

About time: Governor race heating up both parties

Michigan politics have been frozen in place for years, a tribute to the long-term dominance of Gov. John Engler. But Engler will leave office at the end of 2002, and things are heating up all over.

Media attention has focused mostly on things Democratic, where at least three strong potential candidates for governor — former Gov. James Blanchard, present Attorney General Jennifer Granholm and U.S. Rep. David Bonior — are all maneuvering for position. Also scurrying about are State Sens. Gary Peters and Alma Wheeler Smith, with Geoffrey Fieger looming unaccustomed in the wings.

But things are just as interesting with the Grand Old Party, where the race to succeed (certainly not replace) John Engler is well under way.

Originally, it looked like a horse race between Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus and Secretary of State Candice Miller. But it's now clear the Republican establishment has organized itself to back Posthumus for governor and cut Miller a reappointed seat in Congress that squeezes Bonior out.

So how does gubernatorial candidate presumptive Posthumus fare? Not particularly well, according to early polls. In last month's EPIC/MRA survey, Posthumus got whopped by both Granholm (63 percent - 29 percent) and Blanchard (63 percent - 32 percent). Bonior and Posthumus were practically even.

So what's Posthumus' problem? He's a nice guy, both thoughtful and very conservative (though who in the GOP isn't, these days?). He was on the ballot with Engler last time around and has been featured as lieutenant governor in various administration publicity stunts.

But puzzlingly, he's not particularly well known. The same EPIC/MRA poll that found Blanchard's name ID well above 90 percent (with Granholm's at around 25 percent and Bonior at 35 percent), showed Posthumus' name was unfamiliar to 41 percent of Michigan voters.

This suggests Posthumus has not yet carved out a political identity distinct from that of a generalized Republican politician. Political insiders are talking about Posthumus' lack of "traction." That's a big problem, as a recent poll, conducted by Neil Newhouse, found that a plurality of all Michigan voters (42 percent) identified themselves as independents, with self-identified Democrats at around 33 percent, just a few points above Republicans.

And the independent voter problem comes to a head especially in Oakland and western Wayne counties, where suburbanites (especially women) are deserting the GOP for two main reasons. First, they don't like the hard anti-abortion position that is now a litmus test for Republicans; second, they're scared of the "shall issue" concealed weapons permit legislation the GOP rammed through the legislature last year.

It's not for nothing that as smart a politician as Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson has taken direct control of the Oakland County party, trying to moderate the party's hard-right image and in the process displeasing some of his more rigidly conservative friends. If Posthumus can't run well in Oakland and western Wayne counties, he isn't going to build a winning statewide presence outside his western Michigan base.

So that strange sound you hear in the distance is caused by other Republicans dashing around to see what can be put together. State Senate Majority Leader Dan DeGrow isn't denying interest. Another GOP senator, Bill Schuette, is raising money for a run for something.

The best potential alternative is state Sen. Joe

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Schwarz, who has said he'll decide by June 1 whether to run. Schwarz is considered adequately conservative by his party, but he hasn't been afraid to take on Engler on certain issues. While Engler ran George W. Bush's Michigan campaign, Schwarz backed U.S. Sen. John McCain; McCain won big time. Schwarz also favors campaign finance reform, a subject regarded as too hot to handle by the GOP establishment.

A practicing physician, Schwarz sees the opening Posthumus' lack of traction provides. "I'm a radical middle of the roader," he said. "The Republican Party in Michigan has slipped a little further to the right than the middle mass of voters would like to see. As a result, for example, we lost Oakland County in the last two presidential elections, and we see women who would normally tend to vote Republican sitting on their hands."

Stay tuned. It should be a mighty interesting year.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1850, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net.

More should follow Milton Rose's life-long example



Joni Hubred

I met Milton Rose the way I generally meet people in the community — over a letter to the editor and a story idea.

