

An Informed Vote?
Primary Election Coverage
September 2001

A Grand Rapids Institute for
Information Democracy
Report

GRIID ia an affiliate of the
Community Media Center



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Methodology

This report is the result of a one-month study of the daily news broadcasts of three Grand Rapids TV stations: WOOD TV8 (6 & 11pm), WZZM 13 (6 & 11pm) and WXMI 17 (10pm). From August 13, 2001 through September 10, 2001, each day's newscasts were taped and then viewed by Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy staff and volunteers. News logs were kept for each program with specific codes assigned for each of the areas of interest that were documented.

In addition, a study of the Grand Rapids Press was made from Monday, August 13, 2001 through Tuesday, September 11, 2001. The focus was on coverage of the City Commission elections of the 11th. Articles were counted and column inches were recorded, along with various aspects of each article as explained in the *Abbreviations* and synopsis sections. Column inches included headlines and photographs, and were rounded to the nearest half inch.

We are grateful for Jason Cunningham's assistance. He was responsible for the monitoring and content analysis of the *Grand Rapids Press*.

The Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy (GRIID) is an affiliate of the Community Media Center (www.grcmc.org). GRIID offers Media Literacy training and resources to the community in order to help the public actively participate in the consumption and creation of media and to promote democratic values with all media systems. You can view previous reports at www.griid.org. To contact us call 459-4788 x122 or e-mail us at jsmith@grcmc.org.

Summary of Findings

There were more stories on the 3 local TV news stations about Ostriches running lose in Kent County (12) than election stories (8).

The only TV station to mention the Walker candidate races was WZZM 13 - a 30 second forum announcement. None of the 3 stations gave any information on the candidates for Mayor in Walker.

We *never* heard candidate voices on WZZM 13 in the 30-day study period.

All 3 stations had more stories about the Fryling murder investigation, Jim Dreyer's attempted swim across Lake Superior and a police stand-off in southwest Michigan than they did on local elections.

The *Grand Rapids Press* had more election stories than the three TV stations combined.

Both print and broadcast media studied gave viewers/readers very little substantive information on which to make an informed vote.

Introduction

Entering our fourth year of research it has become clear to us that local elections are not a priority for the area TV stations. Little coverage is provided to viewers and even less substantive analysis. It is not difficult to see why only 12% of the registered voters in the 1st Ward of Grand Rapids even bothered to turn out. (based on data from the GR City Clerk)

Political analysts can argue about why there is significant disenfranchisement with the general population when it comes to voting, but it seems clear to us that one thing that contributes to low voter turnout is the lack of quality news information. We looked at both TV and newspaper coverage for the 30 days prior to the primary election. Since the amount of coverage from the TV news and the Grand Rapids Press is significantly different we offer content analysis separately.

For this year's primary there were elections in just two communities, Grand Rapids and Walker. While it is clear that this presents the problem of a narrower viewer appeal it does not lessen the obligation of news departments to cover these election campaigns. Indeed, with fewer candidates and races the opportunity for more in depth coverage was afforded.

We looked at the amount of coverage given to the races in Walker and Grand Rapids, the length of stories, how often we heard candidate voices, as well as information and analysis of candidate platforms. We also made a comparison of election coverage to crime stories and other news items that appeared with regularity during the 30-day study. We make these comparisons as a way of demonstrating what the TV stations give priority to.

Next we will provide a similar analysis of the Grand Rapids Press which had more stories on the local elections than the three TV stations combined. The data pages for both print and broadcast coverage can be found beginning on page __. We end this report with some recommendations for the media and contact information for each news department. As always we encourage readers to communicate with news directors on our findings and encourage them to implement the recommendations. We feel that this dialogue is essential in creating informed citizens who can participate in our process of democracy.

We welcome any input or feedback on this report. You can contact GRIID at 459-4788x122 or e-mail jsmith@grcmc.org. To view other GRIID reports go to www.griid.oerg.

Our TV news content analysis for this election cycle is fairly short and to the point since 1) there was only one city commission race in Grand Rapids and a Mayoral race in Walker, and 2) there were very few election stories.

