

Newcomers want to continue service to St. Joseph

By **JOHN MATUSZAK**
HP Staff Writer

ST. JOSEPH — St. Joseph voters will select at least one new city commissioner Nov. 5, as two incumbents and two newcomers seek three open seats.

Seeking re-election are Commissioners Mary Goff, first appointed in 1986, and Mike Garey, first elected in 1999. They are joined on the ballot by Chris Heugel, general manager of the Boulevard Inn & Bistro;

Monday

► Incumbent commissioners make case in Monday's HP.

and George Barfield, an associate professor of sociology at Lake Michigan College.

Mayor Bob Judd, first elected as commissioner in 1997 and selected as mayor in 2007, chose not to run for re-election.

The two top voter-getters

will serve four-year terms, until 2017, and the third-place finisher in the race will serve a two-year term, until 2015.

Heugel and Barfield are running for office in St. Joseph for the first time. Both have extensive records of community service and both see election to the City Commission as a continuation of that civic commitment.

Chris Heugel

Heugel, 47, moved to St.

Joseph from Indianapolis in 1999 and "almost immediately became involved in the community," he said.

His list of activities includes serving as current chairman of the Silver Beach Shadowland Ballroom operating committee; member and three-term president of the St. Joseph Today Board of Trustees; board member and treasurer for the Cornerstone Chamber of Commerce; two-term president of the St. Joseph Kiwanis Club;

and an advisory board member at Lake Michigan College.

He also is a trustee with the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen and an active member of the First Church of God.

Election to the commission would be "a perfect next step for me," he said. "It would be another avenue to give back to the city I love."

He likes the direction the city is taking.

"I am pleased with the



BARFIELD



HEUGEL

progress and the growth in the city. I want to be a part of keeping that momentum going," Heugel said.

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He has worked in the hotel industry for 22 years. At the Boulevard Inn he manages a staff that ranges from 170 during the summer season to 120 on average the rest of the year.

When he first came to town, downtown storefronts were only 60 percent occupied, and are now almost 100 percent full, he said.

He sees tourism as a huge part of the local economy, and said the city has done a good job of balancing the needs of visitors and residents.

He agrees with the commission's recent decision to eliminate short-term vacation rental properties from residential neighborhoods.

"I think there is a place for short-term rentals, but I would not want one next to my house," Heugel said. "To protect our neighborhoods was a good choice. I would have made the same choice."

He said he would like to see more downtown beautification, but added that the city's spending priorities should be set by residents.

"If elected, my job, first and foremost, is to listen to the taxpayers, and create value for taxpayers. To do that is to listen," he said.

He said some residents are telling him to reduce taxes. But, overall, residents seem to be "extraordinarily happy with the way things are going," he said, as shown by their willingness to keep their elected officials in office.

"Do I want to see big change? No," Heugel said. "I want to continually improve on what we have going."

The city's transition to a public safety department appears to have been a good move based on response times, the number of people at fire scenes and the money saved, Heugel said. He would like to see a closer evaluation of the impact this change has had.

If elected, Heugel would be the youngest commissioner, which he said would bring a different perspective to decision-making.

Along with his civic activities, Heugel is a drummer who plays with different bands and at fundraising events, and he also enjoys yard work. He has one child at St. Joseph High School and another who is a freshman at the University of Michigan.

George Barfield

Barfield also believes that his age would work in his favor. At 74, he would be the oldest commissioner, which he said gives him the perspective of long life experience.

He also would be the only (and likely the first) black person on the St. Joseph City Commission, which he said also gives him a unique point of view.

The demographics of St. Joseph are changing, with more black, Asian and international residents, he said.

"A representative body needs to look more like the community it is representing," Barfield said. "I think

the current commissioners are sincere, but they are lacking experience in matters of diversity."

He said blacks from Benton Harbor often feel unwelcome in St. Joseph, a situation he would like to see changed.

Barfield, a native of Maryland, has been a St. Joseph resident for six years. Before moving, he lived in Benton Harbor for 27 years.

He is retired from Benton Harbor Area Schools, where he held positions including intervention specialist and district improvement coordinator. He also served on the Benton Harbor school board for three and a half years.

He has served on the Board of Directors of the Krasl Art Center; on the planning and development committee of the Curious Kids Museum; and as president of the Benton Harbor Kiwanis. He is lead deacon at First Presbyterian Church in Benton Harbor.

Barfield is a veteran of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. He has a bachelor's degree from Ball State University and a master's degree from Indiana University.

He believes it is time for new leadership in the city.

"With long-term representation you are in danger of thinking you know better than anyone else as it relates to the city," Barfield said.

He said some citizens have become afraid to challenge their representatives. Others told him they planned to vote for him, but

did not want anyone to know.

He disagrees with the city's decision to restrict the location of short-term rentals "for little or no reason."

Barfield and his son had an application for a permit for a short-term rental on Upton Drive rejected, and didn't understand the rationale for the decision.

He wants more transparency in the city's decision-making process.

"I think it's a tragedy if someone walks out of that chamber after a decision is made that impacts them, not understanding why," Barfield said.

He agreed with the decision to create a public safety department, adding that it was unfortunate that some people lost their jobs in the process.

"I think it was a smart move," Barfield said.

He described himself as a "financial conservative" and said his spending priorities would include the city's streets and other infrastructure.

Barfield's hobbies include building furniture, stained glass, basket making, sewing and gardening.

He and his wife, Sara Shambarger, director of the Krasl Arts Fair, have eight children, 25 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren.

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