



Dave Barry

Lifestyle
Sundays

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ERIC J. GREENE
Capitol Connection

Barry judicial race heats up

Five candidates hope to be probate judge

KELLY CARR
The Enquirer

HASTINGS — As the probate judge race heats up in Barry County, five candidates had an opportunity on Friday to help the public understand exactly why they are running.

Inside Thomas Jefferson Hall in Hastings, residents packed a meeting room and waited patiently to hear why each of the people sitting before them deserved to be judge.

The forum, sponsored by the Barry County Democratic Committee, included statements from the candidates and allowed the public to ask questions in what is becoming a closely watched race.

In the Aug. 3 election, voters will decide whether to leave incumbent Stephanie Fekkes in office or to give the seat to one of the four other candidates. Thomas Evans, Jill Steele, David Kuzava and Michael Doherty all



Evans



Doherty



Fekkes



Kuzava



Steele

are running against Fekkes, who was appointed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm in March.

"There are five candidates and I really didn't know any of them," said Kathy Clarey, who attended the forum. "I think it's important to pay attention to who we vote for so I came to hear them. I thought they were all very good. Now I'll have to think more about it and read more about it."

Evans was the first to give a three-minute opening statement, and he let residents know how passionate he is about helping children in Barry County stay on the right track.

"I want to get with those kids and help them develop self-reliance through encouragement and a kick in the butt when needed," he said.

Steele, Kuzava and Doherty

also used the time to introduce themselves to the public and explain why they want the probate judge position. Fekkes waived her right to a statement because she said wanted to allow the public more time to ask questions.

"I offer the choice of a candidate who is a common person," said Steele, who practices law in Delton and has three children. "I have the necessary experience to take on this responsibility. The probate judge deals primarily with children and that is the court you will see me in most often. When I am not at work, my focus is on my family."

Questions for the candidates addressed topics from a possible juvenile detention center to what they planned to accom-

plish if elected. The residents seemed eager to make inquiries of the five running for the position and forum moderator Robert Dwyer was unable to call on everyone because of time limitations.

If elected, Doherty said some of the issues he would focus on include truancy problems in schools and extending the court's hours.

"I would like to make the system accessible to everybody," said Doherty, who also told the public he has strong family values. "Is there any reason why we can't have evening hours? A lot of time people have to take the day off just to pay a ticket. That is one of the areas I would like to see changed."

Most of the questions were addressed to all of the candidates, but one woman from the crowd asked Fekkes if she believes she is soft on crime.

Fekkes, who has been in the position for about three

months, said she believes her time as judge has shown that she implements punishment to those deserving it. She also stated later that since she was appointed to the spot, she has been part of the creation of several programs and has assisted the court with funding and grants by starting a non-profit corporation.

"I wanted to make sure people understood the commitment that I have to the community," she said. "What I've done in the past and what I want to continue doing for the community in the future."

Kuzava, who has run a law practice in Hastings for 10 years, asked the public to take several factors into account when selecting a judge, including dignity, competence and independence.

He also added that he is excited about the opportunity to run for judge and said his background makes him an appropriate choice.

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U.S. unity is eroding, but it's not gone forever

Six decades ago, before most of us were born, thousands of Americans stormed the beaches of France, facing grave danger with no guarantee they'd live longer than a few minutes, as part of one of the largest military invasions in history.

Back home, millions of Americans, many of whom had loved ones fighting across the ocean, sacrificed their time, money and careers in support of the war effort.

Commemorating D-Day on its 60th anniversary rightfully conjures up graphic images of war, feelings of loyalty to the flag and gratitude among all Americans who consider themselves patriots today.

But this commemoration should be more than a reminder. It should be a prod that shows us where we are and where we should be going. On Sunday, we can see where we should be by looking at where we were 60 years ago.

If world war broke out today, would civilian Americans be as united as they were in 1944 with support for the troops, the rationale for war, the president?

Americans weren't itching to make war in the 1940s, but they believed in democracy and felt obligated to bring peace to the world. Americans today don't have an appetite for war either, but the need to participate in self-government and use our super power for global good is no longer steering the nation.

Instead, isolationism is growing in people who believe the United States should tend to its own instead of fighting with other countries. That's a laudable theory, but a big part of tending to our own involves keeping peace around the world, maintaining credibility as a mighty nation and tackling direct threats before they reach the homeland.

The unity during World War II eroded in the following generations, then resurfaced briefly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on American soil. Barely a critical word was whispered against President George W. Bush or the United States govern-

Seven arrested in prostitution sting

TRACE CHRISTENSON
The Enquirer

A Battle Creek man knows today prostitution is not a victimless crime.