Walker Mayoral Race

For the 30-day study of two and one half-hours a day of local TV news only one story was run in regards to the Walker Mayoral race. WZZM 13 ran a 30-second announcement of a candidate forum in Walker on September 4 on their 6pm newscast. Candidate names were not provided, their positions, or any other information that may have been useful for Walker voters. Viewers were also not told that that the forum would be broadcast on GRTV 25 several times prior to Election Day.

GR City Commission Race

The city commission race in Grand Rapids' first ward received a bit more coverage than the Walker race, but gave voters limited information. **WZZM 13** ran one story on August 24 that was related to the city commission race. During their 11pm newscast they ran a 52-second piece about the response of some neighborhood groups to the Chamber of Commerce flyers critical of incumbent Jendrasiak's record. No commentary was provided to clarify the neighborhood organization's nor the Chamber's positions. We never heard candidate positions discussed nor candidate voices on any of the WZZM 13 newscasts in the 30-day period.

FOX 17 provided us with two stories concerning the Grand Rapids City commission race. On August 21st, FOX ran a 30-second piece mentioning a first ward candidate forum hosted by the Community Media Center, with an announcement that the next day they would profile each candidate. They did mention that the forum would be rebroadcast on GRTV, but did not offer dates or times.

The candidate profile piece that FOX ran on August 22nd was 4 minutes and six seconds long. As you can see from data table 1 that the amount of time we heard candidate voices was fairly even, with a slight edge for Alex Myrhorodsky.

Data Table 1

Candidate voices	WOOD TV8	WZZM 13	FOX 17
Jendrasiak	:48		:44
Schmidt	1:06		:41
Myrhorodsky	:38		:52
Total Time	2:32	0	2:17

The profile piece was

candidate responses to four questions that a FOX reported posed to each of the three candidates. The questions asked centered around public education, economic growth (with emphasis on downtown GR), current city commission unity and the fate of John Ball Park & Zoo. It could be argued that all four of these issues are important, but they are not nearly enough to give voters an adequate analysis of the issues the city is faced with.

WOOD TV8 did the best job of the three stations viewed in our study. They devoted more stories (4) and time (9 minutes & 5 seconds) to the city commission race. The first story (Aug. 31) was a 36-second piece on candidate financial reports. The piece reported that Jendrasiak had raised the most followed by Schmidt and then Myrhorodsky. The news-reader also stated that "Jendrasiak had received money from the Democrats and the Friends of Labor, and that Schmidt had received money from the Republicans and the Chamber of Commerce." No explanation nor elaboration was provided on the implications of the financial records, even though it could have made for good news to discuss Special Interest group and partisan support in elections that are supposed to be non-partisan.

Unlike FOX, WOOD TV8 chose to spread their candidate profiles out over a 3-day period (Sept. 4-6), all during the 6pm newscasts. The length of the stories favored Jendrasiak, but the amount of time we heard candidate voices was highest for Schmidt. (See data page 8) Data aside, what was noticeable in WOOD TV 8's coverage of this race was how it was framed.

At the beginning on the segments for both Jendrasiak and Schmindt the news-reader referred to the First Ward race as "hotly contested." Some information was given regarding the special interest and partisan backing of both of the front running candidates, but not enough to help viewers understand what this means for voters and city politics. When TV 8 asked Jendrasiak about this being Big Business vs. Big Labor, the incumbent responded "it's about the people." When Schmidt was asked about her backing from the Chamber she said she also has the back of the "Realtors Association." In either case, the answers are grossly inadequate, especially in light of the fact that TV 8 did report earlier on the amounts of money received from both Special Interest groups (Aug. 31). It is possible that candidates said more, but viewers will never know based on the final edited interviews.

Candidate Myrhorodsky was profiled last. He was portrayed as a non-candidate in many ways. He was questioned on the view that the race was Big Business vs. Big Labor, but the only response we were given is that he planned to "get down and dirty," that he would not be representing any group other than residents of the ward.

