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# Tensions rising in West St. Paul mayoral rematch

## Challenger cites incumbent's case involving gift ban

By Nick Ferraro

[nferraro@pioneerpress.com](mailto:nferraro@pioneerpress.com)

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The mayor's race in West St. Paul is a rematch of a relatively quiet 2004 election in which the two candidates were John Zanmiller and political newcomer Ed Iago.

Except this year, the contest is anything but quiet.

Zanmiller, who is seeking his third term as mayor, said Monday that Iago, a Ward 2 City Council member since 2006, has been "throwing mud" and "getting personal" in campaign literature.

When told of Zanmiller's accusations, Iago said he has only "printed the facts" in the literature, which mentions how the council voted to censure the mayor for violating the city's code of ethics.

"He can make all the statements he wants about my campaign literature," Iago said. "The point is that everything I have said is true."

The dust-up began in April, when the City Council voted 4-2 to censure Zanmiller, who was accused of violating a state law prohibiting city officials from accepting gifts. After the vote, Council Member Jim Englin introduced a resolution asking the mayor to resign. That resolution failed on a 3-3 tie.

Iago was on the "yes" side of both votes.

Allegations had surfaced in February that Zanmiller took a table — made of fake deer antlers — from the former city manager. The mayor admitted that he accepted the furniture but said he was only storing it.

The Dakota County attorney's office closed its investigation into the allegations without filing charges.

Zanmiller, 41, served two years on the City Council

before being elected mayor in 2004, defeating Iago by about 900 votes. He ran unopposed in 2006.

In Iago and Zanmiller, voters have candidates who pledge to

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continue to work toward reducing the number of vacant and foreclosed homes, which number about 300. Both talk about redirecting existing county grant money and getting more funds to help qualified buyers and those struggling with their mortgages.

Zanmiller, who works as a probation officer, said the City Council must continue to maintain the city's sanitary and storm sewers and practice "fiscal restraint without impacting services that residents demand."

"Our city is faced with numerous issues that will have a profound impact on our immediate future," he said. "With the vacant and foreclosed homes, aging infrastructure and no guarantees on our local government aid, we need someone with an actual plan for the future."

Zanmiller can be reached at 651-451-1741 or [jzanmiller@comcast.net](mailto:jzanmiller@comcast.net).

Iago, 68, a retired banker, said his top issues include "budget and expense control" and public safety.

"Our citizens, staff and City Council should not have to worry about the ethics and integrity of a censured mayor," he said. "We have difficult and important decisions coming up — financial, housing, public safety — and need a mayor who has the support of the council and staff with the vision and proven ability to lead our city."

Iago can be reached at 651-731-4447 or [ediago@msn.com](mailto:ediago@msn.com).

Voters in West St. Paul will also decide three City Council races on Tuesday:

#### WARD 1

**Jim Englin**, 40, is seeking his second four-year term on the council. His education includes degrees from the University of Minnesota and Mankato State University. He also graduated from Comair Aviation Academy and works as a trooper/pilot with the Minnesota State Patrol, based in St. Paul.

"I am running to ensure that our public safety departments remain funded and equipped," he said. "I want to be a part of West St. Paul reinventing itself and climbing out of this housing mess and I want to lead the Signal Hills redevelopment. I want to give the public a representative that expects and demands the highest of ethical standards from the top down."

For more information, call 651-308-1844 or e-mail [englinforwsp@comcast.net](mailto:englinforwsp@comcast.net).

**Susan Stradtmann**, 51, works as a labor relations specialist with the Minnesota Nurses Association and is on West St. Paul's parks and recreation advisory board. Last year she unsuccessfully ran for a seat on the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan school board.

"Even though I moved here in 1979, I consider WSP to be my home town," she said. "I want to be a part of West St. Paul by giving back to the community in some way."

Stradtmann did not provide contact information.

#### WARD 2

Two newcomers are vying to replace Mark Tessmer, who decided not to seek a third term.

**Mark Mohr**, 54, is an alumnus of Henry Sibley High School and Inver Grove Heights Community College and works as a self-employed insurance agent. He serves as a Northern Dakota County Cable commissioner and is a member of the West St. Paul Charter Commission. His late father, Max, was a Ward 2 council member in the early 1960s.

"I love West St. Paul and want to bring the pride back that I had in and about West St. Paul," he said. "I have a vision that revitalizes and gentrifies the northern end of South Robert Street. Imagine a full-service grocery store, 200- to 300-seat banquet facility, two-story park-and-ride and a trolley car that operates for a quarter and connects to the light rail running down University Avenue."

For more information, call 651-457-0995 or e-mail [markmohrwstp@comcast.net](mailto:markmohrwstp@comcast.net).

**Anthony Vitelli**, 27, has a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of North Dakota. He is a senior financial analyst at Lawson Software in downtown St. Paul. His grandfather was the West St. Paul mayor in the 1950s and his father was on the City Council for 14 years.

"I am running for City Council because there are steps we need to take to secure our prosperous future," he said. "I will ensure that your tax dollars are spent where they provide the greatest benefit. I will stand up for what I believe in, while respectfully challenging what I believe to be wrong. I will hold our city leaders accountable for their decisions and challenge them to come up with creative solutions to the problems we are facing."

For more information, call 651-455-9690, e-mail [tony.vitelli@gmail.com](mailto:tony.vitelli@gmail.com) or go to [tonyvitelli.blogspot.com](http://tonyvitelli.blogspot.com).

#### WARD 3

**Darlene Lewis**, 68, is seeking her second four-year term on the council. She has a bachelor's degree in business from Metropolitan State University and a chemical technician certificate from St. Paul College. She is retired from Ecolab, where she worked for 27 years. She serves on the Dakota County Communication board of directors and West St. Paul's Economic Development Advisory Committee.

"It is my belief that a strong community is made up of citizens who have a strong voice in city government," she said. "Since my election in 2004, I've listened to these citizens and acted in their best interest. As a 35-year resident I've seen our city go through many changes, and it continues to evolve. We now have more older citizens and a rich cultural diversity."

For more information, call 651-457-8835 or e-mail darlewismm@msn.com.

**Tony Schmitz**, 41, has a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Minnesota and a master's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Texas. He works as an engineering manager for Cypress Semiconductor and volunteers as a catechism teacher at St. Joseph's Church in West St. Paul.

"I'm running for City Council because I believe I can bring new ideas to meet the upcoming challenges of vacant homes, fighting crime, attracting business and staying within budget," he said. "In addition, the 911-Cell Center needs significant performance improvement, and the city's PACE program needs to be applied more equitably to both homeowners and business."

For more information, 651-451-6772 or e-mail tonynschmitz@comcast.net.

Nick Ferraro can be reached at 651-228-2173.

ONLINE

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