



— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Primary to decide winner in 10th District county race

No GOP opposition to incumbent or challenger

Thursday, August 03, 2006

BY ART AISNER

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Two lifelong Ann Arbor residents are vying for the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioner's seat in the 10th District.

Commissioner Conan Smith is seeking his second term and a continuation of a local family legacy in public service in the Aug. 8 primary against local business owner Scott Snuverink, who is making his first run at public office.

There is no Republican Party challenger in the November general election.

Smith said the experience he gained during an "eye-opening" first term filled with political strife over public safety issues has prepared him for the future and confirmed his desire to follow the path of his mother, State Rep. Alma Wheeler Smith, D-Salem Township, and his grandfather, former Ann Arbor Mayor Al Wheeler.

Snuverink, owner of Triangle Towing in Ann Arbor, is part of a broad coalition of candidates who believe the board dismissed citizen input on the new funding structure for Washtenaw County Sheriff's deputy patrols. They say the result was higher costs to communities that see the patrols as one of the few tangible benefits from their county tax dollars.

Snuverink also is touting a message of better fiscal responsibility.

"County government is a business where your taxes should be handled responsibly," he states in his campaign literature. "I'm a businessman with lots of experience in managing money responsibly."

Snuverink is endorsed by the Washtenaw County Deputy Command Officers Association, both the Ann Arbor firefighters and police officers associations, and Washtenaw County Sheriff Dan Minzey.

Smith said he has no relationship with Minzey and was among the outspoken commissioners critical of the sheriff when projected budget overruns were revealed last spring. He said he stands firmly by his philosophy that the police services quandary is an equity issue, but he acknowledges a failure on the part of the current board in the way it developed and communicated the new approach.

As executive director of the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, where Smith prides himself on brokering discussions on regional issues among communities that don't always have the same priorities, he said he takes the pay-for-patrol conflict personally.

Smith said his professional work ties in well with his pursuits with the county, where he sits on the Planning Advisory Board, the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Washtenaw Development Council.

One of his successes in his first term was implementing a new pool policy at county parks that meets state safety standards while making accommodations for religious customs pertaining to modesty. The measure was a direct result of an incident involving a constituent and resulted in what is the only county-wide policy of its kind in Michigan and possibly the nation.

One aspect he'd like to change is setting policies that are more commissioner-driven rather than directed by the administration.

"We allow the administration to set priorities and drive issues and it should be the reverse," he said. "I'm hoping to help lead some of them to set a vision for the county."

Campaign finance records show Smith raised \$300 this cycle and spent nothing while carrying \$1,600 in campaign debt from the 2004 election.

Records show Snuverink indicated he would not meet the \$1,000 fundraising threshold that triggers the requirement to file campaign-finance reports.

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