

Six have entered, three will win: Godfrey Women's Club hosts forum for candidates running for village trustees

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GODFREY - The Godfrey Women's Club hosted a candidate forum for the "betterment of Godfrey" last evening.

The six people running for three positions on the Godfrey Village Board as trustees were at a forum hosted by the Godfrey Women's Club on Tuesday, March 9, 2017, at the Walter S. Ahlemeyer Atrium in the Trimpe Building on the campus of Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC). During that forum, all six candidates took public questions screened through moderator Mark Ellebracht of WBGZ Radio and an "impartial committee" selected by the Godfrey Women's Club.

Godfrey Women's Club Vice President Ginger Woodman said the organization is not at all political, and agreed to do the forum because no other organization was going to do it, and she believed part of her group's mission to make Godfrey better includes ensuring voters are informed. This was the first year for the event.

Candidates running for positions on the village board this year include: Jeffery R. Weber, Mark Stewart, Sharon A. Campbell, Michael G. Stumpf, Jerome J. Jacobs and Nathan L. Schrumpf. On April 4, 2017, voters in Godfrey will be able to select three of those six on their ballots.

Before answering questions, each candidate was given three minutes to introduce himself /herself. That time was paced with a colored spotlight, which started at green, turned to yellow when the candidate had 30 seconds and turned red when time was finished. That spotlight system was used during questions as well.

Full video of the event can be seen below.

Introductions

Jeff Weber: Weber introduced his wife, and said he lived in the Alton-Godfrey area his entire life, before graduating from the University of Missouri and becoming an officer in the U.S. Army. Following his time, he returned to Alton, where he owned an asphalt company as well as a rope and rigging company.

He said people should vote for him because he "has the skills and ability to be a good trustee." For 40 years, he said he has worked with road and sewer constructions, and he knows how to bring more revitalization to Godfrey. He touted his work with unions and government agencies, saying he knows the importance of deadlines and staying on budget. He said he does not accept campaign contributions "from anybody."

"The reason for this is, if you come to me and talk about a problem, I'm going to talk to you and answer you the best I can about your problem," Weber said. "It has nothing to do with whether you gave me any money or not."

He said his parents taught him to give back to the community, which allows him to make a living. He said he has done that through working in various organizations, including being President of the Alton School Board, was on the board at Alton Memorial Hospital, has worked with the Boy Scouts, Junior Achievement, the Alton Boys and Girls Club, the USO of Missouri, PRIDE, Inc. and said he was on the Marquette Catholic High School Finance Board, despite not being a Catholic himself. He was also chairman of the Lincoln-Douglas Square Restoration Project.

In Godfrey, Weber said he was chairman of the building and zoning commission and was chairman of the sewer department, which is what he is currently doing now. He's also on the Capital Projects Board and Stormwater Committee.

He wanted to serve three four-year terms as a trustee, did not run again after two terms, so he took a two-year respite before serving a third term, saying he believes in term limits.

"We need to get ready with good roads and sewers, while not forgetting about our wonderful parks system, if Godfrey is to have good growth."

Mark Stewart: Stewart is currently a Godfrey Trustee - a position he has held for 18 years. He said he originally ran early in Godfrey's history and had three unsuccessful campaigns before he was eventually elected. He said he was going to stop trying, but a friend told him to run again, going door to door telling people what they think and listening to what they say.

"During my time on the board, that's what I've tried to do," he said. "I've tried to listen to people, even people who disagree with me sometimes, but I try to learn from them, and maybe they learn from me, and we try to find better solutions."

Stewart works as a computer programmer for Graybar Electric - an employee-owned company. He got into that field after losing two positions due to plant closures. After losing his job twice, he decided to undergo additional training in a new field, and has worked his way from the bottom of computer programming. He continued his training and received an additional degree in organizational management.

Worked in Godfrey's Exchange program and has volunteered as an auctioneer at Marquette Catholic High School for many years. He's also doing Power of the Purse. He's also the chairman of Godfrey's finance committee, as appointed by Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick.

