

Patterson cites county strengths

JOY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County's incumbent executive, L. Brooks Patterson, candidly admits he's lucky.

Since he was elected four years ago, Oakland's economic climate has been hot, almost superheated. Patterson is happy to be the county's best cheerleader, as well as the political beneficiary of good times.

"It's nothing I've done," Patterson modestly tells anybody willing to listen, "it's the business community that's done all the work. But Oakland County is the engine that drives Michigan's economic train."

And what an engine it is. Patterson has been speaking to chambers of commerce, service clubs and other groups talking about how the county's has more business activity than some states. He glows when talking about how fortune 500 companies with offices in Oakland County are making a mark in the global economy, with more new jobs than the rest of the state combined.

While downplaying his own role, Patterson does mention a few things he's initiated. His Business Round Table, for example, pulls together business executives, entrepreneurs, educators and local officials who make suggestions and recommendations.

Based on the round table's input, the county has established a U.S. Export Assistance Center at 250 Elizabeth Lake Road where entrepreneurs can confer with the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Small Business Administration, and Oakland County officials about the intricacies of international trade.

The Round Table also recom-

mended the One Stop Shop, on the first floor of the executive's building, where businesses can retrieve vital information — about a plant site, for example — with a few strokes of a computer keyboard.

To illustrate his management style, Patterson points to the way he addressed a \$24 million budget shortfall when he took office. "We did what was necessary," he said, "we cut the budget, we froze salaries and we merged functions."

As a result, he said, Wall Street upgraded the county's credit rating "saving us millions of dollars in interest over a decade."

The point is, Patterson, that Oakland County government is functioning better than it ever has in the past. And good government is good politics.

On the political front, Patterson has repeatedly said he is more committed to Oakland County than he is to political dogma. On one occasion — when he thought the occasion warranted it — he feuded with Republican Gov. John Engler and allied himself with Wayne County Executive Ed McNamara and Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer, both visible Democrats.

He's supported tax hikes — like the millage hike for mass transportation and the tax increase for Oakland Community College — while pushing for a cut in the county millage, however modest. Both, he said, would help county residents in the long run. Yet he recommended a 0.1 of a mill tax rate reduction for the county, one which was rejected by the Board of Commissioners. A reduction is now under consideration again.

But Patterson is among the first to acknowledge that his



L. Brooks Patterson, incumbent

biggest battle — and undoubtedly the most difficult — lies ahead. That, he said, is equalizing the amount of money Oakland residents and businesses get back from Lansing.

It's an issue that many have talked about over the decades, but none have effectively addressed.

"The county has been a cash

See Patterson, A12

Hughes touts his conservatism

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If Timothy C. Hughes had his way, he'd get elected as Oakland County Executive . . . and then work to eliminate the job.

As it is, the 36-year-old Kmart systems engineer from Rochester Hills is determined to offer voters in the Aug. 6 Republican primary a clear-cut choice.

They can vote for his primary opponent, incumbent L. Brooks Patterson. Or, Hughes insists, voters can cast their ballots for a "true conservative" like him who is unquestionably committed to lower taxes, less government and traditional values.

What? L. Brooks Patterson — known in many circles as "Mr. Republican" — isn't a "true conservative?"

That's right, according to Hughes who contends the

incumbent has supported too many tax increases — millages for SMART and Oakland Community College, to name two — and allowed county government to grow, and grow and grow.

Does the incumbent, asks the challenger, really need two deputies? Especially when there's only one vice president of the United States?

"I was wondering if the executive needs a deputy at all," said Hughes.

Furthermore, Hughes asks, does the county executive really need a liaison to the southern portion of the county?

Hughes is particularly critical of Patterson for not showing up at candidate nights such as the one last month sponsored by the Bloomfield Republican Women's Club.

"I understand what Patterson is doing," Hughes said. Conven-



Timothy C. Hughes, challenger

tional wisdom dictates that an incumbent shouldn't share the forum with an unknown challenger, lest in doing so give some stature.

But Hughes insists that by ducking him, Patterson is also shortchanging the voters. Voters deserve to see how the incumbent answers some of the issues he raises, Hughes said.

Why, Hughes cited as an

See Hughes, A12

Exec job has high visibility

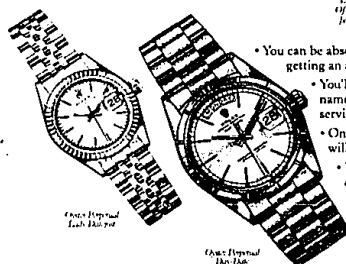
As the county's top administrator, the Oakland County executive is directly responsible for preparing the annual budget that last year surpassed \$460 million.

The job pays \$117,792 annually with benefits that include a county car, excellent health insurance . . . and high visibility.

The executive has direct responsibility for 2,300 of the county's 4,000 employees, including those who work for independently elected officials.

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