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Our Town

Aldermania!

This week: a sign skirmish in the 3rd Ward, a marriage of convenience in the 2nd, and a MySpace campaign in the 12th.

By **Mick Dumke**
February 2, 2007

PAT DOWELL, ONE of four people challenging Third Ward alderman Dorothy Tillman in the February municipal election, has been ripping Tillman for doing too little to spur development, improve education, or fight crime. Mell Monroe, another high-profile challenger in the race, has been ripping Tillman for the same things. But in the past two weeks Dowell and Monroe have been ripping each other.

Monroe volunteer Beulah Jones, a 75-year-old retired principal, says she looked out the window of her South Indiana Avenue condo on January 13 and saw a woman pull a Monroe sign out of her front yard and put it in the back of a van. "I could see nothing but red-and-blue Mell Monroe signs in there," Jones says.

Jones wrote down the van's make and license plate number, then contacted the police and the Monroe campaign. Monroe says he and his staff had already noticed that signs they'd put up around the ward were disappearing: "At first they'd stay up a week or ten days, then four days, then a few hours." By the end of last week, he says, around 650 signs were missing.

The detective assigned to the case told me an investigation was under way but wouldn't give details. Monroe says his campaign found the van in question parked next to Dowell's office and traced it to her campaign manager, Audrey Wade. "I might expect this from the incumbent," he says, "but not from Pat Dowell."

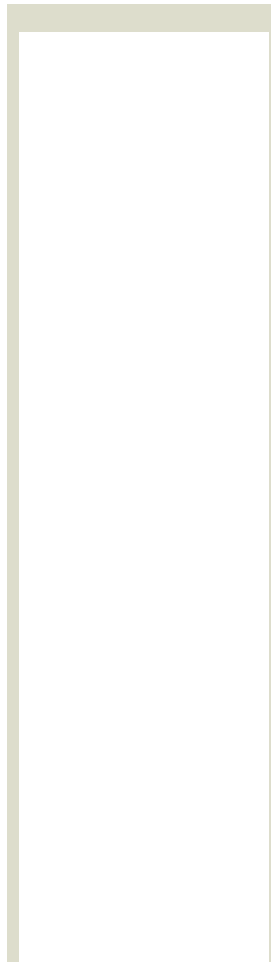
Wade didn't return a call seeking comment, but Dowell told me no one on her staff had taken down any Monroe signs. She suggested Monroe might have his own motives for accusing her. "I'm not sure how well his campaign is going," she said. "Mell has got to increase his name recognition. What better way to get at it?"

Monroe said they should be targeting Tillman, not each other. Dowell agreed, then added, "I just think he should stop whining."

LAST WEEK CONGRESSMAN Bobby Rush showed up at Madeline Haithcock's South Loop campaign office to announce that he was endorsing her reelection as alderman of the Second Ward. "My wisdom that God has blessed me with has taught me that you don't go through life looking backward," he said. "She is the best thing for the Second Ward—the best person for the Second Ward. She will guide the ward to a glorious future."



Dorothy Tillman
Jon Randolph



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Matches

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Rush was alderman of the ward until he was elected to Congress in 1992. Since he was also the ward's Democratic committeeman, he got to pick his successor, and he chose Haithcock, a loyal member of his ward organization. He installed her in his old office and, according to Haithcock, over the next two years micromanaged all her efforts, even demanding that she fax him copies of her daily schedule. When she finally told him she wasn't playing by his rules anymore, he had the locks changed.

Meanwhile Haithcock had gone over to the other side, supporting Mayor Daley, whom Rush had long seen as an enemy. Rush responded by running his sister against her in '95 and in '99, the year he took on Daley. Haithcock won and Rush lost. And though in 2000 he beat back a challenge for his congressional seat from Barack Obama, he continued to stumble, endorsing Blair Hull over Obama in the 2004 Senate primary and anyone but Tom Dart for sheriff last year.

Haithcock has made mistakes too. She's hired family members as staffers and has a reputation for being inaccessible. At some point in the past couple years she and Rush seemed to realize they needed each other. Last year they worked together publicly to get a street named after murdered Black Panther Fred Hampton.

Rush also seems to have realized that he's better off working with Daley than against him. A few weeks ago he said the city had "improved substantially" under Daley and called him a "great mayor," and now he's stumping for Haithcock.

She won the past three elections with the help of Daley's campaign army, but his forces may not be enough this time around. She's up against strong candidates: two attorneys, Bob Fioretti and David Askew; Larry Doody, the brother of Cook County commissioner Elizabeth Doody Gorman; Wallace Davis Jr., a former alderman backed by Congressman Danny Davis; and Kenny Johnson, a businessman backed by Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr.

"I support her," Rush said as he stood in Haithcock's office last

week. "I will spend my weekends working for her." When asked whether he'd be giving Haithcock any financial support, he neatly dodged the question.

JESUS "JESSE" IÑIGUEZ, who's 25, claims to be the youngest person campaigning for alderman in this election. He hopes to represent the 12th Ward and calls the incumbent, George Cardenas, "the Latino version of an Uncle Tom. He's been a Daley puppet."

Iñiguez grew up in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, part of which is in the 12th Ward, and owns a T-shirt business there. He says he's been hearing complaints about Cardenas ever since he was first elected four years ago, among them that Cardenas doesn't provide enough of the services residents want and that last year he betrayed the working people of the ward when he switched his vote to support Daley's position on the big-box wage ordinance. When Iñiguez went to Cardenas's office to ask for an explanation, he says, "He gave me an answer in the form of a recording from an appearance he'd made on a Spanish-language radio station. That told me that he didn't know why."

Other people were already running against Cardenas, but Iñiguez decided he could do a better job himself. "Everything we've been doing is unconventional," he says. "It's very grassroots."


He was one of the first—and is still one of the only—candidates in the election to have a MySpace page. He's got dozens of young volunteers—high school and college students, professional acquaintances, family friends, church members—going door-to-door in the ward. His fund-raising is small-scale. "My mother and her friends are getting together a Tupperware-style party," he says. "Of course everybody will take away a free T-shirt."

He himself has one—a campaign shirt of course—displayed in the back window of his car, which has made it a target. He says someone threw two bricks through his windshield after he announced he was running, one in October and one in December.



Top to bottom: Pat Dowell, Mell Monroe, Bobby Rush, Madeline Haithcock, Jesus "Jesse" Iñiguez

He also says he got an anonymous phone call from someone telling him it would be best if he dropped out.

With six candidates in the race, there may well be a runoff between the top two finishers. If Iñiguez doesn't win, he hopes one of the other challengers does, explaining, "Anything's better than the current alderman." 

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