If elected, he promised to try to do a good job and listen.

Sharon Campbell: Campbell said she has lived in Godfrey with her husband for 27 years (before Godfrey was even incorporated into a village). She was a transplant from Missouri. She retired from her position in January 2015 after serving more than four decades in the federal government - including with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission before retiring from the U.S. Department of Defense as an auditor for the U.S. Army.

"Since my retirement, I have followed the activities in the Village of Godfrey as it tries to prosper and grow," she said. "It's an honor to have the opportunity to become involved and be a part of the decision-making process to move Godfrey forward, and expand this community with growth."

She said she has been "networking" with citizens and found the people "really do care about the future of Godfrey." She said the issue is waiting to have things happen, saying people do not understand the process and complexity changes take, stating they "cannot happen overnight."

"Keeping citizens involved and informed, and an open line of communication is extremely important," she said. "I am very familiar in my experience with the federal government in the importance of making decisions and how your actions affect those individuals you represent."

As an auditor for the U.S. Army, she said she is experienced in keeping soldiers on the ground equipped with what they need "to get their job done."

"My goal is to hear the issue at hand, and make decisions that will benefit the Village of Godfrey and its citizens," she said.

She said she would research the issues brought to her and make the best decisions for everybody in the community after that research.

Michael Stumpf: Stumpf was the first candidate to stand during his introduction, claiming he "was just a pup," at age 66. He said he has lived in Godfrey for more than 25 years (the village was incorporated 25 years ago using the borders of Godfrey Township). He moved to Godfrey from Batchtown in Calhoun County.

"My biggest asset that I feel toward this community is a great deal of common sense and love for it," he said. "Knowing what can be done, and how it can be done."

He worked for Fred Weber, Inc. in the field of construction for 34 years, four months and 12 days, he said, before retiring on Jan. 12 at 7:34 a.m. on "his birthday, because there was a group of guys going to Texas for fishing, and he thought it was a good time to go."

"It has been my pleasure to serve the residents of the Village of Godfrey," he said. "My being here is hopeful to help move the Village of Godfrey forward to the future. I was certain that when 255 was completed that Godfrey would grow. When 255 was completed, the economic downturn showed me that was not going to happen. All the people that you talk to said, 'Mike you've got to wait, because in five years, that interchange behind you will develop before yours does. Folks, it's been eight and it still hasn't.'"

He said that "amazes him," because Godfrey has "hundreds and hundred of acres" for buildings to be built. He said he was not patient for the slow-pace of the development. He asked for voters to reelect him for another term on the village board.

Jerome Jacobs: Jacobs, 36, said he lives in Godfrey with his wife and children, saying his family are members of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Alton. He said he lived in Godfrey his entire life in a large family. He has worked as a change-over coordinator for the St. Louis Blues for 11 years, before recently taking a position at the Wood River Refinery.

"I think civic involvement is a very important responsibility, which is why I'm running for trustee," he said. "More than anything else, I'm running for trustee, because I would like to keep Godfrey a wonderful place to live. I want to make sure our roads and infrastructure stay operable. I want our existing parks to remain safe and beautiful, but I also want to help make our parks even better as they grow. I want Godfrey residents to feel safe in their community, and strongly support our police and fire departments for the dangerous jobs that they do."

He said his goals were to "be open-minded," "always seek consensus," be a good listener and "bring a common sense approach to local government."

Nathan Schrumpf: Schrumpf, 37, said he was born and raised in Godfrey, where he lives with his wife and daughters. He said "with four girls in the house," he is "always outvoted," and joked he thought this is an election in which he has a shot. His family is members of Evangelical Church of Christ, where Schrumpf said he attended elementary school before graduating from Alton High School and attending Ranken Technical College.

He said at the age of 10, he "accidentally started his own landscaping business," and continued it for two decades before selling it and taking a position as a supervisor at the Wood River Refinery, where he still works today. He and his wife just finished building a home in Godfrey, saying he wanted to work as a team to make Godfrey a great community, vowing to work with the police and fire department and maintain and add to infrastructure.