What was glaringly absent in the news coverage was what residents of the First Ward thought about the candidates and Special Interest interventions. It is not enough that we hear from candidates, but citizens who will have to deal with the results of policies set by candidates. Also absent in the TV news coverage was any real discussion about what partisan money will do to local elections. If this is a taste of things to come, voters certainly deserve some explanation and analysis of what this means for future politics. One last element that was not part of the reporting was looking at the incumbent's voting record. One of the easiest things that a news reporter can do when incumbents run is to look at their voting record. It would not take much creativity to look at the record and compare it to what the incumbent and their challengers are

saying about their track record as a candidate.

Comparisons

As we have done in previous election studies we made comparisons to the amount of crime coverage and stories that could be considered trivial. The amount of crime stories from all three stations is fairly significant as you can see from Data Table 2. In relation to crime per election story it works out to; 24 to 1 for WOOD TV8, 27 to 1 for FOX and 40 to 1 for WZZM 13.

The crime stories receiving the most coverage were the police stand-off in SW Michigan that resulted in two deaths and the ongoing Fryling murder investigation. While it is certainly understandable to give significant coverage to these two stories why would viewers not get comparable election coverage?

	WOODTV8	WZZM 13	FOX 17
Total crime stories	96	80	55

Data Table 2

Stories that most reasonable viewers would consider trivial or at least less important than

election stories received much more coverage. As you can see from Data Table 3 there were many trivial stories that received more or equal attention to the elections. Based on the data it is hard to believe that the three TV news departments feel that election coverage is a priority when coverage of Jim Dreyer's attempted swim across Lake Superior or Ostriches running lose in rural Michigan outnumbered election coverage.

We conclude this section of the study by reprinting what the *Grand Rapids Press* ran in response to our initial media release on the election coverage. (*GR Press* Sept. 16 A-25)

"Ed Fernandez, general manager of WXMI, said Smith doesn't understand how broad a region his Grand Rapids-based station has to cover, from Fremont to the Indiana border."

"Cheryl Grant, the WZZM news director, said Smith overlooked the number of times a story ran during a given night."

"And Diane Kniewski, general manager for WOOD TV 8, said Smith didn't account for the combined effect of TV and newspaper coverage. 'You guys (The Press) provide the details and analysis, while we show the images and give the highlights. So, we work in combination. It's good to have people like Jeff Smith who hold you accountable, but I wish he'd come up with a way

Comparison stories	WOOD TV8	WZZM 13	FOX 17 *
New Fruitport Mall	2	5	1
Jim Dreyer	5	4	3
Ostriches	5	5	2
Fryling murder	7	8	4
Lotto	7	3	2
Death of Detroit singer	4	2	3
Police stand-off in SW Michigan	7	5	4

Data Table 3

to stimulate his age demographic of 18 to 49 to get to the polls,' she said."

Election Coverage Data - Primary 2001

Date	Story	time/length
 sec. 6pm/3:18	8-31	GR 1 st Ward race 6pm/:36
	9-4	GR 1 st Ward race
	9-5	GR 1 st Ward race 6pm/2:45
	9-6	GR 1 st Ward race 6pm/2:36

Total # of election stories - 4

Total Time - 9 minutes & 5 seconds



Date	Story	time/length
8-24	Chamber of Comm. Role	11pm/:52 sec.
9-4	Walker forum announcement	6pm/:30 sec.

Total # of election stories - 2
seconds

Total Time - 1 minute & 22



10pm/:30 sec.

Date	Story	time/length
8-21	GR 1 st Ward race	
8-22	GR 1 st Ward race	10pm/4:06

Total # of election stories - 2

Total Time - 4 minutes & 36 seconds

Grand Rapids Press Content Analysis

Although the election was a primary, any candidate earning more than fifty percent would be granted the seat. This is what happened, with Jendrasiak taking 60 percent of the vote. Therefore this study can be considered to be of the coverage of the full election.

For comparison, a tally of stories on the 8-year-old Fryling murder case was kept. Although the list may not be comprehensive, there were at least 9 stories. One on the front page of the *Region* section (37 col. in on September 9) and eight on the front page of the paper itself (346 col. in. total on August 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 30 and September 2 and 10) for a total of 383 column inches.

