

Engler aide expands her political turf to Oakland

By Wayne Peel
staff writer

What happened to former Wayne County Commission vice chairwoman Susan Heintz in her first month out of office?

"A lot," Heintz laughs. For one, her political backyard now extends to Oakland County. For another, she's getting a taste of political warfare so intense it makes the often tumultuous Wayne County commission seem tame.

A three-term commissioner, Heintz resigned from her Livonia/Plymouth area seat in April to head up Gov. John Engler's metro region office.

Right from the start, she's been busy. Protesters were camped outside her door on the first day of the job.

"They were unhappy about a lot of things, not just about the governor's budget cuts," Heintz said. "I listened to them and passed their demands along, but some of it had to deal with

the Legislature and I had to tell them I have no control over that."

That was first indication that Heintz would now have to deal with constituents far different from her upscale former constituents. By early June she'd either met, or would soon meet, people representing every political viewpoint under the sun. "The Communists let you know when they'll be coming," she said. "That's a plus."

MEETING WITH people, listening to their concerns and, perhaps, pouring oil on troubled waters, are her main duties.

Her commission stint would indicate it's a job to which she is well suited.

The board's only Republican, Heintz walked a fine line between Detroit-based commission leadership, suburban commissioners and Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara. Her outgoing, witty personality quickly helped her earn friendships, while deflecting criticism. She proved skilled as well as charming.

Tangible proof of her success: fellow commissioners twice voted her vice chairwoman of the 13-member

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Engler aide



set of issues.

Engler budget cuts, and the new governor's hard line on state spending, has made him more than a few enemies, especially in metro Detroit. Advocates for programs ranging from welfare to state support for the arts have called Engler's tight budgeting everything from insensitive to inhumane. At the same time, recall petitions began circulating a mere four months into his term.

"Obviously, there are people who are going to be unhappy," Heintz said. "Everytime you do anything someone's going to be unhappy."

Heintz added, however, that she sees greater support for the governor than Detroit newspapers or newscasts would indicate.

"THE ARTS group has been very visible, but when I'm out with constituents I hear far more praise than criticism," she said. "People seem especially pleased he's holding the line on taxes."

On the road a good portion of the

time, Heintz is no stranger to many of the Wayne, Oakland and Macomb residents she meets.

She had served as director of the Western Wayne Council of Governments and an executive committee member of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments before entering county politics.

Even earlier, she was a dedicated campaign worker for her father, longtime Mount Clemens Mayor Bert Vande Vusse.

Heintz, 43, often jokes her father took her to planning commission meetings as readily as other dads took their daughters to the circus.

Her political activity increased at the University of Michigan, where she campaigned for then-Gov. George Romney. Later, she worked with U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar, during the Indiana Republican's tenure as mayor of Indianapolis.

The governor's Detroit metro office can be reached at 256-1003.

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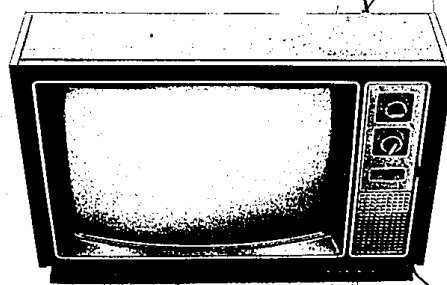
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