A quiet, well-spoken gentleman, Mr. Rose had taken pictures of a stunningly brutal accident that involved a sweeper truck and a passenger car, driven by an elderly woman who had to be extricated with the Jaws of Life. The accident

happened in the 14 Mile Orchard Lake Road area, which he called "Suicide Alley."

He had the statistics to back up his beliefs, too — 85 accidents in 30 months, almost three-quarters of which occurred in dry pavement conditions. More than 30 resulted in injuries. That he worried about the safety of motorists, many of whom were his neighbors and friends, showed in how often he spoke out about the problems he perceived.

In a letter published in our paper on Feb. 1, Mr. Rose pointed out, "There are a total of 12 exits and entrances onto 14 Mile with only two lanes and a 'safe' center lane, causing any cars winding up in the center to become head-on casualties."

At a January Farmington Hills City Council meeting, he stood up to speak during public comment on the shopping center proposed in the Northwestern 14 Mile Orchard Lake triangle. The idea of pumping thousands more car trips into Suicide Alley got this thin-as-a-rail, elderly man with the flash of community spirit ablaze in his eyes out on a blustery night, to a meeting that lasted several hours.

Not long afterward, I asked one of our reporters to do a story about Mr. Rose and his wife, Zelda, who have been active school volunteers for many years. I was stunned to learn Mr. Rose had fallen ill and saddened a week later to learn of his death.

But it was only then that I learned the extent of this 87-year-old man's involvement in the world around him and the depth of his community spirit. How sad we waited so long to do a story that should have been obvious to me the first time I spoke with him.

I might have learned sooner that he was a member of the "Grumpies," a loosely aligned organization of men and women who write letters to the editor. And had I taken a look at our back issues, I'd have found dozens of letters he and his wife had written, about everything from concealed weapons to our coverage of high school proms.

I'd have known how much the Roses were appreciated at local elementary schools as volunteer tutors, how they inspired other senior citizens to

do the same. I'd have gotten answers to questions I can't ask any more, like what motivated him to devote so many hours to teaching children and what he'd say to get other people to do the same.

It may not seem like it, but the communities in which we all live and work could use many more people like Milton Rose. We don't talk enough about the voids that need filling, the children and teenagers who need more caring adults in their lives, the young parents who desperately wish for someone — anyone — to answer the myriad questions that arise every hour of every day with their new babies.

Plenty of people volunteer, but plenty of need

In his life and death, Milton Rose provides a striking contrast to the time-strapped world most of us live in from day to day.

still does — and will always — exist. The Farmington Hills VFW Post is up for sale because its members weren't involved enough in keeping it alive. The Farmington Beautification Commission has disbanded, because nobody applied to serve on it.

In his life and death, Milton Rose provides a striking contrast to the time-strapped world most of us live in from day to day.

Consider this: On Jan. 22, Mr. Rose got up at a city council meeting to express his concerns over traffic on 14 Mile Road. He mentioned full-page letters he'd written to the West Bloomfield Police Department, the Farmington Hills police and engineering departments and the state of Michigan Engineering Department asking them "what can we do now to save some injuries and lives" because if this new development goes in, it will only increase the traffic problems on 14 Mile Road.

On Feb. 1, the day his last letter to the editor was published in this paper, he was hospitalized with internal bleeding. Two and a half weeks later, he was gone.

Almost until the day he died, this man was a devoted and passionate advocate. I can't help but wonder who will take up his determined fight for traffic safety, who will be inspired by his example of volunteerism.

My fear is there won't be enough people who do. I hope I'm wrong.

Joni Hubred is editor of the Farmington Observer. She welcomes your comments, either by phone at (248) 477-5450, or by e-mail at jhubred@homecomm.net.

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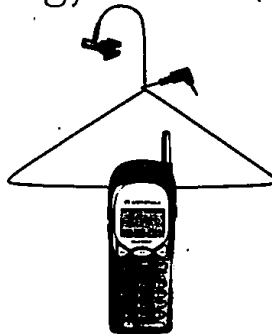
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