work at it. You have to be dedicated."

Working 40 hours a week over the 40 years, McGraw has calculated that he has punched in 81,000 hours on the clock, and walked about 8 miles a day.

The Monday after he officially retired, McGraw walked his route once again, this time taking pictures of the friends he has made at Gwynn's, Machus 100, the Polo Shop, The Community House, Baldwin Library, the Birmingham Theatre, Peabody's and of course police horse Sgt. Spanky and Birmingham's mounted police officer John Heppner. There are 125 pictures in all.

"Birmingham is very special to me and always will be," McGraw said. "I took these pictures so I can cherish the memories. I didn't do it for the hell of it. I did it because these people meant something to me."

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