

Candidates for Alton alderpeople speak before last night's mayoral forum

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Candidates seeking positions as alderpeople were given three minutes to speak on behalf of their candidacies at the East End Improvement Association's (EEIA's) Fourth Annual Candidate Forum.

Those running with opposition were invited to take the podium at the conference center at the Atrium Hotel the evening of Tuesday, March 7, 2017. Candidates were invited to speak in order of the wards in which they were running, and candidates were given placement by alphabetical order. The event was moderated by Steve Schwartz.

Ward 1

In the First Ward, Brian Campbell is running against James Hernandez to fill the seat of Jim Ryan, who served as alderman for 12 years.

Brain Campbell: During his introduction, Campbell said he was raised in Piasa Hills in Godfrey, attended St. Ambrose Catholic School in Godfrey and graduated from Marquette Catholic High School in Alton. Currently he is a business owner with a wife, Monica Schwegel, and is raising three children in Alton.

"My kids are part of the reason I want to run for alderman," he said. "I want a safe environment for them. I want a safe environment for all of your children, too."

Campbell said his children participate at the Boys and Girls Club in Alton, with their favorite hobby being chess. As part of his candidacy, he said he has met with several community groups, including Alton Main Street, the Riverbend Growth Association and All Around Alton.

He said budgeting and fiscal responsibility were going to be cornerstones of his campaign.

James Hernandez: Hernandez said he was a lifelong resident of the First Ward. He formerly served as the Chairman of the Alton Expo, and was also a former member of the Alton Godfrey Rotary Club as well as the Alton Knights of Columbus.

Hernandez also touted his experience working within the city, with 14 years of experience as the Alton Public Works Director, appointed by who he described as "one of the best mayor's Alton has seen in years," Donald Sandidge. He said that experience makes him "invaluable" to citizens, saying he knows how the "system is supposed to work."

He promised to be available in person and by phone if elected. He described himself as "honest, dependable and trustworthy."

He concluded by sharing a joke he heard from Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick regarding building a wall between Alton and Godfrey, saying "if it happens, this proud Mexican won't pay for it."

Ward 2

In the Second Ward, Eric Konkol is running against incumbent Carolyn MacAfee.

Eric Konkol: Konkol said he has lived in the Second Ward for 10 years with his wife and three daughters, adding he considers Alton his hometown - despite not being born there.

He said he has a "variety of skills" to find solutions to complex problems. Those skills include understanding budgets as well as ordinances. He said he works with a tight budget for the United States Postal Service, where he oversees vehicle operations and maintenance.

He is also a trustee for the National Association of Letter Carriers. He said that position within a union greatly aids in conflict resolution and negotiations between different viewpoints. He said he would use those skills if elected to find middle ground as well as helping to continue to revitalize Alton.

Carolyn MacAfee: MacAfee said she was not running for reelection "as a hobby," or "for a paycheck." She showcased her accomplishments as an alderwoman, including her own efforts to beautify Alton through pulling weeds, planting a garden for the benefit of the Oasis Women's Center and adding signage to the Lincoln-Douglas Square.

She also showcased work she has done throughout her ward, including adding proper drainage and culverts to 11th Street, and assisting the Alton Police Department in ridding Elm Street of a drug house. She said she has turned in 75 property violations due to disrepair, 75 street department issues, 54 junk cars at rental properties, trimmed or cut down 19 dead trees, fulfilled 110 pickup requests for large items of garbage, 175 trash and junk violations and 202 weed and tall grass violations.

She also showcased a traffic study she had conducted at 20th Street and Alby.

If elected, she promised to support small businesses, the amphitheater, the Alton Police Department and the Alton Fire Department as well as stronger code enforcement.

Ward 3

In the Third Ward, Incumbent Michael Veloff is running against Ayron Womack. Womack did not appear at the event, so Schwartz allowed Veloff to speak.

Michael Veloff: Veloff said he was born in Alton, and has lived in the city for 45 years. He said he lives in Alton with his wife, Beverly, and their two children. He said he attended St. Matthews Catholic Church and graduated from Alton High School as his class valedictorian. He has since received a masters in civil engineering from the University of Kansas, and still currently works as a civil engineer for Heyden and Associated in St. Louis.

Veloff said diverse people working together for the community will be in a better position to generate creative solutions. He said he would work to limit liability and cost to taxpayers, while still working to revitalize and preserve the historical parts of Alton.

He said he is currently working with the city to ensure people living near the multi-modal train station near Homer Adams Parkway will be properly protected from both noise and environmental pollution from the station's completion.

Ward 4

In the Fourth Ward, incumbent Tammy Smith was appointed to her position on Oct. 26, 2016, following the death of former Fourth Ward Alderwoman Alice Martin. Smith is being opposed by Rosetta Brown, Steven Kimbrough, Sr., Stanton E. Holliday and Carlton William Cannon.

Rosetta Brown: Brown described herself as a "lady with a vision." She spoke with confidence, saying she received a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership, her master's in human resources and was working towards a doctorate in education. She is married to Roy Brown and the two have a daughter together. She said she has also been fostering children with her husband for 15 years, most recently adopting two young men.

She said she has a great amount of experience in collaboration and would work toward creating safe havens and community centers for people, saying, "if someone had a place to lay their head and food to eat, they would be more willing to be trained and educated for a job, instead of resorting to robbing, stealing and killing." She said she would stop criminals from "migrating into the Fourth Ward."

