

Small businessman takes his case to Washington

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

For Steve Hardesty, being elected as a representative to the White House Conference on Small Business was a pleasant surprise, and an opportunity he wouldn't have missed.

Hardesty, 34, has owned the 7-Eleven store on Middlebelt at Nine Mile for 10 years. He hopes to use his knowledge to push issues for small business owners and franchisees that he pushed in Chicago, May 11-12, to help them become more independent and productive will be part of the national conference June 12-16 in Washington.

First initiated in 1980, the conference met again in 1988. This will be only the third such conference, but it has been an effective tool for small business owners, who employ 80 percent of American workers.

"Of the issues that were brought before the conference in 1980, every one of them has been addressed and acted on," he said. "We are going to recommend that there be a conference every four years."

The conference will include 36 elected representatives from Michigan, including Hardesty, and other appointed representatives, who will discuss many issues facing small business owners. Hardesty said at the state small business conference in April, where he was selected, 58 issues and concerns were singled out. At the regional conference in Chicago, various state delegations will combine concerns and come up with a final list of 60 issues to take to Washington.

"There is a lot of overlap," he said. "But we'll do some parsing down."

"But you can be sure that two issues will be on every state and region's agenda when the conference convenes in the nation's capitol in June: taxes and government paperwork."

Hardesty said he'll be part of a Main Street Committee at the conference, which deals with a variety of issues from community development to changing technology.

The Farmington resident said he's been active with the American Franchisees Association, which

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Steve Hardesty
businessman

will have a strong contingent at the conference.

"Taxation is a big issue that takes in everything from a proposal to depreciate machinery to a replacement of the income tax with a national sales tax," he said.

Filling out government forms is a problem for small business, which do not have the resources and whose managers must often wear many hats, he said.

"What we'd like to do is eliminate a lot of duplication between different agencies of the government," Hardesty said.

Hardesty said he'd also like to get more concessions for franchisees in their overseas those businesses, there are no specific regulations protecting the franchisees.

Hardesty said after working in the auto parts business and as an investment advisor, he sank all he could into buying his 7-Eleven franchise. And he's proud of his accomplishments, despite his initial naivete.

"It was a lot of hard work and it's only the last three years that I've really been doing that well," he said. "There were many times that I was working hard and not really making money. That's when it's hard because you aren't having fun."

Hardesty said finding good help is just as hard or harder in the convenience store business as any other, because store managers can't afford to pay good wages.

"What I can really offer them (employees) is flexible hours," he said. "Right now I've got a real good



SHARON LEMIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Small business talk: "What I can really offer them (employees) is flexible hours. Right now I've got a good crew and a good manager," says 7-Eleven's Steve Hardesty.

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And like any business owner, the toughest job is the same.

"The hardest thing to do is fire someone," he said. "That's always been true. I haven't had to do that much and I'm better at it, but it's never easy. You don't know how important that job is to someone."

Hardesty said with its record of success in the past, the conference should produce results of Capital Hill.

"There is the cost of paying taxes and the cost of preparing taxes," he said. "If we can cut down on the preparation, that is like cutting taxes. It leaves more money for capital formation and investment."

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