Schrumpf also vowed to help small businesses in order to keep money in Godfrey by "making good financial decisions" and "balancing the budget" while not costing taxpayers money.

"One thing I feel I can bring to the table is a younger generation's insight, the hard work and dedication of an experienced council member," he said.

He said he would work to embody Godfrey's motto of "you can see your future from here."

Question One: How are you now involved with the Village of Godfrey, and do you attend meetings regularly?

Weber: Since being off the board for two years, Weber said he now chairs the Godfrey Planning and Zoning Commission and Godfrey Sewer Department, and serves on the Storm Water and Capital Projects Commissions. He said he tries to attend all the Godfrey meetings, saying he has been in seven meetings this week, mostly regarding building a new sewer system for a portion of Godfrey.

"It takes a lot of time, usually about five hours a week with the engineers, deciding how we're going to do it," Weber said.

Stewart: Stewart is Chairman of Finance Committee and leads the board in that meeting. He is also on the Godfrey Community Planning and Economic Development Committees, so he attends all the board and township meetings. He said he is involved "all the time." He said he does not think he could be "more involved" with board issues.

Campbell: Campbell said she has recently started to attend board meetings after retiring in January in 2015 to cope with a parent with dementia. Her father perished soon after, and she then helped with her mother. She said she had dealings with Godfrey to get her street private over the course of four years, when she said the board "may have been tired of seeing her at those meetings." She said she has recently been paying more attention to board dealings at the meetings, through the website and through the newspaper.

Stumpf: Stumpf stood again and said he was in his second four-year term on the village board, adding he is the head of the Capital Projects Committee. He is also on Weber's sewer committee. He said his biggest issue was infrastructure. When he was elected, he was told it was an easy job, but soon said it became more than a part-time job, even adding he contributed significant wear on a new pair of boots.

"I am not a guy who is going to sit behind a desk or look out a window, or listen to what someone tells me or asks me to do and not go look," he said. "I always go look. I'm not afraid to look, and I'm not afraid to ask questions. Some of the questions I ask are very hard questions - so be it. That's what I'm paid the big money for."

Jacobs: Jacobs said he has "been recently attending some of the meetings more lately." He said he does not serve on any boards, but said his kids were involved in the Godfrey Parks and Rec Department, learning how to play various sports through those programs.

Schrumpf: He said he was self-employed before taking his new position, saying he preferred to "stay out of local government as much as possible, even though he goes to meetings." He said he owns commercial properties in Godfrey, so he sometimes goes to meetings to keep up with new rules and regulations involving codes. He said he stayed pretty neutral while self-employed, but has wanted to get more involved since working at the refinery.

Question Two: Business and Economic Growth in Godfrey is focused on the recently-created TIF districts. This can be a tremendous tool to help companies grow and expand, creating opportunities for many. However, other taxing districts are negatively affected. As development grows in the TIF districts, the Godfrey Fire Protection District will be called upon to provide fire, rescue and EMS service, but receives no revenue from the growth and increased traffic. How do you plan to ease this burden, so the entire village can continue to receive the same quality of service we have come to expect from the fire department?

Stewart: "As development goes, there's more strain on services," Stewart said. "When we did the TIF district, there was a recognition that there would be benefit in the long run to the fire department, to the school district, to the taxing bodies, but I felt that as the TIF grew, that we would try to give some of that money back, especially to the fire district to try to help out. As of now, the TIF district hasn't grown any. There hasn't been that much development, and we don't pull that much money at all from it, but I expect that's going to change over time as developments happen, and then we can look at trying to help out and make up for some of that.

"Me personally, we're trying to expand our business districts, which is what really has generated money in the past, and me personally, I would like to build a new city hall and fire station along the Lars Hoffman Boulevard, which we're going to extend out to Pierce, and we will use the money from that business district to do it."

