

No political damage in divorce

Blanchards split amicably at 21-year mark

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The pending divorce of James and Paula Blanchard will do minimal damage to his political career, but friends say it may explain why the governor has shown little leadership in his second term.

"I'm like an old father to him," said Sen. William Faust, D-Westland, former Senate majority leader, who would get Sunday phone calls from the governor. "I had no idea things were not going well."

"There has not been strong command from the executive office," Faust said. "Perhaps it (domestic problem) explains the slow pace."

"It has to affect him somewhat," said Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton. "But he's enough of a professional to devote his time to the office."

Another veteran senator, Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, said he saw "no impairment" of Blanchard's recent performance.

"IT WILL NEVER cause him to win or lose an election," said Jerry D. Roe, Lansing public relations consultant and history buff.

Blanchard would be the first serving governor of Michigan to be divorced, and probably the only one ever divorced, said Roe, the state's acknowledged expert on gubernatorial biographies.

"Politics does it to a marriage," said Roe, former executive director of the Republican Party and himself divorced. "It's an unrealistic way of living. All of a sudden Joe Smith becomes 'the Honorable.' People are bowing and scraping."

"Then you come home at night to really. No one is more honest than your wife."

Roe listed many political divorces — U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle, state Senate Majority Leader John and Rep. Colleen Engler, House Speaker Gary Owen, and a long list of congressmen.

When Lt. Gov. James Brickley campaigned for governor in 1982, his divorce was never an issue.

In years past, said former Gov. George W. Romney, divorce may have been a political liability, "but not anymore."

"A SURPRISE to me," said Sen. Faxon, who marched with Blanchard in the Memorial Day parade in Ferndale, where Blanchard was born 44 years ago.

Paula Blanchard was not with the governor, Faxon recalled, but he hardly noticed at the time because "it makes better sense to me if spouses don't attend those things. Many times Bill Milliken (governor 1989-92) attended things by himself."

Faxon noted that Nelson Rockefeller was divorced while governor of New York, mounted a strong presidential campaign in 1968 and then was appointed vice president in 1974.

The last time divorce was discussed as a political issue was 1951, Faxon said, when Democrat Adlai Stevenson was defeated for the presidency. A Stevenson fan, Faxon doubted the divorce was a factor.

Rep. Kosteva said he had heard "not a word" about the breakup until Tuesday.

State Democratic chairman Richard Wiener is in the Soviet Union until June 30 and was unavailable for comment.

FOR MONTHS, newspaper columnists have criticized Blanchard for lack of leadership on major issues facing the state:

- Road funds — he opposes more taxes.
- Property tax reform — he advocated expansion of the homestead exemption, no major change.
- School finance reform — no position.
- Reorganization of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority — no position.
- Product liability.
- State court unification — no budget money.

Replied Tom Scott, Blanchard's press secretary: "People saying he had a mandate (from his 2-1 re-election victory) either: 1) wanted to raise taxes; 2) are his political opponents or 3) wanted to see him stumble politically."

Scott said Blanchard's priority has

been "an ambitious human investment strategy," denying the governor failed to show leadership.

RUMORS ABOUT possible marital difficulties between the Blanchards had circulated for a year in the state Capitol press corps, but not one had printed a word.

The news came the governor's press office, which left a pack of releases in the House Press Room during lunch hour Tuesday. It came during the busiest week of the year for the Legislature, scheduled to adjourn today for the summer.

The two-page release said that at 11:45 that morning, Paula Blanchard began a no-fault divorce action in Ingham Circuit Court.

Representing Paula Blanchard is Lansing attorney Camille S. Abood. Representing the governor will be F. Thomas Lewand, Birmingham attorney, Blanchard's one-time campaign manager and first chief of staff.

"Longstanding irreconcilable differences in their marital relationship compel this decision at this time. The decision to end our marriage has been made after many months of thought and discussion," their announcement said.

"It has been an extremely difficult decision to reach. We want our friends and supporters to know that we intend to continue an amicable relationship both personally and professionally."

THE BLANCHARDS were married June 16, 1966 — 21 years ago today — shortly after Paula, a Clarkston native, earned her teaching degree from Michigan State University.

Blanchard earned his bachelor's degree from MSU in 1964 and master's degree in business administration in 1965.

Mrs. Blanchard taught fourth grade in Minnesota while her husband was earning his law degree,

which he received in 1968.

Mrs. Blanchard had held an unpaid job in the Commerce Department promoting Michigan products. Several months ago she left it for a part-time position at MSU as director of Teletate, an audio and video production unit. She is working on a master's degree in telecommunications, which she expects to receive by fall.

The Blanchards petitioned for a temporary order for financial support. They agreed to joint custody of son Jay, 18. They expect to reach "a comprehensive and equitable financial settlement."

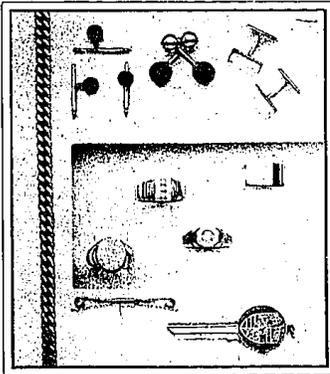
Mrs. Blanchard will reside in Okemos, a Lansing suburb, where Jay will be a high school senior in the fall. They will continue to have State Police protection.

Blanchard will continue to reside in the executive residence near the Red Cedar River southwest of the Capitol Building.



Jim and Paula Blanchard gave no hint of "irreconcilable differences" the night of Nov. 4, 1985, when they celebrated his re-election as governor in the Renaissance Center.

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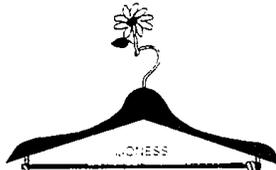
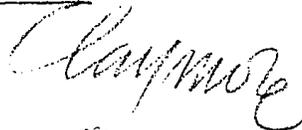
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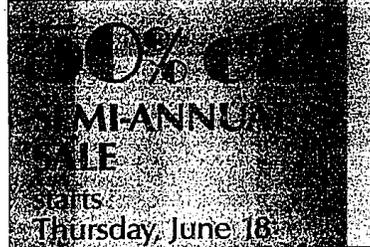
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