

Down-to-earth Ed McNamara evoked far-reaching vision

No, I wasn't surprised. He was 75 and had a quadruple bypass operation last year. And Lucille, his wife of 53 years, wanted him to slow down.

But it still was a jolt for me when Ed McNamara announced over the weekend he wasn't going to run for a fifth term as Wayne County Executive.

You see, I've known and admired Ed for virtually all his political career. Ed was already on the city council when I started my newspaper company in Livonia back in 1966. I wrote the editorial in the Livonia Observer in 1970 that endorsed him in his successful race for Livonia mayor against Harvey Moolke. As Livonia's mayor for 16 years, he helped

mold a city out of what had been a township. When he won the race for Wayne County Executive in 1986, I couldn't have been more pleased.

Most people don't remember — or don't want to — what Wayne County was like back in the '80s. Broke. Disorganized. Badly managed. Corrupt in large parts. An embarrassment to the entire state.

McNamara put Wayne County back together again. He fixed the budget mess, balancing the county's books for 13 straight years. He led the effort to rescue the Rouge River, once indistinguishable from a sewer, and he saved SMART, the suburban bus system, from collapse. He drove the negotiations that led to Comerica Park and Ford Field in downtown Detroit. And, of course, he was the prime mover in expanding and modernizing Detroit Metro Airport, with the new \$1.2 billion Midfield Terminal set to open next February.

These are magnificent achievements, a distinguished record for any politician. But as I reflect on his career, I'm drawn to two less obvious — but more important, in my view — parts of his legacy.

First, people. Possibly because they tend to think mostly about themselves, most political bosses never develop a farm team. McNamara recognized and promoted a group of able men and women who will lead Michigan for many years to come. He launched the careers of Wayne County

Prosecutor Mike Duggan; former U.S. Attorney Saul Green; Freeman Hendrix, who was Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer's deputy; Attorney General Jennifer Granholm, who could well become Michigan's first woman governor. He played a key role in the election of Kwame Kilpatrick as mayor of Detroit.

Some might call McNamara a kingmaker. I prefer to think of him as a very rare politician who recognized that one of the obligations of a good political boss is to find, recruit and create his work. McNamara had an eye for talent and, notable for a traditional and proudly Irish politician, he promoted a diverse team: white and black, male and female, urban and suburban.

Second, style. Unassuming. Never one to develop a cult of personality. McNamara could walk into the airport without being recognized by more than a handful. Practical. Having had a problem explained to him, his first question always was, "How do we get this done?"

Down to earth. Although he was ferocious in

McNamara put Wayne County back together again.

protecting his reputation, he never developed the bad habit of believing his own press releases.

In that context, I've always felt both Detroit newspapers were by and large unfair in their constant criticism of McNamara, especially over the airport. Certainly, it looks very much as though a lot of strangely lucrative contracts were let without much review. McNamara was never shy about raising money from people who stood to benefit from his administration. But I do suspect that a standard reflex in both Detroit daily newsrooms on a slow day was to see what kind of dirt could be dragged up on Ed McNamara.

Maybe ceaseless nitpicking just comes with the turf. Other than John Engler, Ed has been Michigan's most capable and powerful politician in recent memory. He created a machine; but the machine got done what needed to get done. He was a kingmaker; but his proteges have turned out to be extraordinarily able. He was down to earth; but his vision was far-reaching.

I'm sorry he won't be in office during the years to come. We'll need people like him.

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. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net.



Hugh Gallagher

Tough times call for changes here at your Observer

Things are changing at *The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers*.

Beginning Monday, we will be changing the way we're organized and how we produce our newspapers. These changes are in part a response to the recession, which has drastically reduced advertising lineage in newspapers throughout the state, including *The Observer & Eccentric*. For us, the tragic events of Sept. 11 only accelerated a revenue decline that started last August.

Like the Big Three auto companies and countless other Michigan businesses that have had to cut costs and lay off employees to maintain their economic health, we are obliged to reduce our work force.

Basically, there are two ways to do this. The bad way is simply to just cut numbers of staff. The better way is to carefully examine how the work can be better organized and what new processes can be put in place to improve productivity and at the same time maintain quality.

We've chosen the latter route. "We have been working with consultants and our editorial department managers to fashion a business model that allows us to improve quality and service to our readers while maintaining our economic health," according to Susan Rosiek, publisher of the *Observer Newspapers*. "Most of these changes will be invisible to our readers. But they will help us get through these difficult times and prepare us to ride with the economy when it improves."

The changes include:

- Page design and layout will be in the hands of a Presentation Editor.

- The task of paginating our editorial copy on computers will be performed by skilled paginators.

- As a result, reporters and photographers will have more time to spend in the local community covering the news.

- Freed of production responsibilities, Community Editors will have more time to spend in editorial planning, story assignment and being out and about in the community.

We will continue to publish the number of newspapers we have in the past, but in some

cases a single editor will be responsible for two newspapers. Dave Varga will be the editor of our Livonia and Redford Observers, Julie Brown will be the editor of our Garden City and Westland Observers. Brad Kadrick will continue as Plymouth editor, Tedd Schneider as Canton editor and Joni Hubred as Farmington editor. Sue Mason will be our new presentation editor.

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In some cases, the individual Community Editors, reporters and photographers you have come to know through their bylines and coverage of community events will be changed. We will be working hard to make sure our readers and advertisers know whom to contact and how to do so.

For years, we have prided ourselves on producing the best community newspapers in the country. Although reducing our work force is painful, we believe in the long run the steps we are taking now will enable us better to fulfill our commitment to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the communities we serve and contribute to the business success of our advertisers.

As always, we welcome your comments and observations.

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HOLIDAY VISIONS

December 7, 2001
4:00 — 10:00 p.m.
Downtown Birmingham

- ★ Free Gift Wrap
- ★ Free Carriage Rides
- ★ Live Strolling Entertainment
- ★ Storefront Decorating Contest
- ★ Purchase a \$15 Birmingham holiday snow globe with proceeds benefiting Forgotten Harvest
- ★ In-store Events and Activities

