

Political tricks are no problem at art fairs

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POLITICAL

NOTEBOOK

Campaigning at the crowded event stays remarkably civil

News Staff Reporter

A high concentration of diverse, eligible voters in a relatively confined area just weeks away from a primary provides a ripe opportunity for political shenanigans.

But by all accounts, including those from the Ann Arbor Police, election-year hijinks were virtually nonexistent at the art fairs this past week. Though crammed closely together along Liberty Street, volunteers from booths representing multiple political parties and various causes were reportedly respectful and uncompetitive.

The most curious political smears came in the form of bright pink posters featuring a photo of President George W. Bush. Affixed to lampposts scattered throughout downtown, the posters asserted that if voters love Bush as president they'll love Republican gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos. They also claim DeVos will work hard for school vouchers, keep the minimum wage low and oppose stem-cell research. There's no sponsor listed, but the poster encourages readers to search the Internet under "Legal Pyramid Scheme" for more information.

Not so anonymous were the "Pinocchio President" T-shirts with sketch renderings of Bush with an elongated nose being sold at the Democratic Party booth, underneath a smattering of pro-Granholt shirts and buttons.

The only official candidates who mingled with the masses were Republicans Keith Butler and Mike Bouchard, who face each other in the Aug. 8 primary to determine who runs against Democratic incumbent U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow in the November election.

"Anytime you can come out to where people are and meet them and be with them, it's important to do," Butler said Friday while sauntering along the booths on Liberty Street. "It doesn't matter if this is supposed to be Democratic Party area because I intend to be a senator of all the people."

Bouchard, the Oakland County Sheriff, was scheduled to visit the art fairs Saturday afternoon. He also was in Lodi Township earlier in the week for a campaign fund-raiser benefiting Republican State House candidate Shannon Brown.

Credit protection

State Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee, was in Ann Arbor earlier this week to unveil a new package of bills proposed by Democrats to strengthen Michigan's identity-theft laws. The proposed laws increase penalties for identity thieves, particularly those who target the elderly and people with disabilities. It also would require notification when consumers' personal information is compromised by database security breaches.

"We must get tough on identity thieves, we must change the status quo, and we must do more to protect consumers in Monroe and Washtenaw counties," Angerer said while at the Washtenaw County Courthouse on Tuesday. She and other Democratic incumbents, including Pam Byrnes, D-Lyndon Township, made similar announcements on a campaign blitz throughout the state last week.

But former representative Matt Milosch, whom Angerer replaced in 2004 and will face again in November, said the true leader on identity-theft has been misidentified. Milosch, of Lambertville, was one of the first in the House to recognize and address the serious crime by sponsoring bills that outlawed identity theft, extended the statute of limitations for prosecution and set stiff penalties, said spokesman John Balbach.

"Kathy Angerer is simply playing catchup with Matt on this issue," Balbach said. "Is identity theft legislation a good idea? Absolutely. That is why Matt did it over two years ago."

Democratic party officials said they expect the Legislature to address the bill package this fall.

Golden girl

Democratic congressional candidate Sharon Renier medaled in seven of eight events at the Michigan Senior Olympics that concluded last weekend at Western Michigan University. Among her accomplishments were five golds in swimming events and a reported state record in the 200 meter backstroke, she said. Renier also won a silver in the 50-meter freestyle and a bronze in the 100-meter dash.

The 50-year-old organic farmer from Munith said she would've done better had she not injured her Achilles tendon while training.

"I'm a tough girl," Renier said while brandishing the hardware at a meeting with the News last week. "I can't say I'm Jesse Ventura or this big action hero like Arnold Schwarzenegger, but darn it, I did pretty well at the Senior Olympics and I feel pretty proud about that."

She said she was also proud to draw some 7th Congressional District voters to the competition by issuing a campaign challenge, but acknowledged doing so well could backfire with jealous types. "I guess I didn't think about it that way. It's possible, but we'll see," she said.

Renier, who won a three-way party primary in 2004 and then lost to U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, is one of four Democrats squaring off for the seat in the Aug. 8 primary. Washtenaw County residents Daryl Campbell, Chuck Ream and Fred Strack are all making their first run for congressional office in a district stretching from western Washtenaw across southern Michigan to Battle Creek.

Notables

* Manchester Republican Shannon Brown, Byrnes' opponent in the November election, was endorsed by the Michigan Restaurant Association.

* Democratic State House candidate Rebekah Warren was endorsed by the Michigan AFSCME workers union in her bid to replace term-limited State Rep. Chris Kolb. She faces Ann Arbor City Councilman Leigh Greden, D-3rd Ward, on Aug. 8.

* Republican Randy Richardville was endorsed by the Michigan Chamber of Commerce in his effort to replace term-limited State Sen. Bev Hammerstrom, R-Temperance. He faces Milan Mayor Owen Diaz on Aug. 8.

* Ypsilanti mayoral candidate Steve Pierce announced Monday that police officers, firefighters and employee unions at the city have endorsed his bid for the top post at the city. Pierce, Paul Schreiber and Council Member Lois Richardson, D-1st Ward, are competing for the mayor's job in the primary.

* Rod Johnson, candidate for the Ypsilanti City Council from Ward 3, announced that Mayor Cheryl Farmer and council members Barry LaRue, Brian Filipiak, Trudy Swanson, John Gawlas and William Nickels have endorsed his bid for the seat. Johnson and Brian Robb are competing to replace LaRue on the council.

Staff Reporter Khalil Hachem contributed to this report.

This is an occasional feature focusing on local and state politics through the November election. Have info or a suggestion for a topic? Art Aisner can be reached at aaisner@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6823.

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