Grant-writing is another skill she championed, saying the city could use someone who knew how to get funding through such methods.

She said she wanted to beautify and upgrade the safety of the Fourth Ward.

Carlton Cannon: Cannon said he was born and raised in Alton, adding he has owned a barbershop within the Fourth Ward for a decade. He said he has faced a lot of troubles in his life, including having his car break down before the forum (he took a cab). He said he also slept on the floor of his barbershop for the first few months it was opened.

He said he attended St. Patrick's School, finishing his elementary education at Lovejoy. He graduated from Alton High School.

In the Fourth Ward, Cannon said he was working toward placing 14 garden beds, for the purpose of neighborhood "sustainability." In the future, he said he wanted to "triple" that number. He said people in his ward suffered from "health issues," which he said would be much less if they were eating better.

He said he was also called into court to testify regarding a store across the street from his barbershop, which was selling paraphernalia. He said, partially due to his hard decision to speak, that store was no longer selling liquor in his neighborhood.

Stanton Holliday: Holliday took the podium dressed in his Army dress uniform. He said he returned to Alton in 1993 after joining the U.S. Army in 1973. Since his return, he said the Fourth Ward has had "weak leadership." He said he would bring strength to the position.

His journey for strength, he said, first occurred when he read the Bible from cover to cover when he was 19, adding anyone who knew him before that knew he needed to do it. He said he stayed in the Army for two decades because he is "a fighter." He described his role models as Eisenhower, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Lincoln.

He said he learned many things through his time in the United States Army, including that both the pen and the tongue are "mightier than the sword."

Before leaving for the armed forces, Holliday said he was a major part of a large push to force the Alton Police Department to hire nine black officers. Previous to 1973, he said the Fourth Ward had very strong leadership. He said he would bring "strength, integrity and honesty" to the position.

"I'm not scared of mayors, police chiefs or anyone," he said. "I went to the same schools they did and know all the same stuff."

Steven Kimbrough, Sr.: Kimbrough said he is a mailman with knowledge, experience and qualification. He said he is knowledgeable of the city as well as state and federal laws. He said he has also served as a Chairman of the Precinct Committeemen within the ward.

He said he has worked with the NAACP as well as the Coalition of Concerned Citizens.

Kimbrough said he has lived in Alton his entire life, with the majority of that time being within the Fourth Ward. He disagreed with the need for a new community center, saying current buildings and streets needed to be revitalized. He said he wanted to restore and invest in the youth within the ward together, saying everyone had to work together to make it work. He championed efforts by Alton Boys and Girls Club Director Al Womack, as well as the Aces Program sponsored by Greg Norris.

Tammy Smith: Smith is the current alderwoman, appointed following the death of Alice Martin. Smith said she has been a lifelong resident of Alton, works with people who have been deemed unfit to stand trial as well as those who were able to plead insanity.

She also started A Precious Organization, dedicating to aiding people in the community who suffer from sickle-cell - like her daughter and grandchild. Through that organization, she has been able to help people suffering from sickle-cell across the region with medical care, summer camps and an annual Sickle-Cell Walk, which has raised as much as \$40,000 for the cause.

Smith also championed "Ballin' with a Cop" - a program for young people to make community with police officers through the universal language of basketball.

She said she did not expect to be an alderwoman, but promised she was doing her best to carry the legacy of Martin. She said she would continue to be guided by her example and would support "cleaning up" neighborhoods as well as continued support for both the Alton Police Department and Alton Fire Department, and the revitalization of the "Mexico" area of Alton.

Ward 5

In the Fifth Ward, Charles Brake is running unopposed for his seventh term, after 20 years in office.

Ward 6

In the Sixth Ward, Terry Bristow is running against Stephanie Elliott for the position once held by outgoing Alderman Gary Fleming, who is retiring after 20 years as an alderman.

Terry Bristow: Bristow thanked Fleming for his service, saying he had been planning to run for the position for eight years. He said he lives in Alton, and runs Bristow's

Automotive Repair. Because of his status as a small business owner, Bristow said he is experienced with working with small budgets.

He said he was told by his father to not complain about a city unless he was prepared to do something about it. He said he wanted to come together and "keep outsourcing to a minimum" within the city. He said the city could do a lot more work in house, warning city workers to "prepare for more training" if he were to be elected. He also said he was in favor of the community policing program and promised to be accessible to his constituents.

Stephanie Elliott: Elliott began her presentation by thanking God. She said she was the oldest of five girls and lives in Alton with retired electrician, Joe Elliott. She said the two have two sons who now live in New York and Mississippi. She said she was born and raised in Alton and graduated from Alton High School.

Her experience working her way through businesses was showcased in her speech as well. She said she started working as a hostess at the Holiday Inn, eventually working her way into management. She received a master's in accounting from Webster University, and currently works in special operations at the Simmons, Hanley Conroy National Law Firm, where she is also a part of the Simmons Employee Foundation.

Elliott also volunteers at the Reach Out and Read program.

She said she would promote safety and community in Alton and believes her background in finances will help assist the city with some of its worst issues, which are financial in nature.

Ward 7

David L. Boulds is running unopposed in the Seventh Ward for his fifth term in office.