Campbell: She described the question as "loaded." She said people are frustrated things do not happen fast enough. She said she is grateful for firefighters, saying they do not get there without public support, saying she votes in the favor of the Godfrey Fire Protection District on every ballot. She said the plan is not "an overnight plan," saying the time it takes is frustrating.

Stumpf: "When the TIF district and the business district were both brought into recognition for the village, that question was asked many times," Stumpf said. "I want you all to know that would be a problem that we would all love to have. If we had businesses in the business district and the TIF district and we had to sit down and spend

many a night thinking about how we were even going to subsidize the fire department in order to protect our residents, so be it. It would be one great problem. Unfortunately, as of yet, that hasn't happened.

"Once again, when 255 was completed, I thought we would have all kinds of things we don't have. Why? I can't tell you, I wish I could. But, I can guarantee you that those entities that would be impacted by the business district and the TIF district, I would be more than happy to help them out, if they run into problems."

Jacobs: Jacobs agreed with Stewart.

"I don't think it's fair the fire department should have to service the TIF district and not get anything in return," he said. "I think as a board, we need to come up with some good solutions and somehow figure out a way to reimburse them or somehow find some sort of happy medium or common ground, so they're happy."

Schrumpf: Schrumpf said he supports the TIF district and the economic growth it will provide. He said "eventually that tax revenue will be gained to help propel Godfrey into the future."

Weber: Weber said the question was more about the fire department than the TIF district and said he honestly believes everyone wants to support the fire department. He said he, Stewart and Stumpf all sent money to the Godfrey Fire Protection District to hire additional firefighters while all three were on the board. He said the same thing will happen in the future, saying they will try to do everything within the budget to support them.

He added there was no reason for a new Godfrey Village Hall, promising he would never vote for such a measure.

Question Three: Almost every candidate issues a statement saying they want to work to increase business, improving parks, improving opportunities and fostering "smart growth." Who could argue with any of these goals? What specifically do you want to do to improve Godfrey, and why do you think you are the best choice on the ballot?

Campbell: Campbell said she was new to the process, and has been attending meetings. She said she can only bring her experience of federal service for more than four decades of service. She said she could be part of a team, and said she would like to encourage people to be a part of the group to get a better feel. She said people ask her questions, but said they should ask the board. She said she would do her research and homework, adding she cannot make decisions "off the top of her head," instead saying she would do

a thorough job. She referenced her job at the Pentagon as experience, saying she has dealt with unexpected issues before, such as the outlandish suicide rates of soldiers in the U.S. Army affecting the Pentagon's budgets and needs to alleviate.

Stumpf: Stumpf described Godfrey's parks as "second to none," saying they were a jewel in the area.

"My job is to make sure that we have access and decent roads to those parks," he said.

He said good roads and sewer systems invite people to come to the village. He said taxpayers' money is required to maintain infrastructure whether the taxpayer "likes it or not." He said taxes are not meant to "sit in the bank" once they are collected, hoping to grow. He said he would spend the taxpayers' money for the purposes for which they are collected, including parks, roads and sewers.

Jacobs: "If I was going to change anything in Godfrey, it would be making sure infrastructure - both new construction and existing - are moving forward. I would love to see Godfrey Road flourish."

Schrumpf: Schrumpf said he has seen the village "from one end to the other" during the time he managed his own business. He said he spends a lot of time in Godfrey parks with his daughters and believes the parks could have some new features to bring more people. He said the sewers and roads could use improvement, and said new sidewalks near Stamper were "coming along well."

Weber: Weber said all politicians promise a lot of stuff.

"The whole secret is, how do you get to that point?" Weber said. "The way I do it, is I spend all my time working for Godfrey."

Weber said he focuses on infrastructure. He said he wanted the village to be able to move into the village when better economic times come, which will be easier with good infrastructure. Weber also mentioned the parks of Godfrey, saying it was wonderful. He said he has the skills and ability to help Godfrey grow.

Stewart: Stewart said Godfrey had endless opportunities. He showcased his efforts to convince Jersey County Rural Water, which provides water to the north side of Godfrey, to bring fire protection level water to the community - an effort he was told would take 40-50 years. He said lines are currently being replaced in the village, and are being upgraded.