Late Friday, the man sat bloodied and in pain on the curb at Dickman Road and Fountain Street after Battle Creek police said he tried to jump from the passenger side of a pickup truck which was being pursued by officers working an undercover prostitution sting.

Moments before and about two blocks away, the man and the driver of the truck had agreed to meet a woman at a nearby motel. They believed the woman was a prostitute but she was an officer working undercover.

So as the truck pulled onto Capital Avenue Southwest, a police car attempted to make a traffic stop and the pickup truck driver fled, speeding through parking lots until, at about 40 miles-per-hour, the passenger tried to jump and may have been tangled in the seat belt, falling to the pavement just before the driver of the truck stopped.

The passenger was taken to Battle Creek Health System for treatment

and was to be charged with possession with intent to deliver cocaine after Sgt. Bruce Penning said the man offered to use the illegal drug to pay the undercover officer for sex.

The driver of the truck was to be charged with felony fleeing and eluding.

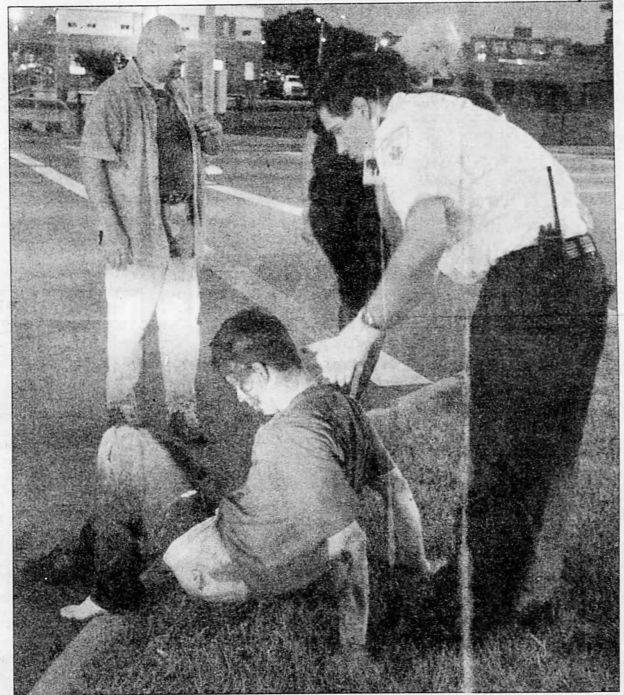
The names of the men were not released and the condition of the injured man was not immediately known.

Penning said the two were among five men and two women arrested during the sting. The men were charged with seeking sex while the women were picked up for solicitation.

Three female officers, watched by nearly 15 officers, walked a two-block area just south of Capital Avenue and Fountain Street waiting for men to offer to pay for sex.

"We have had a number of citizen complaints," Penning said as the sting ended shortly before 10 p.m. "We do this at least two or three times a year."

Money for the officers, most



A Battle Creek man is treated Friday after he tried to jump from a moving pickup truck while fleeing from police during a prostitution sting.

PLEASE SEE STING, 4A

B.C. police arrest seven in prostitution sting

STING, FROM 3A

working overtime, is paid from Weed and Seed grant money, a federal program designed to clean up crime in certain neighborhoods.

Through the late afternoon and evening the female officers walked slowly, smiling at any vehicles that seemed to slow so the drivers could have a long look. The women were wearing microphones and nearby other police officers were listening.

"What you doing," an officer, using the name Jodi, said to a driver who stopped.

"Nobody right now," the driver replied.

"Interested in anything?" she asked. "What are we looking for?"

The man continued with some small talk.

"Are you a freak?" she asked.

"I have never been called that before," he replied.

"It's up to you," the officer said. "It's your ball game."

"...with these stings, we move the business out of the neighborhoods and there is nothing for the prostitutes to stay there for."

BRUCE PENNING

Battle Creek Police sergeant

Moments later the man told the officer he would pay \$20 for "full service" and oral sex.

The officer told him to drive across the street and she would meet him in a motel room. Before he got there, a police car pulled in behind and he was on the way to the Calhoun County jail.

Penning said not only would the man be charged but police would seek to seize his vehicle because he was using it in an illegal activity.

Although several drivers circled the area much of the evening, some never offered to pay for sex despite several conversations with the female officers.

But Penning called the operation successful.

"When you go after the johns, it is a safety issue for the officers because the risks are a lot higher," he said, referring to all the extra police used to watch the transactions. "But with these stings, we move the business out of the neighborhoods and there is nothing for the prostitutes to stay there for."

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