

Doug Ross

No more 'business as usual'

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

FINDING WORK has never been a problem for Doug Ross. The Southfield resident barely wraps up one project and he has another job offer.

And Michigan's new Director of Commerce hopes to do as well for the rest of the state's workforce.

"Our goal is faster economic growth so there are enough jobs," said Ross, who at 42 has held several state posts including senator. "We want to make this state one of the global centers of new industrial technology."

A FORMER consumer advocate who fought drug makers and auto repair firms on behalf of residents, Ross is charged with enticing businesses to Michigan.

That means making the work environment more competitive — cutting out "red tape and regulation" and paying costs like workers' compensation and business tax.

While "actively moving out of the

way" of businesses, he's also committed to developing the "factory of the future." And that means new ideas — and possibly some ruffled feathers.

ALWAYS OUTSPOKEN. Ross attacks "business as usual." He makes it clear that the practices which made Michigan an industrial leader just don't work today.

Once the main source of autos, state manufacturers are now competing in a world market against companies with more advanced techniques and employee "partnerships." The commerce director believes Michigan must abandon "hostile" labor relations and embrace new technology.

"It's not that we changed, but the world changed," explained the economist, who has a master's degree in public affairs from Princeton University. "The real enemies of what we're trying to do are not Democrats or Republicans, management or labor, Detroiters or outsiders," he said firmly.

"It's those who cling to the old ways. Those are the real enemies of Michigan."

ASSURING WORK for Michigan residents and their children is a big order, especially in a state plagued for years with high unemployment.

But it's the kind of challenge Ross goes after. Except for a year teaching civics and two years running his family's food brokerage firm, the Detroit native has always held public service jobs.

Oakland County Commissioner Lawrence Pernick, a fellow Democrat who represents Ross's hometown, describes him as "one of few public officials with brains and the backbone to use them."

"He takes career risks because of a real concern for the community."

BUT ROSS admits it's not just dedication to the public that drives him.

It's also a lifelong love of politics, which goes back to his days as a legislative aide to Democratic congressman Joseph Tydings, John Dingell and Neil Stabler.

"Neil Stabler really demonstrated to me at an impressionable age that

you could combine political effect with strict ethical standards. You could be both," explained Ross, who authored a book on Robert F. Kennedy called "Apostle of Change."

A LONGTIME bachelor who married in his late 30s, Ross also could afford to take a few chances.

He kiddingly urges wife Karol, a psychologist, to "keep making more money" so he can continue helping out the Blanchard Administration.

"I'm not at all threatened by a working wife," quipped Ross. "Security has never been an important consideration for me. I will always trade adventure for security."

ROSS'S CAREER took off when he helped found the Michigan Citizens Lobby. The 30,000-member citizens group helped repeal the sales tax on food and medicine, as well as enact the Auto Repair Protection act, Generic Drug Act and PBB Protection Act.

As executive director of Michigan Common Cause, he led a successful fight to enact campaign finance reform legislation.

His work as consumer advocate came back to haunt Ross when he was nominated by the governor to look after the state's business interests. But the former small business owner doesn't see any conflict.

"None of that was anti-business activity," answered Ross, who challenged drug manufacturers and auto repair shops.

"They were efforts to deal with a marketplace that wasn't functioning. The drug manufacturers were using their influence to keep lesser-known brands out of the market."

A LONGTIME FRIEND of Gov. James Blanchard, Ross met the state's leader when both were campaigning for Attorney General Frank Kelley. Defeated in his primary bid for the U.S. 17th District seat now held by Sander Levin, he launched into a series of state-run jobs programs.

Ross directed the Michigan Youth Corps and Project Self-Reliance, an experiment to get welfare recipients into private sector jobs. He also directed the Governor's Task Force on a long-term economic strategy for Michigan.

In December, he was asked by Blanchard to head the \$250-million De-



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

When he isn't selling Michigan as a place to work, Commerce Director Doug Ross is supporting one of the state's small businesses — The Workout Company. Ross and his wife Karol are regulars at his sister Laura Roberts' Bloomfield Township aerobic dance studio.

partment of Commerce which employs 1,900 people. Karol is operating as a single parent. I regret that."

But Ross is buoyed by the prospects of working with the governor to improve conditions in their home state.

"He (Blanchard) absolutely refuses to be defeated by any problems or obstacles," said the equally enthusiastic Commerce director.

"And this is more than just jobs. It's another opportunity to work in partnership with another aspect of the future."



