

Two vie for judgeship in Parma

by Robbi Hess

Incumbent Michael Sciortino and political newcomer Harriet Zunno are both vying for the Town of Parma justice seat. Both candidates are practicing attorneys.

Michael Sciortino said he was seeking reelection because of a letter he received from a woman whose family he helped in a 2005 case. "I was sincerely touched by this letter and by the mother of a young man who made some wrong choices in his life and who is now doing tremendously well," he said.

In addition to having served the residents since 2001, Sciortino said his passion is for public service, care for the community and his desire to help others. "My judicial experience and qualifications have set me apart from any other candidate for this office. I know that this position is extremely challenging and requires numerous hours in order to provide fair and impartial justice."

While in the role as justice, he has presided over more than 10,000 criminal, traffic and civil cases. "To have had the opportunity to receive just that one letter from an exhausted parent, in presiding over all of those cases, makes it worthwhile and purposeful to me. That is why I am running for a third term as Parma Town Justice, and I believe I am the most qualified judicial candidate for that office," he said.

He assists with the Rochester Teen Court and has been selected by the Better Business Bureau to serve as an arbitrator over commercial disputes in the marketplace between businesses and consumers.

Sciortino was hired as an attorney in 2000 by Chamberlain D'Amanda Oppenheimer & Greenfield LLP, a local law firm. He has been active as a trial lawyer and personally represented individuals with personal injuries, labor or employment disputes, criminal matters, and handled commercial and corporate litigation, in both state and federal court. "In 2006, I was a recipient of the "Up and Coming Attorney's Award" for my dedication to the legal profession and local community," he said.

The biggest challenges facing any town or village justice, he said, are the time commitment and ethical rules that must be complied with. "Being a Parma Town Justice is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week position."

Sciortino said he knows that "judges" are not political candidates in the traditional sense. "A judge represents the law and under the ethical rules must be held to a higher standard than candidates for other elective offices. All ju-

dicial candidates not only must be unbiased and impartial, but must also avoid any appearance of bias or partiality," he said.

While in office, he has worked with students since 2001 as a coach for the Hilton High School Mock Trial Team. "I also received the 'Friend of Education' award by the Hilton Central School District in 2004." He is vice president of the Monroe County Magistrate's Association and has maintained other positions such as secretary and treasurer. He belongs to numerous professional associations.

Looking ahead, he said he hopes to maintain the same degree of pride as he has had in the past as a Parma Town Justice and "continue to serve the Town of Parma as a fair and impartial jurist."

He lives in the village of Hilton with his wife and daughter and has lived in Hilton since 2000 when he graduated law school.

When asked why he is the best person for the job, he said, "On January 1, 2001, I took an oath of office to uphold the U.S. Constitution and the New York State Constitution and the laws of the State of New York. I take that responsibility extremely seriously and have since that time. I have more than seven years of judicial training and experience in three different judicial positions, more than seven years of experience as an attorney, and am also an arbitrator of commercial disputes. As a result of my judicial experience, I have been endorsed by the Republican, Conservative, and Independence parties," he said.

Harriet Zunno has lived in Hilton since 1992 and has participated in the community in various ways such as serving on the Village of Hilton Zoning Board of Appeals and being a member of the Hilton Rotary Club. She is currently on the board of directors for the Hilton Apple Fest and her duties include chairing committees, working with the photo contest and serving as the Hilton Apple Fest's official photographer.

She is a practicing attorney with an office located in Hilton. "I have a general practice but have been a qualified law guardian since 1993 representing children in family court, custody and divorce actions," she said. "My practice is not limited to doing law guardian work but this unique experience has brought me an understanding about human nature and relationships with each other that I would not have otherwise had."

When asked about issues facing the town or the judicial position she said, "Judges and those running for judgeships cannot offer an opinion about most topics including



Michael Sciortino



Harriet Zunno

what they may decide in any particular case or issues which may arise in a case. I will say I am very qualified, both by education and experience, to serve as the town justice."

Zunno has 21 years experience practicing law, 15 of that in the village. She went to law school at the University of New Mexico and practiced there for six years before returning to New York - her home state.

"I believe that people ought to serve their community in any way they can," she said when asked why she decided to seek office this year. "I grew up in the shadow of President John Kennedy who challenged us all to serve our country. I read that as serving our community in whatever manner we may feel qualified."

That service doesn't necessarily have to be in a public office, she said, but rather in serving with a local charity, helping those in need or in interest groups. "It is our participation, by all of us in various areas of community life, which makes a community vital and an interesting place to live. Thomas Jefferson said that people should bring their special talents to their government, share their expertise, help it succeed for all of us and then leave. In due course, change is good for government and I believe it is now time for a change in Parma and that is why I am seeking the justice seat."

She believes that without choice, without an election, there is no sense of accountability for those in office. "If someone is hand picked by a committee and they run unopposed, do they become accountable to the people who picked them or to the voters?" she asked.

There are close to 15,000 people in Parma, and about 9,000 of them are registered voters, she said. "Citizens have a powerful voice and ought to have a direct say on who is running their government and serving. You achieve this with elections where choices are available. Without choice, you don't have democracy," she said.

Election Day is Tuesday, November 6.