

Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



DeVos Makes the Rounds of All 83 Michigan Counties

In the year before his successful 1990 bid to unseat Governor Jim Blanchard, Republican John Engler visited all 83 Michigan counties, mostly in his Oldsmobile sedan, lugging along a bulky phone-in-a-bag that worked only on occasion.

Last week, in his bid to unseat Governor Jennifer Granholm next year, Republican Dick DeVos reached the 83-county milestone when he dropped by the Peppermill Restaurant in Gladwin for a 5 p.m. "meet and greet" session with local folks after earlier stops in Standish, East Tawas, and Tawas City.

DeVos, who in these high-tech days makes cell phone calls and taps out wireless e-mails as he rides in his Lincoln Navigator SUV, arrived with a driver and a communications aide who downloads photos and videos for the campaign Web site.

"I've logged 28,118 miles since June and each mile has been an education," said the wealthy west Michigan businessman, former president of Amway and its parent company, Alticor, Inc. Some of the stops, especially in the Upper Peninsula, were made in DeVos' own small jet.

DeVos, the GOP's unopposed nominee-in-waiting, reached the 83-county mark about nine months before the 2006 primary. Engler, who was Senate majority leader and presumed nominee at the time and campaigned mostly on weekends, hit the mark in December 1989.

A common thread in the early journeys of Engler and DeVos was the PR flair of John Truscott, who was Engler's press secretary and now communications director for DeVos.

Truscott trumpeted DeVos "...having coffee at the Leland Fire House, enjoying a cheeseburger at Club 37 in Baldwin...visiting New Page Paper Company in Escanaba," etc.

Now DeVos will spend much more time in urban areas, including, this week, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Metro Detroit.

Truscott said DeVos is on track to meet his fundraising goal of \$1 million by December. His wife, former Republican State Chairwoman Betsy DeVos, is helping on that

front. Campaign finance obviously will not be a problem for a family that is one of Michigan's wealthiest, and one of the nation's top GOP contributors.

How's DeVos doing so far with voters? According to latest polling, about a third of them don't yet recognize his name. That's not surprising at this point, and can be overcome with time and money.

About the time that DeVos started his tour, he trailed Granholm, 33 percent to 51 percent, among 600 likely November 2006 voters surveyed by Lansing-based EPIC/MRA. In the firm's 600-sample October 19 to 25 poll, Granholm led, 53-30. (Margin of error: plus/minus 4 percentage points.)

Considering the margin of error, and that the election is a year away, not much should be read into the fact that he trailed her in October by five more points than he did in June (and by three more points than in September's slightly smaller sample.)

One thing that gets flyspecked by both camps at this stage is who's gaining where. Granholm has significantly increased her substantial lead in the Detroit media market; while DeVos has done the same in the Grand Rapids media market.

In coming months, the battle increasingly will be joined in Oakland and Macomb counties, and western Wayne. Just as Ottawa County long has been GOP West, Oakland County once was GOP East. Not now.

Northern Watch

DeVos' best showing among Michigan's five major media markets is a 48-32 lead in the Traverse City market, which covers much of the northern Lower Peninsula and the eastern Upper Peninsula.

Granholm's 32 percent is the lowest in any media market, as is her 32 percent in the Map Regions category that EPIC/MRA dubs "Lower North." However, in the Upper Peninsula, she leads, 75-13.

Regional sub-samples have a greater margin of error. But Granholm has an apparent need to shore up just below the bridge.

George Weeks is the political columnist for The Detroit News and is syndicated by Superior Features.

Janice Law Picked for Book Fair

A former St. Ignace summer resident, Judge Janice Law, is among authors selected for the annual Book Fair and Authors' Night sponsored by the National Press Club (NPC) in Washington, D.C., November 17.

The event attracts hundreds of fans, publishers, NPC members, and agents and is open to the public.

A judge in Texas, Ms. Law has written a book entitled "Sex Appealed. Was the U.S. Supreme Court Fooled?" which details investigation into lingering rumors about *Lawrence v. Texas*, which went from her Houston, Texas court to the Supreme Court.

Judge Law now serves as a visiting judge for judges who are ill or on vacation.

Municipal Planning Experts Share Ideas for City Manager Search

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engineering, since much of the job involved shaping growth, infrastructure, and dealing with financial issues," explained Professor Ohren. "The position was seen as nonpolitical, although this meant that council should accept the recommendations of the professional without question, which you could argue was political indeed.

"The position today is widely recognized as political," he continued, "not in the pejorative or partisan sense, but in the sense of mediating, accommodating, and facilitating decisions. And, because of the growth in local government activities, there is much more to ride herd on besides infrastructure. Indeed, people skills have become critical; managing an organization of a group of professionals requires key technical and human relations skills, as well as the ability to communicate effectively with council members and the larger community."

Professor Ohren believes that relationships with the community may be a city manager's greatest challenge.

"The manager must be working all the time with the community," he said, "through neighborhood organizations, business groups like the chamber, and utilizing a whole host of new approaches to facilitating and engaging people — surveys, focus groups, town meetings, open houses, coffees, and so on."

