

In home state

Ford enjoys his last hurrah

By LYNN ORR

The home team did not deserve a glitzy pep rally for the faltering campaign. More than 15,000 spectators at Livonia's Wonderland Center Monday cheered the Ford campaign as it closed its last hurrah. J.P. McCarthy, Bill Carter, and Wayne Rogers were in evidence, and a big ending. The Ford campaign was over.

Many in the crowd were there to see the President, said the candidate. Garden City resident Mary Jane Hynes echoed the sentiments of others when she said, "It's a thrill of a lifetime. How often do you get to be close to the President? We may see him on his first day in office or his last," she said, referring to Tuesday's election. Followers accompanying Ford included 23 Congressional District candidate Carl Pursell and U.S. senatorial candidate Mary Esch, who rode with Ford from Metro Airport. The surprise of the rally was the box of the crowd audible when Ford introduced Esch.

THE PEP RALLY-type atmosphere was enhanced by balloons, punctuated with sports songs and boogie and musically accompanied by area high school marching bands including Livonia's Stevenson and Bentley, Garden City East and West, Westland's Wayne Memorial and John Glenn, Plymouth, Northville, Bedford Union, and Farmington's Harrison.

Garden City West senior Mary Diederich, dressed in orange and black, couldn't predict the outcome of the election, but was glad to be part of the crowd. "It's not every day you get to see the President," she said, tucking her pom-poms.

Although Stevenson sophomore Kim Love was more excited about going to Florida with the Stevenson band than appearing at the rally, she was surprised at the secret service security. "They even locked in our tubs," said the Spartan student.

Bedford resident Bill Smith, my real name, home to see Ford. "I have a lot of respect for the man. It's going to be a close election, but hopefully he'll win."

Defeat resident and Michigan State University student Sue Zemba and two friends made the trip from East Lansing on a whim. "It seemed like a good idea, more appropriate than going to classes."

The group planned to travel on to the Carter rally in Flint, but Ms. Zemba wasn't swayed by the speech. "I already cast my vote for Carter at home."

WESTLANDERS Mr. and Mrs. Ken Fuernsten came out of curiosity and the fact that their daughters in the band, said Fuernsten. "I wanted to hear what he had to say," he added, admitting they were still undecided about their votes. Contributing to the spirit of the crowd were Ford women as represented by the Wayne 23 District Republican Club and wives of Livonia Jaycees. "We're here to stand around and talk to one woman said, but others were enthusiastic despite the chilly temperature and long wait. Although Ford's visit was right on schedule, the crowd had arrived early, and J.P. McCarthy tried to warm them up both physically and spiritually with some humor and the introduction of celebrities for Ford, including Hugh O'Brien and Wayne Rogers from MASH, former Detroit Tiger Bill Freehan, sports announcer Bill Fleming and UMI head coach Johnny Orr.

"Every sports announcer in the country is entitled to a few products," Fleming began. "UMI will beat this State by three touchdowns, and Gerald Ford will defeat Jimmy Carter by four touchdowns," he exclaimed, almost drowned out by the roar from the crowd.

Ron Kramer continued the sports metaphors announcing he and Wayne Rogers drew the biggest applause of any celebrity which surprised the actor.

"I never had a welcome like that before. I think I ought to be running for something."

The motorcade's arrival drew a mass roar from the crowd and U.S. Sen. Robert Griffin expressed the feelings of many. "I'm bursting with pride at the turnout here in Livonia," he said, noting his Garden City youth.

An apparently weary, hoarse Ford began his speech by imitating everyone at the rally to his inaugural in January, endorsing Pursell and Esch, and thanking the celebrities, including Chuck Connors who rode with Ford from the airport.

FORD'S SPEECH failed to include any

starting revelations on the election eve but he loved the audience, who were basically polite and very quiet when he asked for it.

"Everything I have in politics comes from you and I speak in appreciation and gratitude," he said. "Now you have the opportunity to confirm me with your ballots."

Coach Johnny Orr presented Ford with a basketball signed by all the members of the UMI team, which Ford held aloft and told the crowd, "I hope they shoot a lot of buckets next season, but tomorrow we have to hit some home runs and score some touchdowns."

With the election history, area residents have vivid memories for their mental scrapbooks. A boy with a Nixon mask riding on the shoulders of his friends, kids shirring up the poles to get a closer look at the President, signs like "This is Ford country," and the sight of 20 photos virtually unused by the press but ready for an emergency made up Campaign '76 in Livonia.

For Livonia area residents who came to the rally to make our votes heard, the job they want may take some time.

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