

For county offices

Tuesday, Oct. 24 2006

St. Louis County

The most lavishly-funded campaign for local public office on the Nov. 7 ballot is being waged by St. Louis County Executive Charlie A. Dooley. He has direct mail, radio and television commercials, a barrage of press releases and a campaign schedule that would drop a mule. What he doesn't have is an opponent with a legitimate shot at beating him.

Republican Joe Passanise, 64, of Creve Coeur, has raised less than \$15,000 for his campaign, and he has spent about \$6,500. A community college teacher and a former county highway engineer, Mr. Passanise entered the race on his own, without the support of the county Republican Committee.

Mr. Dooley, 58, has built on the Democratic political machine he inherited from the late George R. "Buzz" Westfall, whom he succeeded as county executive in 2003. He tapped the same source of campaign contributions, mostly developers and law firms doing business in the county, and has carpet-bombed Mr. Passanise with nearly \$1.2 million in spending. Not since the United States invaded Grenada has there been such a mismatch.

Mr. Dooley also inherited and built upon Mr. Westfall's staff, and has done a capable job of administering county government. Charlie A. Dooley has earned re-election.

Democrats would like to extend their control of county government by seizing the majority on the seven-member County Council. The key race there is the 5th District in the central county, where incumbent Republican Kurt S. Odenwald, 51, of Shrewsbury, is facing Democratic state Rep. Barbara Fraser, 59, of University City.

Ms. Fraser says she has a "broad vision" of the role of a county council member, saying her experience in the Missouri Legislature can help make sure that the county gets its fair share of state resources. She sees the county as an ideal location for biotech industries and promises to focus economic development initiatives in the county's inner-core suburbs. She says she will be an independent voice and won't be an automatic vote for Mr. Dooley's initiatives.

Mr. Odenwald, as the leader of the council's Republican majority, has played a valuable role in checking the excesses of Democratic county executives, although he has voted with the majority on important regional initiatives. His proposed

county-wide smoking ban was the most controversial issue considered by the Council in recent years.

Although it was defeated, Mr. Odenwald deserves credit for raising the issue. Although both candidates are well-qualified to serve St. Louis County, the balance and independence Kurt S. Odenwald provides on the council make him the choice in the 5th District.

In other council races, Republican Colleen Wasinger, 41, of Town & Country, is the choice over Democrat Kathleen "Kathy" Schweitzer, 50, of West County in the 3rd District. Ms. Wasinger promises to continue the policies of retiring Council member Skip Mange, who may have been the county's most valuable member. In the 7th District, incumbent Republican Greg Quinn's experience gives him the edge over Democrat Steven Biggs of Eureka. In the 1st District,

incumbent Democrat Hazel M. Erby is unopposed.

St. Charles County

By dint of experience and temperament, Steve Ehlmann deserves to win the post of St. Charles County Executive in next month's election. He has represented the county in the Missouri House and Senate and served three years as a judge on its circuit court. For the last two years, he's been county director of administration, where he is right-hand man and understudy to County Executive Joe Ortwerth.

Mr. Ehlmann was born in the county, and there may be no one else who knows it better. He literally wrote the book on the place: "Crossroads: A History of St. Charles County, Missouri," published in 2004.

Now, he's the Republican Party's anointed successor to Mr. Ortwerth, who is leaving the post. He is opposed by Democrat Jim Rutherford, 44, a marketing manager from St. Charles city. Mr. Rutherford wants to improve environmental public health and emergency procedures and lower taxes. But he cannot equal Mr. Ehlmann's breadth of experience.

Mr. Ortwerth gave St. Charles good, sensible government. But he had a habit of launching into battles with municipal leaders over annexation land-grabs and the larding on of tax breaks to developers. In those battles, Mr. Ortwerth usually was right.

Mr. Ehlmann, 55, promises a gentler, less combative administration. "We've had a real drop in the tone of our deliberations," he says. "If we

don't clean up our act, good people are not going to want to get involved in government any more."

Four seats on the county council are up for grabs, and voters have a choice of several qualified candidates. In the 1st District, Republican challenger Joe Cronin presents no compelling reason to oust incumbent Democrat Cheryl Hibbeler. Mr. Cronin, a St. Paul alderman and manager of a lawn equipment company, pledges to stop abuse of eminent domain and promote "smart growth." Ms. Hibbeler wants to keep outlying areas of the county rural, while focusing developers on "infill" tracts in existing suburbs. She is the better choice.

In the 3rd District, Republican Nancy Matheny, 55, of Weldon Spring, holds the edge, based on her status as a certified public accountant and a career that includes a stint as management dean at Lindenwood University. She is opposed by Democrat Tim Schulte, 40, a stock broker from St. Peters. They express similar views on county issues, but Ms. Matheny's broader financial background should bring a needed perspective to the council.

In the 5th District, Democratic incumbent Joseph McCulloch, 50, a lawyer and former St. Louis police officer, faces Republican John Didion, 55, owner of Didion & Sons Foundry in St. Charles. After crews of illegal immigrants were found working on a publicly-aided construction project, Mr. McCulloch sponsored an ordinance to require that contractors on such projects pay prevailing wages. Mr. Didion promises to bring "pro-business values" to the council in order to attract employers.

Joseph McCulloch's concern for workers' wages is admirable, and he deserves reelection.

In the 7th District, Republican John White, 60 is the owner of a dental ceramics company. He has served well on the council for five years. His Democratic opponent, Howard Hoskins, 59, is a retired advertising and public relations executive from

St. Charles.

Jefferson County

Four years ago, Republican Mark Mertens won an upset victory to become presiding commissioner. He has performed more than capably, guiding the county in its sometimes difficult transition from rural enclave to an area of booming suburban

bedroom communities. Mr. Mertens has managed improved transportation, sewage and broadband access programs while maintaining Jefferson County's traditional reverence for property rights. He is the choice over Democrat Chuck Banks, the

former mayor of Pevely.

Franklin County

Republican Ed Hillhouse, 57, of Villa Ridge, deserves a second term as presiding commissioner. He has professionalized county government and, like Mr. Mertens in Jefferson County, done a good job in balancing the demands of new suburban residents with older families who don't want to lose the small-town character in the county. His Democratic opponent is Gary W. Getman, 45, of St. Clair, a former sheriff's deputy and St. Clair police officer.

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