He said another example was Lars Hoffman Boulevard, which only goes 1,000 feet. He said he would do it foot-by-foot, but said another 1,000 feet was in the future. Goals like that, he said, had to be taken bite by bite, because the village does not have enough money to get it all done at once, and did not want to overtax citizens to get it done.

Question Four: What is your position on the tax rate in Godfrey? Raise it? Lower It? Or keep it the same?

Stumpf: Stumpf said, over the last eight years, the village has lowered the tax levy by 32 percent. He said the tax levy can only be lowered if property levels are stable or on the rise, which is not the case. Stumpf said part of the reason Godfrey cannot get projects done as a swift enough pace is because the tax levy has been lowered "too much." He said the tax levy would have to be increased in small increments over time, saying anyone who disagrees should have a plan. He said the village board answers to its citizens, and told voters who believe the levy is "just fine," should not vote for him, because he does not believe it it.

Jacobs: Jacobs said he did not have enough factual information to speak accurately about that topic. He said the village should not have more money going out than coming in.

Schrumpf: Schrumpf said he does not like paying taxes as much as "the next guy," but said he would have to be in office to see projects in the coming years to make a determination. He said taxes should be similar to cost of living increases.

Weber: Weber said he was always against lowering the tax rates, saying Godfrey has some of the lowest tax rates in Madison County, warning "if you keep lowering it, you'll get into a bind." He said costs are increasing at \$320,000. He said there was no way to lower the rate if costs continue to raise, saying the consequences of the lower rate accumulate over time. The lowest rate in Madison County should satisfy people, so they should keep it level until additional revenue can be secured.

Stewart: Stewart said, as the Chairman of Godfrey's Finance Committee, he "keeps a pretty good eye on the money." He said next year's levy could not be determined, because he did not know how much money was coming into the village. He did say there were some projects the village had in mind, and costs have been increases. He said the village has been fortunate enough to have a surplus, but added he "would not hesitate" to raise the village's tax levy if the village "were in a bind." He said he has voted "many, many times to lower it," saying it depends on the financial situation as well as the demands of the residents.

"You're really getting a good deal, we work very efficiently, you're really getting the best levy, you know - rate - in Madison County," he said.

He credited the board, mayor, and the rest of the village employees for running efficiently. He said "other forces" were making things more difficult, especially the current financial status of the State of Illinois.

Campbell: Campbell said her background helped her to assess the financial situation of things, saying if there are too many projects at once, they have to decrease them, and "take a hard look" at what is needed, saying the best things for citizens are mixtures of short and long term goals. She said if projects can be started, but not finished, then they should be reevaluated. She reminded people things cannot be done overnight or all at once. She said the community should decide what happens first.

Question Five: If elected, how would you vote on future measures regarding burning of yard waste? Would you support a total ban? A tightening up of rules? Keeping current rules, but better enforcement? Or allowing burning more often?

Jacobs: Jacobs said he would be in favor of "tightening up" the rules, as a resident in a "pretty mature neighborhood." He said his son has asthma and was concerned for his health.

"I know when fall comes around, it's pretty disgusting what people are burning in the neighborhoods, and it's not fair," he said.

He said neighboring communities have "suck trucks," which he thought would be a better option, despite its expenses. He said he would not ban burning completely, adding Godfrey was "too rural for that," but thought there should be stricter rules.

Schrumpf: Schrumpf said he agreed with Jacobs, saying he once had a vacuum truck in operation in Godfrey, adding it may have been "the biggest one around." He said the burning should still be kept, but should have more regulations. He said his mother in the River-Aire subdivision's biggest pet peeves was the burning of wet leaves, which often smolder.

Weber: Weber said Godfrey's current burning policies were "pretty good." He said there is a limited time to do it, saying only a couple days a week are available for burning, and burning is only allowed during certain months.