He said council needs to find a person who can balance and complete many tasks at one time and keep a level head during conflicts that arise on the board and within the community.

"Balancing the necessary attention to both internal and external demands can be difficult for managers," he said. "It often takes a personal toll."

How To Trim the List of Applicants

Professor Ohren suggests each council member should have an idea of what he or she wants from development of St. Ignace in the future and find those candidates who best match those visions.

"Spend time prior to reviewing applications and interviewing candidates to develop consensus on the key directions for the community," Professor Ohren advises. "If the council can arrive at some agreement on what they collectively see as the future of the community, that will help them determine the kind of individual they see leading the community in that direction. For example, if the community is growing, becoming more diverse and heterogeneous, with new programs and new issues perceived to be addressed in the future, you want a manager who can relate to that perceived future, one perhaps who has experienced some of the same changes in a prior position."

For Mr. Amrhein, what is most important for council is to always keep in mind the most important question when reviewing and interviewing applicants: What is best for the city?

"Everyone is going to have their favorites," said Mr. Amrhein. "I would suggest to council to try to keep an open mind, try to think of follow-up questions. If you don't understand the answer they give you, then ask them to elaborate and, at the end, really sort it all out.

"Council needs to be really give and take," he continued. "They need to keep asking themselves who is the one who will do the best job for the city. I think it requires a special kind of person that, when it does get political, it won't bother him or her. In a sense, that person must act as almost a servant to the board, which gets tough sometimes."

Mr. Amrhein said council must not just offer a job but sell the community to the candidates; explain not just what council expects from that person but also what that person can expect out of the community, such as economic growth and rearing a family.

"This helps to get a good pool of candidates," he said. "My inclination with any kind of hiring is that the person should have the soft skills already. You want people who are already accustomed to communicating with people, for example. Maybe that person is just a small department manager in

that city, sometimes it's that person that has familiarity and has experience in finance and such. They can learn the hard stuff afterwards. There is going to be a learning period with anyone they hire."

Professor Ohren said there is no easy answer to trimming a pool of 31 candidates down to only five, though had council hired a firm to recruit and screen applicants, it may have been worth the cost.

"While this is an added expense, sometimes the cost is worth it in terms of contacts in the network of applicants, ability to help the council develop in collective fashion a job description, and use of that description in winnowing out most applicants," he said. "Without being totally familiar with the council's desires regarding skills and experiences, I would look for academic credentials — degree in public administration — and past experiences in public and nonprofit organizations."

He offers the following questions that should be considered during the hiring process:

- Has the applicant been a manager, even if not a city manager? Department head, assistant manager positions are often good training grounds for managers.

- Has that person been a supervisor, has that person had responsibility for people getting a job done? "This is one of the key responsibilities of the manager and I recognize it is hard to gauge," he said.

- Have they worked with organized groups of employees? "In most communities across this state, employees are unionized and that poses a variety of challenges for managers."

- Have they had to prepare and implement a budget; are they familiar with the financial challenges facing local governments today?

- Have they worked with a governing board, even if not a city council?

- How have such councils evaluated them in the past on these several areas of responsibility, if at all?

What Makes A Good Candidate?

A good city manager candidate should have experience working with governing boards, said Professor Ohren, whether it is within a city, township, village, county, or even a nonprofit organization.

"Public and nonprofit entities are quite different from private organizations, especially in the role that the governing board plays," he said. "They have legitimate authority to act on behalf of the community; the manager's job is to facilitate that action by the board and then to implement the collective decisions that emerge.

"The best candidates are those who can facilitate, accommodate, and reconcile differences between and among many different groups," he continued. "The manager has to play a mediating role, facilitating the expression of diverse views — making sure people get a chance to express their views and are heard; compromise and accommodation that almost always becomes necessary to resolve differences; and implementation of policies and programs where some people are almost bound to be unhappy."

The nature of the environment within which managers operate, said Professor Ohren, is often full of conflict.

"There's differences within the community — racial or income or even geographic divisions often manifest themselves in communities; differences between and among council members who are charged with governing as a collective body — a challenge sometimes even in the most homogeneous communities; and there are differences within the organization among competing professionals. Police and fire professionals compete between themselves for resources, status and so on, as do recreational staff, and any of the other employees groups in the city."

Though he has more involvement with county administrators, Mr. Amrhein believes there are common characteristics between a county administrator and a city manager.

"They both need to have the

ability to manage money and people," he said. "Having the common skills for basic operations for that position is really critical. But you also must have the ability of getting people to work together.

"A manager is truly a manager," he continues. "He or she is the CEO of the city. In the county, an administrator is different, his or her job is a bit more complex because he or she must deal with more elected officials, that being department heads. But a city needs someone who can work with an elected board and know their positions and at the same time understand the role of supervising departments and employees."

Today's city managers are asked to do more with less, said Mr. Gilmartin. It is important, he said, that the candidate be able to multi-task, yet also be active in the community.

"You need someone who understands the municipal government," Mr. Gilmartin said. "For today's city managers, it's a different time now with financial structures. It's important for that person to be able to be a good fit into the community. They need to know more about individuals' needs in the community. They need to have some skill in the demographics in that particular area. It may be economic development, or maintaining infrastructure, or a broad-based look at finances."