BILL BREBLEN/staff photographer

In his Southfield living room, Doug Ross reflects on his new role as Michigan's Director of Commerce.

INSIDE ANGLES

BY LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Know someone doing something notable? Let us know. Write: Inside Angles, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024.

A LIFT OFF OF 500 balloons is set for 6 p.m. Thursday from Detroit Baptist Manor. The balloons will be filled with messages from the residents launching a monthlong celebration of Older Americans Month.

KEVIN MALY will enter his Tailgate Chili in The Great Chili Cook-off next weekend in Saline, one of a half-dozen events planned at the Saline Farm Council Grounds as a benefit for National Kidney Foundation of Michigan. The Farmington Hills recipe-maker will have a lot of competition on his first time out with Tailgate Chili. To date, 80 recipes have been signed up for sampling and judging.

PATRICIA TOMPKINS, Latin, Greek and English teacher at Farmington High School, has been selected to participate in a seminar sponsored by San Jose State University. The participants will travel in Greece and Turkey, May 30 to June 24 to study ancient religion, history and archaeology. Athens, Mytilini and Istanbul are the featured locales with brief excursions to nearby sites.

THE LITTLE PROFESSOR Book Store on Grand River in Farmington has announced the local award winner of the Little Professor Book Centers 1985 national scholarship award program. David T. Walsworth, a senior at Farmington High School is the recipient of the \$700 local scholarship and is automatically eligible to compete for the \$1,000 regional and \$5,000 national awards to be announced in mid-May. In winning the award, Walsworth demonstrated strong academic, community and literary achievements and skills.

PAULA SUZANNE ANTISHIN will be attending Gilt's State at Central Michigan University in June. A junior at Farmington High School, she follows in the footsteps of her brother Dennis, who was selected to attend Boy's State when he was a junior, chosen for outstanding scholarship and leadership. American Legion Auxiliary Unit 348 will sponsor Paula during her week of seeing government in action.

CARRIE BROWN, daughter of Wallace and Sadie Brown and a junior at Harrison High School, was recently awarded a vocal scholarship to Interlochen Fine Arts Camp through the Amity Music Club. This year Carrie participated in All-State Honors Choir and received a Superior Rating at State Solo and Ensemble Festival. She also received a Superior Rating at the National Federation of Music Club Festival this spring.

DANIEL ROSS, a student at Farmington High School, is a member of the University of Michigan Youth Symphony. Daniel performed in the Toronto area recently with the symphony as part of its annual spring tour. The 91-member orchestra, selected from over 170 students who auditioned, rehearses for three hours each weekend throughout the year at the U-M School of Music.

AIRMAN FIRST CLASS BRADLEY FILLION, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Fillion of Farmington Hills, has graduated from the U.S. Air Force aircraft maintenance course at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. He is a 1982 graduate of Clarenceville High School.

TOM HALE, Alice Nichols and Marcle Kitch, all area residents and members of Farmington Artists Club, have had pieces of their work accepted for "Waterworks," a national competition sponsored by Michigan Water Color Society. A total of 101 pieces were selected for the show, from the 847 entries submitted by artists who work in watercolor throughout the country.

FRANKLIN J. ELLIAS of Farmington Hills, associate chair of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit's Holocaust Subcommittee, accepted a proclamation at the official statewide Holocaust commemoration on the Capitol Building steps in Lansing. The proclamation designated Michigan's Days of Remembrance of the Holocaust and was presented by Gov. James J. Blanchard and Lt. Gov. Martha Griffiths.

THE MICHIGAN DAILY, The University of Michigan's student newspaper, recently named its new editors and managers for the 1985-86 academic year. Dawn Willacker, a sophomore majoring in marketing and communication, was named sales manager.

KEVIN WOODHOUSE of Farmington Hills has been named to the dean's list at Indiana University. To make the dean's list students must earn a 3.5 grade average or better.

MAUREEN O'CONNOR and Stacey Kugler of Farmington have been named to the dean's list at Northwood Institute in Midland.

ST. FLORIAN Strawberry Festival will be held from noon to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, May 4 and 5. St. Florian is on Poland and Brombach streets in Hamtramck, between I-75 and Joseph Campau, south of Davison.

JOE SAKOFSKE, son of Bernard and Patsy Sakofofske of Farmington Hills, enlisted in the Navy's Delayed Entry Program. Joe is a senior at North Farmington High School. He will report for active duty in August and will attend basic training at the Naval Training Center in San Diego.

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