"I understand if you have an asthma problem, that is a problem, but let's face it - what's Godfrey going to do?" He replied. "Is Godfrey going to hire a bunch more people and go out and pick up all the leaves, pick up all the limbs and everything? If that's what the

public wants, we could do that, otherwise, the person who lives there has to get rid of all those leaves somehow, and in many cases, burning them is the easiest way to do it. So, I'm in favor of leaving it basically the way it is. We got into this situation because the federal government came in and told us we had to cut back on the time you could burn, and we were all happy to do it on the board at that time, so I just think it ought to stay the same as it is right now."

Stewart: He said that issue "gets people going one way or another," saying there was "no way to make everyone happy." He said the real problem was people who don't follow the current rules set in place, and people who are "inconsiderate of their neighbors," saying such people would probably always be inconsiderate.

He said he never burns leaves, saying he mulches or mows them. He said he burns limbs, however, saying he follows the rules, which are often inconvenient. He also said the current rules were hard to enforce. He said the federal government has set limits, adding any change would have to be cleared through them as well.

"The cost for having a truck, we have 36 square miles in Godfrey, the cost for having a truck, you can't imagine it," he said.

He warned getting a truck would be a huge mess.

Campbell: Said she noticed a big change since limiting from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. on Wednesday and Saturday. She said her neighbors are pretty considerate, adding sometimes people forget they cannot burn on Tuesdays. She said she appreciates the decreasing amount of days for burning, and encouraged people to build good relationships with their neighbors and be honest when telling them it is not the right day to burn. She said she would hate to stop it totally, and encouraged people to be honest with neighbors, especially regarding health issues. She said a truck would cost money, but would vote for it, if the people wanted it.

Stumpf: Stumpf said the village has been sued by a woman through the Department of the Americans with Disabilities Act. He said they were in a bind, and some of the trustees formed a committee and went to the U.S. Department of the Interior for a rule change, which allowed the village to continue burning.

"We have looked to that many times in the past to see if those rules can be changed to allow more time," he said. "The Department of the Interior says, 'we have given you all we're going to give you.' Please be patient with us, do your due diligence, and we're still allowed to burn."

He said the village has wonderful trees, which cause problems, but said neighbors should talk among each other to ensure that peace and harmony are maintained throughout the village regarding burning.

Question Six: What are your top priorities for the Village of Godfrey

Schrumpf: He said his top priorities are to attract tax revenue while trying to attract businesses, residents and new construction, saying the village could do a lot of things with more tax money.

Weber: He said he wanted to work on sewer, streets, storm water, and capital investments as he has been doing for the past two years.

Stewart: Stewart said there were a lot of issues and a lot of things to work towards. He said he had a focus on sewer issues as well. He said he would like to do a crosstown road and bring the Lars Hoffman Road to Airport Road, and bring more business to the business district. He said Godfrey had lots of opportunities and looked forward to working with and listening to the mayor, the board, city workers and the public. He said Godfrey does not have "lots of problems" like other communities.

Campbell: She said Godfrey is a small community trying to grow. She said a great focus would be starting and funding business districts, but was cognizant of the infrastructure required for business growth. She said Godfrey's financial future is attempting to grow the business districts. She said burning issues and park upkeep would also be priorities. She said she was new to the process, and would "do her homework if elected."

Stumpf: Stumpf said infrastructure and parks are his biggest concerns. He said businesses will not come without infrastructure. He said those are the welcoming cards for the city. He reminded people they do not have to vote for three on the ballot when given the option to vote for three, but he said everyone should vote. He said he was not happy with low voter turnout histories in Godfrey.

Jacobs: Jacobs said he agreed with infrastructure, saying it was huge, but warned against undertaking projects too large to finish.

"One of my biggest things is, if we can't finish developing our existing like Godfrey Road, what makes you think we're going to finish our new development?" Jacobs said. "If you drive down Godfrey Road, there are vacant buildings and undeveloped land, and I would like to get with our economic developer to create some sort of plan to help the Godfrey Road develop and make it look good for our town."