In breaking down the 12 articles considered to be directly focusing on the election, it was found that 1 was an announcement of a forum (8/20) having no other content. Two (8/14, 8/22) were coverage of forums. Five (8/14, 8/16, 8/26, 9/1, 9/9) were about "electioneering". By this is meant they focused on fund-raising, candidates' attacks on each other about things other than voting positions, and controversy over who was backing whom. Some of these things, such as Schmidt's record of voting for school-board elections (8/14) are real news, but the ratio of electioneering stories to actual operative political content indicates a bias toward that sort of coverage. One story (9/11) was about voter apathy. The other two (9/2 and 9/6) can generally be considered substantial election coverage, although the story of 9/2 was the only thoroughly researched, broad-based investigation into the election that presented an issue not driven by scandal or campaign rhetoric.

Of the twelve articles, only four contained relatively broad coverage of issues. Two were coverage of forums (8/15, 8/22). One was an article focusing on the Labor/COC angle in which the candidates were mentioned, and not the other way around (9/2). One was a "profiles" section of an article on voter attitudes (9/6). In this last article, the "coverage" was a series of quotes from each candidate. In three out of four articles (or three out of 12) the Press was content simply to take the candidate's word for what they stood for. Certainly quotes from candidates are a necessary and valid aspect of election coverage, and what one would expect from coverage of a forum. But the Press has clearly focused on one issue it deems newsworthy (labor/COC) and left the candidates' other positions relatively unexamined, either for their quality as positions in themselves or their truthfulness.

These are the issues mentioned more than once the Grand Rapids Press in its coverage of the election, from least frequent to most frequent: School board voting records, Community police centers, the future of John Ball Park, Tax abatements (this issue is not frequently mentioned by name, but it is apparently at the core of the labor/COC "debate"), the naming of Rosa Parks Circle, and the conflict between labor and the Chamber of Commerce in backing Jendrasiak and Schmidt, respectively.

About a dozen other issues, such as absentee landlords or the placement of cell towers (see *Articles* section), were mentioned once. Usually, these one-shots were not explained, except to state Jendrasiak's (the incumbent) position on them. For instance, we learned that he

opposed the placement of a McDonald's drive-thru restaurant in Cheshire Square, but not why, or what an opposing argument would be. Sometimes even the positions are not given, as when a citizen mentions that Jendrasiak "came out to listen" to a problem with yard-waste bags – but not what the problem was, or whether any action was taken. Certainly not every problem needs to be explained thoroughly, but that is the scope of these dozen or so single-mention issues. It is instructive to note that two of the five most frequently mentioned issues do not deeply effect the daily life of most citizens. More significantly, twice issues were described as being important but not developed at all. At a forum on August 14th (8/15) Jendrasiak "said combined sewer overflow issues will top the agenda" for the next city commission. No information is given on what these particular issues are, what Jendrasiak's positions are, or even how the sewers have been combined. Although journalism is a subjective art, it would seem that if a city commissioner running for office names an issue as the most important for his next term, that the local paper ought to give some background on it. Slightly less significant, but more ironic, is the mention of the owner of a coffeehouse that the election has generated, in the words of the Press, "a fair amount of discussion over the future of the city's West Side." Ironic, because none of this discussion has taken place in the Press's election coverage. Nothing further on the issue is developed.

Most of the articles referred to the Labor/COC conflict. Four mentioned it in its full form as COC-backed Schmidt attempting to oust labor-backed Jendrasiak. Three more mentioned half of the equation, mentioning either Jendrasiak/labor or Schmidt/COC (or GOP), but not contrasting the two. While this is a valid issue in a political campaign, here it is used in place of real coverage. Aside from discussions of where each candidate's money is coming from there is little attempt by the Press in these articles to investigate the issue in depth (an exception is the article of 9/2, discussed below). At worst, the charges are mentioned, and perhaps countercharged, without evaluation or even details as to what such an influence might imply. At best, Jendrasiak's voting record is mentioned. However, since on the tax abatement issue Jendrasiak's record is 60 out of 65 in favor (That is his claim. The Press does not comment.), there is certainly some complexity to his position, which is not clear from the reporting. Is there evidence in Jendrasiak's career to indicate undue influence, or not? Conversely, Schmidt claims to be running a non-partisan campaign, even though she has extensive backing from the Chamber of Commerce. Are there any ties between the two, which are not obvious at the surface level? At this juncture this issue merges with the issue of how the Press has allowed the candidates to dictate its coverage.

