

Nichols touts accomplishments as he seeks 4th term

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Is Sheriff John F. Nichols too frail to be re-elected?

At a time when the vitality of Republican presidential hopeful Robert Dole — five years younger than Nichols — is sometimes called into question, the sheriff insists he has the energy and vigor to thrive in the demanding world of law enforcement.

The issue came up Monday at a candidate night sponsored by two labor organizations within the sheriff's department — the Oakland County Sheriff's Deputies Association, about 525 members, and the Command Officer's Association, with 83 members.

The executive board of the deputies association has already endorsed incumbent Nichols. But members wanted to see the candidates face to face, according to association secretary Jami Allen.

Some deputies privately said, however, the association may reconsider its endorsement late this week at the organization's general meeting.

The subject of Nichols' well-being was broached — ever so gently — by one of his GOP rivals.

"I'd never question his (Nichols') intelligence," said Paul

A. Molin, 53, of Farmington Hills. "But his age and health are important factors (in the campaign), and we should be concerned."

Molin — who said being sheriff is an administrator's or manager's job as a cop's — said he is concerned that Nichols might not be able to serve out his complete term.

If that happened, said Molin, there would be great pressure from political bean-counters to appoint someone less concerned about public safety and the integrity of the department.

Nichols' vitality also came up during the question and answer period when somebody asked Nichols if he intended to serve out his full term or — as rumored — turn the job over to his undersheriff.

"Are you crazy," Nichols responded. "Do you think I'd go through all this (the campaign) to turn the job over to somebody else?"

Nichols, who turns 78 in November, bristled at any implication he was less qualified now than he was in 1984, when he was first elected — after a career that included being chief of police in Farmington Hills and police commissioner in Detroit.

He itemized some of his accomplishments, including

establishing what observers say is the most successful boot camps in the state.

Nichols has pointed criticism for GOP rival Gerald L. Carlin, the former captain of the Rochester Hills substation demoted to midnight jail duty during the infamous probe into the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.

Carlin, 41, said the demotion — and his subsequent vindication — had a beneficial effect, namely seeing other aspects of the sheriff's department during

the 10 months between his indictment and his resignation from the office.

For one thing, Carlin said, the sheriff's department should consider selling off valuable property in high rent districts — like the acres it has in Auburn Hills — and buying less expensive property. An abandoned, and presumably inexpensive, motel along Eight Mile Road, for example, might be suitable for jail facilities to service the southern part of the county, he said.

That didn't sit well with

Nichols, however. "One of my opponents thinks he knows how to run a jail because he worked there briefly," the sheriff said.

"But there's a big difference between working midnight and being responsible for the entire jail," the sheriff said.

Even something seemingly as simple as dealing with county commissioners is much more difficult than it appears, said Nichols. "When I first got this job, I tried to be kissy friendly (with county commissioners)," he said. "But then they started to

cut my budget, and I had to get tough."

"Sheriff Nichols takes criticism too seriously," Carlin said. "Too often the person who brings bad news gets his (or her) head bit off."

Molin said he'd improve morale by keeping an open-door policy, so the lowest deputy would have access to the man in charge.

But bigger problems are on the horizon, said Molin. Budget cuts and pressure to privatize the department are concerns.

Hogan cites abilities in campaign for sheriff

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

When he announced his candidacy for Oakland County Sheriff, Matthew E. Hogan III vowed he would never attack incumbent John F. Nichols or speak ill of his department.

Hogan, 46, commander of the State Police post in Brighton, was true to his word Monday when he shared the political spotlight with Nichols and other candidates at their first meeting of the campaign.

Nichols of Northville, Gerard

L. Carlin of Oakland Township and Paul A. Molin of Farmington Hills were the Republicans at a candidate night sponsored by the sheriff's deputies and command officers.

Not present were Republican candidates William A. Goodfellow of Pontiac and Michael L. Odette of Clarkston. Raymond B. L'Esperance of Davisburg was excluded from the ballot Friday when a judge agreed with county election officials who said L'Esperance could not be a candidate because he was not a registered voter.

Hogan is running in the Aug. 6 Democratic primary against Scott C. Good of Auburn Hills. Good was also a no-show.

The Republican victor will run against the winning Democrat in the Nov. 5 general election.

When Hogan, who expects to retire from the state police after 25 years, announced his candidacy in April, he said he has successfully worked with Nichols and his department for years. Thus, said Hogan, he has too much respect to wage a regular political campaign.

It showed Monday.

Hogan, for example, nodded to Nichols respectfully when he took the podium to detail his background and leadership qualities. He has the experience, Hogan emphasized, to lead the department into the 21st century.

Among his qualifications, Hogan said, was the ability to resolve internal problems in a professional manner. He's a tough negotiator, Hogan said, but he regards police unions as part of the process of resolving disputes and individual grievances.

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