Candidate Need Not Have A Tourism Background

With St. Ignace's main industry being tourism, many city council members are interested in what sort of tourism background each applicant has and to see what ideas and goals these candidates can bring to the city. But is having experience within the tourism industry necessary?

Mr. Amrhein believes as long as a candidate has a strong background in the basic operations a city manager must perform, which he calls "soft skills," he or she should not have a hard time incorporating the community's main industry into the city's financial, infrastructure, and future development plans.

"At some point," said Mr. Amrhein, "to be a very effective city manager for the City of St. Ignace, he or she is going to have to at least understand the impact of that industry and the impact it has on all city governments in the state. If council gets someone who is a good learner, a good listener, and studies up, then it just becomes another 'soft skill-hard skill' thing.

"What's critical is that they acquire that skill, that they understand by either having it from day one or fairly quickly after that," he continued.

Mr. Amrhein also warns council of candidates who have long-marinated in one particular industry in their current or previous position.

"You don't want to see someone who's been a city manager in a city of 40,000 people, which is totally based on, for example, manufacturing, because he or she won't get out of the mindset of manufacturing," he said. "You might get someone who wants a slower pace with that background, and if he or she's a good learner and can adapt, then that person is a good candidate. But that's a hard thing to measure."

Professor Ohren, believes that a city manager must allow other community groups, such as Chamber of Commerce and St. Ignace Visitors Bureau, to steer the city's tourism industry in the right direction, but that person must have the ability to orchestrate issues and communication between the city and those groups.

"While your main industry might be tourism, I bet most of the money in the city's general fund budget is devoted to public safety," said Professor Ohren. "But I am not sure that I would agree that a police or fire chief would be the best candidate for manager. The manager may become the most visible cheerleader for tourism and for the community, but the manager will not be running the economic development commission or the visitor and convention bureau.

"City managers need to be able to supervise, work with, and support professionals in all departments in the city," he continued. "So rather than a virtuoso in one

function, I would look for one who can move beyond their own functional expertise and knit the whole group together in symphony."

Growing Talent

Professor Ohren and Mr. Amrhein believe college graduates or young applicants with little or no administration experience are not a genuine candidate, nor should they be, however, bringing in young talent and grooming them to eventually take a position like a city manager is making better preparations for the future.

"I personally do not encourage our students to apply for management positions right out of the program unless of course, they are going through the program with experience already under their belt," Professor Ohren said. "For example, a young man who had worked in a public safety department, with progressively more responsible supervisory positions, recently completed our program and applied for, and was accepted, as manager in a small community. Normally, however, our traditional age students don't have the experience needed to 'hit the ground running' in a manager's position, and they are better off serving as an assistant or apprentice for a couple of years.

"Having said that, however," he continued, "I am aware that in smaller communities the salary level often is not competitive for people who have been in the field for some time. In that case, you may have no choice but to get a newcomer in the field.

"The key skill that is needed to learn on the job is working with a board," said Professor Ohren. "There is not much we can do in a classroom that prepares a student for the challenge of meeting the needs of five or seven or nine or even 15 council members, the 'care and feeding' of council members I often call it. While humorous to think about it that way, it really is the key to the success of a manager; he or she will succeed to the extent they can meet the expectations of a group of people who are elected individually to act collectively on behalf of the community. That is often a recipe for conflict."

Mr. Amrhein considers the city manager and county administrator positions in America are a "graying department," however, that may not be a disadvantage.

"Part of me agrees that there is a need to replace those graying departments by growing talent from within, but another part of me says this is a CEO position," said Mr. Amrhein. "This is not a job for my 25-year-old son, for example, but give him five years of experience in a managerial role and then maybe he'll be ready."

Making a deputy city manager position, said Mr. Amrhein, is a great concept if the city can afford to do so and can entice that person to stick around.

"The difficulty, from a practical standpoint, is if you hire a city manager at the age of 40 and you have a deputy fresh out of college," he said. "That's conceptually a great idea. However, that 40-year-old manager, if he's doing a good job, might be looking at retiring or moving on; also, the deputy might not want to wait that long.

"You must encourage your managers of any type to continue to educate, to grow, and invest in the people they have working for them," Mr. Amrhein continued. "Some of them you're going to lose, that's okay because you've contributed to the quality of the profession. However, some will stay. But city managers today are usually so busy that they need to focus on what's happening now, that's what's more important to them. The piles of paper on the desk have to be done before you can be thinking down the road."

Mr. Gilmartin said there will be a learning period for the new city manager.

"Even the most experienced city manager would have a period somewhat with a learning curve," Mr. Gilmartin said. "They have to get to know the community or they have to get to know the city infrastructure or the basic operations of supervising the departments. There's always going to be a learning curve with whoever council hires."

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359 Reagon Street, PO Box 277, Saint Ignace, MI 49781

Telephone (906) 643-9150 • Facsimile (906) 643-9122

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Publisher/Editor

Wesley H. Maurer, Jr.

Associate Publisher

Mary R. Maurer

Advertising Director

Dawn R. Huskey

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.