

Home sweet home

Ross is picking education over politics - for now

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Doug Ross is back in town. And the former director of the Michigan Department of Commerce, has some ready advice for communities like Rochester Hills, Southfield, Farmington, Livonia and Bedford.

Be ready to go after a good piece of the economic pie and be willing to make the changes needed to achieve it.

"Communities must have a clear idea of what they want to be and where they want to go to be successful," Ross said Tuesday in an interview at his new home in Farmington Hills. "Communities that hang on to the past — that won't make changes — are in for difficult times."

Ross, who was state director of commerce from 1984 to 1989, left Michigan two years ago to become president of the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED), a not-for-profit agency in Washington, D.C.

"CFED is a combination think-tank and public consulting agency," he said, which focuses on a wide range of economic and developmental problems. Its clients include the

Baltimore Regional Council of Government, the Aetna Life & Casualty Foundation and Johns Hopkins University.

But the organization is decentralizing, Ross said. As part of its strategy to move key personnel into diverse parts of the country, he has moved back to Michigan.

"WE ALWAYS PLANNED to come back to Michigan," said Ross, who moved back earlier this month "so when this opportunity came up, we were ready."

Ross said the move home was "a family decision," with input from wife Karol and their daughter, Julie. The couple's two sons, Mitchell and Douglas, are students at the University of Wisconsin.

Ross, who was a state senator from Southfield from 1978 to 1982, said the decision to buy a house in Farmington Hills was, to a large degree, based on input from his daughter.

"Julie's going into her senior year," he explained. "So we said she could pick her own high school" — which turned out to be North Farmington Karol, a psychologist, is director of a clinic in Macomb County

She said she could live with Julie's decision.

Ross, 49, said his immediate plans are somewhat general. His main preoccupation will be with CFED, of course. He intends to be active — but in a nonpolitical context.

"I've always been an activist," said Ross, who held leadership positions with both the Michigan Citizens' Lobby and Common Cause, before turning to government. "That's not going to change."

Ross said he intends to be active in the Farmington schools — possibly through the Parent-Teacher Organization — and, hopes to lecture or teach at the University of Michigan. "And I wouldn't mind tutoring."

POLITICS, HE SAID, is definitely out, at least for now. "I simply have no interest."

Ross said he was surprised — like others — that his old friend and boss, James Blanchard, lost his bid for reelection last fall.

Nobody can pinpoint the specific reason Blanchard lost, Ross said. "But I believe it has something to do with a general dissatisfaction with politics and government."

"People seem to have lost faith in

a number of institutions (including politics). They don't believe they are effective in dealing with major problems," Ross said.

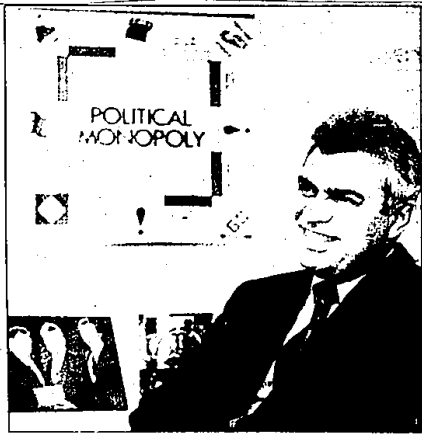
So people are turning elsewhere, he said. They're looking for other ways — to schools, service clubs or social organizations — to make their contributions.

Ross still considers himself a Democrat. "But there's an ongoing struggle for the soul of the Democratic Party (nationally and locally)," he said.

"The future of the party depends on its ability to refocus on mainstream America," he said. Instead of being the party of the poor, Democrats must again become the party of the middle class.

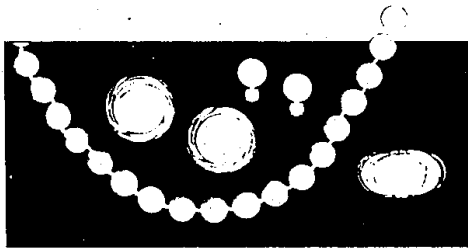
"Democrats can't be the party of bigger government," Ross said. "It must be the party representing opportunity for all levels."

MINDFUL THAT MANY communities in Wayne and Oakland are struggling with problems related to growth and economic development, Ross said he sees a parallel between developments here and what is happening nationally.



SHARON LE MEYER/staff photographer

In a home filled with political memorabilia, the Political Monopoly board behind Doug Ross relates to his tenure with Common Cause and the Michigan Citizens Lobby. Less distinguishable is a picture of Ross, former Michigan Gov. James Blanchard and John Sununu, chief of staff for President George Bush. The occasion was a gathering of the National Governors' Association at which Ross received an award.



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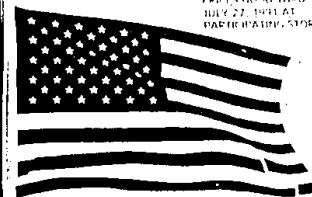


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