A large percentage of the coverage focused on scandal – awkward donations, a brochure put out by the Chamber of Commerce that may have been improper and other similar issues. As mentioned above, only once was there a thoroughly researched article that attempted to draw together and document the larger issues surrounding the campaign. The extent of investigation in this cycle was generally limited to recording what was said at forums and reprinting peoples' answers to various charges. It would seem that little "legwork" was done in resolving issues independently. What investigation there was generally had to do with issues of finance and controversy, such as the COC brochure, as opposed to the actual operations of city government. Certainly the Press covers city government independently of elections. However, the question is raised, how responsible is a newspaper for the thoroughness of its coverage of local elections? Should papers do in-depth coverage of less glamorous subjects as a public service?

Papers are political entities. They endorse candidates and they enjoy special privileges that most people assume go along with a watchdog role in society. In general, a person who wants to inform him or herself about city government would turn to the local paper to learn what is going on. But it is quite clear from this study that someone ignorant of city government who turned to the Grand Rapids Press would be left in the dark about all but six issues in this election. He or she would be relatively clear about the opposing sides of issues surrounding John Ball Park, and Rosa Parks Circle. He would know a little about tax abatements, and that there was a recent initiative for community police centers, but almost nothing about the candidates, or any of a dozen other issues that were mentioned, or even the complex benefits and costs of the issues that were mentioned. He would also have no idea where to look for further information. Obviously, the Press is a newspaper, not an encyclopedia. Only a committed citizen who applies him or herself with diligence can become informed, and such a person can probably compensate for the lack of newspaper coverage. But should he have to? That leaves the problem of the general voter apathy that even the press acknowledges.

“It’s kind of sad to see a turnout of less than 15 percent when local government affects people’s quality of life more than any other level of government.” James Jendrasiak, quoted on 9/11.

Having examined the coverage of the Press over the month preceding this election, it is impossible to avoid the question of whether or not the media are actually encouraging voter apathy by providing only minimal coverage of elections, and not making it easier for the uninitiated to understand them. The age-old argument is that people don’t want to know what’s going on, that they would rather have stories about crime and entertainment than politics. That the Press subscribes to this theory is suggested by the fact that it devoted 9 articles (including eight front page headlines) and 383 column inches to recent developments in the Fryling murder case, which is eight years old. Compare this to 12 articles, (including 1 front page headline) totaling only 276.5 column inches for the entire spectrum of election coverage, from announcements and coverage of forums to in-depth reporting, including all the minor tidbits in the *Polpourri* ’01 sidebar. Maybe it’s true that people just aren’t that interested. But it would be very interesting to know how many people would like to learn about elections, but just don’t know how to go about it and aren’t getting much help from the “fourth estate”. Most importantly, if newspapers don’t provide us with this unsexy but vitally important information, who does?

“Nobody gets into voting here. They don’t even know who’s running.” -- Charlet McKenney, waitress at American Bread Co., quoted on 9/6.

GR Press Data

Articles

8/14 11 col. in.

p. A9 – page 1 of *Region* section, slightly above fold

Jendrsiak attacks foe on school vote record

Candidates quoted attacking each other and defending.

Records attendance at various votes but very little on positions, except to repeat rhetoric.

SBV.

8/15 30 col. in. including 12 of photo

p. D2

First Ward opponents square off

All three candidates quoted. All pictured.

CPC, RPC, JBZ.

Discussion of candidates's priorities.

Discussion of relative success of Schmidt's campaign tactics.

8/16 21 col. in.

p. A19

Some charge Chamber crossed lines in leaflet

Jen. quoted. Headshots of Jen., Schmidt. Once again, Myrh. mentioned but nothing more.

