

Spin from page A1

Speaking to future candidates at the Coslick Center in Farmington Hills Saturday, Skubick thanked those who attended for taking some initiative.

"It scares me there are not enough people who are willing to get involved in the system," he said.

Which is not to say getting involved is easy, and Skubick acknowledged media types don't make it much easier.

"My job is not to make you look good. My job is not to win the election for you," he said to the standing room only crowd gathered for the "Money, Organization & Media" seminar. "My job as a journalist is to ask snotty, difficult questions that make you think on your feet."

Skubick proved his point with a participant who had been involved in a controversy over bow-hunting deer in Novi. In just a few minutes, he'd shot-gunned more than half a dozen pointed questions, from at least that many different angles.

"It's not the first question that I get what I'm looking for," Skubick explained. "It's the second or the third or the fourth. It's the follow-up questions that get you

Recruit from page A1

it's, instead of having three factions that don't work together, to all be under one umbrella."

She was referring to the chamber, downtown merchants and Farmington Downtown Development Authority.

"Quite frankly," Flaharty said, "the chamber and DDA haven't worked in partnership very well together lately."

Communication problems between the Farmington Area Founders Fest Inc. board of directors and merchants about issues relating to the annual festival and parade fueled the February re-formation of the DFBA.

Flaharty said she will discuss with the merchants how the DFBA previously was a chamber sub-committee, with bylaws and officers, from 1986 until 1996 when the association went dormant.

Last week, the chamber board of directors voted to dissolve those previous bylaws, paving the way for a new agreement.

Flaharty said merchants would not be required to join the chamber to be active in the sub-committee, although several already are members.

Benefits of becoming a sub-committee, Flaharty explained, include the chamber's ability to "facilitate" meetings. In addition, the chamber could handle time-consuming legal matters and paperwork needed for an organization to be officially recognized by the state as a nonprofit group.

But merchants, after holding Wednesday's meeting, could decide to say no thanks and remain a "totally informal" volunteer group, Flaharty added.

Weighing the role

One of the association members, Skip Rosenthal of Books Abound, Tuesday said he was aware of the meeting, but not aware that becoming a chamber sub-committee was all-but-finalized. Or anything close to it.

"Not to my knowledge," Rosenthal said. "It's not been offered yet. It's very informal."

Rosenthal said he hoped that, if the speculation was true, that it would not have an impact on the association itself. He said merchants want to maintain the association, to keep an active voice about downtown issues.

Merchants will weigh how much of an impact, or role, they would have staying on top of those issues if they were a chamber sub-committee versus remaining independent, said Jeff Pavlik, co-owner of the Farmington Bakery.

But valuable discussion of difficult issues likely would take a different form if the association - now a community forum more than anything else - opts to become a chamber sub-committee.

"If they wanted to take a position on things, that would have to go through our board of directors," Flaharty said. "That point is made in a letter (sent by the chamber to merchants). Any policy or position would have to be filtered through."

Farmington City Manager Frank Luthoff Tuesday said it would be a "great idea to bring the Downtown Farmington Business Association into a committee status."

CAMPAIGNING

cians often clash, Skubick urged candidates to develop a good working relationship with a reporter before a problem arises.

"If you do have that relationship, you know you'll have equal access to tell your story," he said.

"That's all you can hope for." Skubick shattered the myth of "unbiased" reporters and said what people should demand from journalists instead is fairness. He suggested tape recording interviews to ensure a defense when comments are taken out of

context and said candidates should beware of the words "off the record."

"Once the reporter turns the recorder off and closes the notebook, the interview is not over," he said. "From the time that reporter walks through the door, until the time you know he is safely at home, in bed asleep, you are on the record."

Skubick's best advice about whether to go "off the record" rested on the level of trust already established. A reporter might not use information directly, but could use it to get statements "on the record" from another source, he said.

In this day and age of seven-second sound bites, he said candidates should do what they can to control an interview, taking it at their own pace, rather than the reporter's. In addition, it's important to stick with the central message of their campaign.

Because Skubick hosts a public affairs television program on PBS, he offered the following advice about getting in front of the camera:

For men: No white socks, no pinkie rings, suits rather than sports coats, regular ties and over-the-kneecap stockings.

For women: Longer skirts or slacks, no gaudy jewelry and dress "appropriately."

Ask for a mirror before the cameras start rolling.

Have someone else watch while you speak and record yourself, to catch bad speech habits or mannerisms.

Look at the host, not the camera.

Ask for a glass of water, which will slow down the conversation and allow for a few extra seconds to formulate the answer to a difficult question.

No seersucker.

And finally, relax and have fun.

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