Young look for state GOP

By Tim Richard
staff writer

By reputation, the Republican Party is middle-aged.

But Michigan's list of delegates and alternates to the Aug. 20-23 Republican National Convention in Dallas is studded with people in their 20s, including one from Southfield.

"We have a young party leadership. I'm 31, the youngest state chairman in the country," said Spencer Abraham, the Lansing lawyer and polister who has headed the Michigan GOP for the last year.

Although it hasn't been verified, Abraham and the young activists believe they are setting some kind of record for young faces in the crew of 77 delegates and 77 alternates.

"WE HAVE numerous young chairs," Abraham added, pointing to the 3,600 state convention delegates and alternates on the floor in Grand Rapids last weekend.

"We've encouraged the youth auxiliaries — the Young Republicans, the Teen Republicans and the College Republicans. And we don't want any young person to think he or she can't be active in the senior party," Abraham added.

"Look at Spence's staff," said a field worker from the Republican National Committee in Washington. "He has 10 people in their 20s that are in responsible positions.

"They had 200 at the youth caucus last night. John Guzik was on Cloud 13."

TWO OTHER young at-large alternates are Mike Cassa of Southfield and Tim Pope of Novi.

At 24, Cassa has moved from youth activities to senior party affairs. He is working for James Stewart, Huntington Woods public safety director who is making a bid for Oakland County sheriff. Cassa had the backing of conservative leader Paul Gadola of Flint to be in the delegation.

"My family is longtime strong Republican. My activism evolved from that," Cassa said.

Cassa was state youth chairman in Brooks Patterson's 1982 bid for the gubernatorial nomination. At the University of Detroit, in his undergraduate years, he organized Republican and Reagan clubs.

POPE, A JUNIOR majoring in political science at Eastern Michigan University, made his way to the national delegation by virtue of being chairman of the state College Republican organization.

"We built a good organization. We have the largest College Republican budget in the country except for North Carolina," Pope said.

"We have 31 chapters. We've sponsored voter registration rallies, done recruiting on campus and plugged folks (students) into the county organizations."

Particular targets for getting collegians active in campaigns, he said, have been the 3rd Congressional District (Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College), the 6th (bordering Oakland University) and the 10th (Central Michigan, Ferris State College, Alma College).

Of the many youthful faces in the Michigan delegation, Pope said, "This is the first time that has happened. There's no precedent."

JOHN M. GUZIK of Livonia is third vice chairman of the state GOP, elected at the 1983 state convention along with Abraham.

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