Focus: COC's anti-Jen. leaflet, whether it's ethical, legal. CPC, TXA, AOA, Scandal.

Mentions that COC backs Schmidt, but does not mention Jen. is backed by labor.

Brief mention of Jen.'s record on two issues – CPC, TXA, nothing specific on Schmidt, Myrh.

Mentions Jen.'s actual voting record on TXA – yes to 60 out of 65 abatements.

8/20 4 col. in.

p. D2

1st Ward candidates to meet

No quotes or pix.

Announcement of GRTV forum. No info on positions, etc.

8/22 21 ½ col. in.

p. D3

Zoo, park stir debate at forum

Quotes, headshots of all 3 candidates.

Detailed quotes from all three on backing of special interest groups, naming of Rosa Parks Circle, renovation of John Ball Zoo.

Accusations that Schmidt is backed by GOP.

Labor/COC, RPC, JBZ.

Mentions issues of "neighborhood blight" and absentee landlords.

8/26 7 ½ col. in.

p.A19, first page of *Region* section. 1st item in *Polpourri '01* section.

no headline.

Quotes.

Absolutely nothing on positions. Focus: partisan Republican support for Schmidt, with countercharges and disputed insinuations against Jen.

Mentions Jen. supported by labor, but does not contrast with Schmidt/COC. Does mention that GOP supports Schmidt, however.

9/1 27 col. in.

p. A3, first page of *Region* section, cont. on p. A4

\$5,000 donation gives Jendrasiak fundraising edge over Schmidt

Candidates quoted. Photos.

Absolutely nothing on positions or voting record. Article is about where funding comes from, provides details on amounts and sources of donations. Generalizes that Jen. claims Schmidt is a tool of business, Schmidt claims Jen. is a tool of labor.

Once again, Myrh. is mentioned. Absolutely nothing on his positions or even leanings. Labor/COC.

9/2 69 col. in.

p. A1, above the fold. cont. on p. A14

Chamber, labor fight for city's 1st Ward

Jen., Schmidt quoted. Photos.

Details on Jen.'s voting record against various pro-business measures. Little background.

Very little on Schmidt (first-run candidate) except she's supported by COC.

Bulk of article on neighborhood/business conflict.

Some info on Jen.'s voting record – 90% for tax abatements, etc.

Labor/COC, RPC, CPC, TXA

A number of issues mentioned but not explored:

Money from Downtown Development Authority

Issues concerning the private hauling of trash.

McDonald's drive-through in Cheshire Square.

Cell towers in northeast side neighborhood.

9/2 4 ½ col. in.

p. A17 – 1st page of *Region* section. 2d Item in *Polpourri '01* sidebar.

Take that

Schmidt quoted denying she's a puppet of COC.

Absolutely nothing on positions. Focus: Schmidt's image problem as COC puppet.

No concrete news. Reporting "buzz".

Does not mention Jen.'s support from unions.

9/6 63 col. in.

p. A17 – 1st page of *Region* section. Continued on p. A21.

Candidates make final push

All 3 candidates quoted. No political quotes.

Rosa Parks Circle, tax abatements mentioned but not discussed in main body.

Mentions that a fair amount of discussion has been generated over future of West Side, but fails to mention the content of the discussion – is this related to tax abatements?

Focus is on voter apathy. Labor v. COC angle.

Includes 36 inches of "candidate profiles". Include vital statistics and positions on 4 issues:

John Ball Park Zoo, downtown retailing, tax abatements, and public schools.

First mention of possibility of no general election?

Labor/COC, RPC, TXA, JBZ.

Mention of issues of public schools, downtown retailing.

9/9 9 col. in.

p. A21 – 1st page of *Region* section. 1st item in *Polpourri '01* sidebar.

No title.

No quotes from candidates.

Focus on donation to Jen. by Steil staff member. Nothing on election issues.

9/11 20 col. in.

p. A17 – 1st page of *Region* section. Continued on pA18.

1st Ward showdown may draw few voters

Jen. quoted on getting out the vote.

