



February 5, 2010

Candidate campaigns for a kidney

By Kevin Kelly
kkelly@nky.com

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - It's a time-honored tradition in Kentucky for politicians to take on unusual nicknames or change their names entirely to get noticed.

Ray "I Am a Democrat" Adkins and Robert Mead C.P.A. are a couple that come to mind.

But there's probably never been one like a novice candidate in this year's race for Campbell County Surveyor. He is Mike "Needs A Kidney" Sittason. And, yes, that's his legal name.

"Oh yeah, I'll have to change it if I get a transplant," the 67-year-old retiree said over a three-course lunch this week. "I can change it to, 'Got A Kidney.'"

Sittason said members of Campbell County Change for Kentucky - a Democratic-leaning political organization - encouraged him to get involved in the political process this election year and to have some fun with it.

The Highland Heights resident has never run for public office before and he has no formal training as a surveyor.

"We did that (name change) because I need one, but it's also sort of a funny way to say that, 'He's on the bottom of the ticket but he has a vast knowledge of health care,'" Sittason said. "And I do. I was actually an insurance agent for 23 years and sold health care insurance."

Joe Kramer, a Republican from Alexandria, will square off against Sittason in November. Kramer, a 35-year-old vice president at Cardinal Engineering in Wilder, is a state licensed professional land surveyor and engineer.

"While it's not a requirement, certainly to me and other surveyors in the area it's very important to have a licensed surveyor to fill that office," Kramer said. "The office is generally not utilized that much. It's really up to the fiscal court and the judge as to how often they'd like to call on us to fill their survey needs....I feel like I've got the qualifications to assist them on the as-needed basis."

The county's surveyor, who receives no pay, had been Brian Cox. He resigned in the fall after taking a full-time job with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

Also a state-licensed professional land surveyor, Cox is the president-elect of the Kentucky Association of Professional Surveyors.

"I understand he (Sittason) wants to get his name out there in order to try and become a recipient," Cox said. "This is not the venue to do that because it really downplays the surveyor as basically a, for lack of a better word, a...nobody."

Having worked for builders in real estate at one time, Sittason claims to know "a lot" about surveying. He can read a plat and said he would let competitive bids for any work.

Sittason thinks people should vote for him because he's "conscientious" and "hard working."

"Washington started as a surveyor. Lincoln started as a surveyor. And now me," Sittason said.

But enough about politics. How did Sittason get to the point where he needs a kidney transplant?

It stems from the five heart attacks Sittason suffered before receiving a new heart in 1994. The anti-rejection drugs he took for 15 years after the transplant ravaged his kidneys. He said he is on a donor list for a new kidney and three times a week undergoes dialysis at a Cold Spring clinic.

Sittason's blood is Type A positive. Two daughters were potential matches, but they're Type AB. A sister matches but she has high blood pressure.

"I've got some friends that are going to get tested, but you just don't know if they're going to match or not," he said.

Should a donor come forward and be determined a match, Sittason does not believe undergoing a transplant operation before November would hinder his ability to hold office.

"Yeah, you can still run. And you can still do your job," he said. "In fact, I'd probably be a little better than on dialysis. That's three days a week when you've got almost the whole day tied up. And if it's like the heart transplant, after all that, I was like their poster boy. They put that heart in and I was in (the hospital for) 11 days, walked away, never looked back."
