

Two campaign for District 1 legislature seat

by Robbi Hess

Two local men are vying for the seat on Monroe County Legislature for District 1 which encompasses the towns of Parma, Ogden and Sweden. Todd Dunn, who serves on the Spencerport School Board, is facing off with incumbent legislator Dick Yolevich for the seat.

Todd Dunn, candidate for Monroe County Legislator for District 1, is no stranger to holding a public office, interacting with the public or working on large scale budgets. He has served on the Spencerport School Board in 2003 and again in 2006. While he doesn't clarify that as a political office, he knows that has given him the experience necessary to seek the legislator seat.

"I'm seeking office because I believe we need an independent-thinking legislator who puts citizens' interests ahead of partisan politics. We need a legislator who is more open and accountable to the taxpayers," he said.

Dunn questioned why the legislative sessions are not telecast or webcast. "The cost is minimal and in the face of being open to the community, I think that local government bodies need to make certain the proceedings are open and available to everyone."

Dunn also questions the need for local development corporations (LDC), a not for profit corporation created by county administration to privatize governmental activities. "Because they are private, LDC business activities are off the county books, hidden from public oversight," he said. "I believe balance in county government would better serve the people of District 1. We don't have a balanced county government currently. We need an independent legislator representing the people of Parma, Ogden and Sweden, who understands that a bipartisan approach to solving our problems is essential."

An additional reason he is seeking office is because he believes the voters in the district deserve a choice. "The voters out here haven't had a choice in 15 years and I think it is crucial for them to have one," he said.

Dunn thinks his 11 years in private practice working with three different engineering and construction firms, working as a professor at RIT and having been involved in the Spencerport school board and its budgets gives him the experience necessary to seek legislative office. "I have been involved in items that are tangible in the lives of people every day," he said. "From highways and bridges to drainage and infrastructure, I have the knowledge, experience and education to address these issues."

Dunn was born and raised in the Brockport area and his family has owned Dunn's Furniture, which is in its third generation of operation. He has lived in the District 1 area since 1993.

One of the biggest issues facing the district right now is the so-called FAIR plan, he said. "This plan, if enacted, will hurt residents of Parma, Ogden and Sweden proportionally more than residents in other parts of the county. Both the Hilton and Spencerport school districts stand to lose \$1.5 million in revenue and the Brockport district stands to lose even more (\$1.6 million/year). Moreover, the county has shifted its share of the cost for funding Monroe Community College directly to taxpayers. Since Parma, Ogden and Sweden have a high proportion of students at-



Todd Dunn



Dick Yolevich

tending MCC, the increase on the county tax bill will be approximately \$71 in Parma, and \$81 in Ogden, proportionally higher than in other parts of the county."

Dunn feels the public faith in county government has been eroded by current actions and recent scandals. "With last year's scandal with the Monroe County Water Authority and the fact that officials were granted salaries and unearned benefits, the faith in the government has fallen off," he said.

Dunn said he is the best person for the job because he would bring an independent voice to the legislature. "I would strive to make decisions on the citizens' behalf, not the (political) party's," he said. "I also think with my strong technical background and experience, working with large budgets and being able to work collaboratively, would be qualifications that would be necessary to be an effective legislator."

Dunn and his wife, Sharon, an elementary school teacher in the Brockport School District, have two children; Erin, a senior in Spencerport and Colin, a freshman.

Dick Yolevich will be seeking election to the seat which he has held for the past two years. He took over the seat from Pete McCann, whose term limited out. Prior to becoming a legislator, Yolevich held public office on the Parma Town Board for six years and prior to that, served six years on the Parma Zoning Board of Appeals. "I see my election to the legislature as a natural progression of my prior political service," he said. "My first opportunity in the role of legislator came because I had the experience and knowledge to fill the position."

While serving in the legislature for the past two years, Yolevich said he is most proud of having been able to be part of a government body that kept the property tax rate flat. "I was one of the sponsors of the taxpayer protection act which will tie any future increases in non-mandated spending to the consumer price index or below," he said. "Also, while on the legislature, we have cut nearly a half a million dollars in non-mandated spending, supported the Monroe County prescription drug plan for seniors, I opposed the Greece soccer complex and authorized needed spending for improvements in roads in Parma, Ogden and Sweden - approximately 10 roads and bridges were addressed."

He also supported the civil confinement bill to keep sex offenders out of neighborhoods.

"I secured community block grants for my district of \$139,000; \$8,700 for youth bureaus and \$96,000 in community block grants for the senior centers in my district," he said. General funding of \$390,000 was put toward transportation services for seniors in the area as well.

When talking taxes and cuts, Yolevich said he supported County Executive Maggie Brooks' FAIR (Fairness, Accountability, Innovation and Results) plan which school districts say will impact their bottom lines if they lose their share of sales tax revenues. "I felt the FAIR plan was the right thing to do," he said. "There is some controversy about it but I can tell you that I did the right thing by supporting the plan because we protected the property taxpayers and assured that the county's fiscal stability was taken care of. We prevented a 20 percent property tax increase and prevented the loss of critical services like having to close parks or limit county sheriff road patrols."

Yolevich said the FAIR plan "took the horrendous Medicaid bill off the backs of county taxpayers forever and cured the county budget deficit problems. Schools received a record increase from state aid of about 11 percent last year. You really can't convince me that they (the districts) can't tighten their belts without having to raise property taxes," he said. "The county executive has offered the services of our county budget advisory committee to all the school districts to help them look at their budgets and come up with innovative ways to save money - they have all turned us down."

Bottom line on the FAIR plan, Yolevich said, is that in the long run it will be beneficial to all taxpayers.

Yolevich said he was seeking reelection because his number one priority for the district, and the county, is job retention and creation. "I'm a firm believer in COMIDA and what they do. Since I have been in office the legislature has created 5,000 jobs and retained more than 11,000. I will listen to any reasonable ideas from individuals when it comes to creating or retaining jobs."

The issues facing both the district and the county, he said, was the structural imbalance of close to \$50 million every year caused by the Medicaid bill. "This year, by initiating the FAIR plan, we have disposed of the Medicaid bill and solved the structural balance in the county's budget," he said. "The budget problems we had in the past are gone for the foreseeable future as long as we continue to be frugal with spending."

Yolevich serves as the Monroe County Legislature's vice chair of the intergovernmental relations committee and on the human services committee. He sits on the board of directors for the Western New York Association of Counties. As a Viet Nam veteran he belongs to the American Legion Post 788, the VFW Post 6105 and the Viet Nam Veterans Chapter 20. He is a member of the Greater Hilton Parma Chamber of Commerce.

He and his wife of 39 years, Susan, have lived in Parma for 38 years. They have two adult children, Tracy and Vicki, and four grandchildren.

He feels he is the best person for the job of legislator because he is a retired small business owner and has inside, working knowledge of businesses. "I have a real feel for the pulse of the community and have accomplished many good things for the community since I've been in office and I want to continue to do so."