Labor/COC. Nothing on voting record.

Focus of article is voter turnout. Very little political.

Mentions issue of yard-waste bags.

Editorials

8/18 25 col. in.

p. A11 – *Comment* section

Race for 1st Ward seat on City Commission is as partisan as it gets

No quotes.

Nothing on specific positions except Jen. has voted “against some tax breaks”.

Ignores Myrh., except to mention he’s in the race.

Point of article is to place Jen. with “populist” groups, labor, Dems.,

Schmidt with COC, Reps. i.e. who backs them not what they stand for.

8/29 27 col. in.

p. D5

Jaye walking; fiancee says she sent him packing

Quotes. Photo.

Absolutely nothing on positions. Focus: David Jaye’s scandalous personal life. Mention of election is brief & peripheral.

9/5 12 col. in.

p. A14 – *Comment* section

Jendrasiak for 1st Ward

No quotes.

Endorsement. Info on one position – Rosa Parks Circle. Negative comments on Schmidt’s voting record, Myrh.’s unpreparedness.

Other Articles

8/28 6 col. in.

pA12 1st item in *Community Briefs*.

Candidates for mayor will debate next week

Announcement of forum. Names candidates and gives brief information on each.

9/2 15 col. in.

p.A22

Two candidates for Walker post challenged for campaign war chest

Absolutely nothing on positions. Focus: how much money each candidate has.

9/4 30 1/2 col. in.

p. A11 1st page of *Region* section.

Economic clouds darken labor's big day

Jen. quoted.

Focus: Labor Day parade. Labor/COC.

7 col. in.

Walker mayor: VerHeulen

Editorial. No quotes. Endorsement. Minimal information on positions, all 3 candidates.

9/5 30 col. in.

p. D5

Firefighting staff, communication key issues for mayoral candidates

No candidates quoted.

Focus: a candidate forum.

Relatively detailed covering of issues. No context.

9/9 1 1/2 col. in.

p. A21 – 1st page of *Region* section. Last item in *Polpourri '01* sidebar.

Helpful Hints

Announcement of Walker & Spring Lake elections. No political content.

9/11 15 col. in.

p. A13

State's voters head to the polls

AP article. Mentions various races, incl. Detroit City Council, but not GR.

Abbreviations

AOA – Attacks on attacks. One candidate has made a negative comment, and another candidate is counterattacking.

col. in. – Column inches. All columns were treated as being of the same width, though the width of some columns in front page articles is greater.

CPC – Mentions the issue of community police centers.

JBZ – Mentions the issue of the future of John Ball Park and the zoo.

Jen. – Jendrasiak

Labor/COC – Article mentions the issue of Labor's backing of Jen. vs. the Chamber of Commerce behind Schmidt

Myrh. – Myrh.

RPC – Mentions the issue of the naming of Rosa Parks Circle

SBV – Mentions the issue of voting records in school board elections (not actual positions on school-related issues).

Scandal – Article focuses on a scandal or controversy surrounding election. Election issues are peripheral.

TXA – Mentions controversy over tax abatements

Recommendations

- 1) Make local election coverage a priority.
- 2) Give all candidates equal time/space regardless if they are viewed as viable candidates or not.
- 3) When covering candidates give substantial information on their positions and voting record when incumbents or previously elected officials are campaigning.
- 4) Inform viewers/readers days in advance when public forums will be held or if they can be viewed at a later date on the PBS affiliate or any Public Access station.
- 5) When covering candidate races do follow-up stories, much the same way crime stories are done.
- 6) During an election cycle make election stories lead stories as often as possible.
- 7) Provide an *Elections* page in the *Press*, similar to the *Comment*, or *Local Beat* page.
- 8) Cross-referenced articles. For instance “The labor/COC conflict was covered in-depth in last Saturday’s *Region* section”. This would allow people to catch up and might even encourage reader loyalty.
- 9) More articles in Sunday papers. There were none on the Sunday before the election.

Who to Contact

WOOD TV 8

120 College SE
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News Director: Jim Loy

WZZM 13

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