

## **Friends In High Places**

By Michael Westendorf

Above all else, Ann Manary wants to make it very clear that she's not bitter. The 18-year veteran of the Midland County Clerk's office has been the talk of the town in most political circles after an appointment last year some viewed as controversial.

Manary is the current Chief Deputy County Clerk and was on tap to become the next Midland County Clerk last summer when her boss, former clerk Karen Holcomb, decided to retire early. However, Manary's seamless job transition was jolted to a halt when Scott Haines, the former Register of Deeds and Republican Party leader was appointed instead, by a panel of judges with GOP ties.

Since then, Manary has switched political parties and is running against her boss in November as a Democrat. She originally announced her candidacy as a Republican.

"I joined the Republican Party twelve years ago when Jeff Porter was getting ready to leave and he knew that I wanted to be the county clerk someday and he said to me, 'Only Republicans get elected in Midland,'" she says.

Her decision in January to run as a Democrat was fueled by a reevaluation of her political beliefs. However, political parties aside, Manary admits she's not a politician. She is encouraging voters this year to look at her qualifications instead of her ability to campaign.

"People in the Republican Party had promised me if you just sit back and be a good girl, when Scott's done, we'll make sure that you're the next person. And I thought, number one: why should I have to sit back and be a good girl when I've work really hard, and number two: I wanted to run this race as myself."

Manary says the Democratic Party has given her complete support, "Very much so. They've been great. They've helped out with my spaghetti dinner and things like that. I've gotten contributions from a lot of folks in the Democratic party. They've volunteered for anything I've asked them to volunteer for."

### **The Campaigns**

“I think it’s going really well,” Manary says of her campaign. “I’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback from people.”

Manary is running the typical local campaign. She has a small sign committee to help put up yard signs and is holding various fundraisers such as golf outings and spaghetti dinners to help fill the coffers. Regardless, she remains her largest donor. With no primary opponent, she saved the majority of her campaigning for the general election. She had approximately forty-seven large yard signs around the county for the primary. The small yard signs won’t come out until it gets closer to November, she says.

“I’m not going to be out spending thousands and thousands of dollars, I mean, I have a budget. I have a lot of friends who are volunteering. I have a small sign committee to help me put up my signs throughout the county.”

Haines also says his campaign for County Clerk is going well. Unlike Manary, he has past political and campaigning experience. He was the Midland County Register of Deeds from 1999 – 2006, and before that he served as the District Director for the Fourth Congressional District under U.S. Rep. Dave Camp. He also served as Camp’s campaign manager. When *The Tridge* spoke with Haines, he was planning an October fundraiser at a private home. This was the first campaign in which Haines said he would be using a fundraiser. Previously, he had always used letters. He also says that he is not his biggest campaign donor.

“I’m obviously very appreciative of the support that I’ve got” he says.

### **The Position**

In describing the difference between the Clerk’s position, and his former post, Haines brings up the contrast in speed.

“It’s a much more fast-paced office. The Register of Deeds office, for the most part, is a very even-keeled type of office.”

In the Clerk’s office, Haines says, “There’s so much more that can happen on the spur of the moment. There is something different almost every day.”

The Midland County Clerk’s office splits its time between the County Services building

and the County Courthouse.

Haines says that with the Edenville recalls of last year, he had little time after his appointment before he had to get right to work. “If you look at the year I had as my first year as County Clerk, it really has been a unique year. We have seen things happen this year that have basically never happened.”

Manary says there isn’t such a leap between her position, and that of Haines’. She says she has the same authority as the county clerk in his absence. One of the strengths that Manary’s campaign has been touting is her years of experience in the clerk’s office. “I have done every job there is to do, so, if any point in time if I have staff who is not there, I can step in and do their job, and I think that’s a huge asset to the community,” she says.

Haines recognizes Manary’s experience, but says that “new eyes” might be more beneficial to the office. “It’s been a long time since someone from the outside has been in the clerk’s office – and everyone has come from within the office. I brought new eyes to the office,” he says, “Same old, same old, you know, can be good at times, but it isn’t always good. There’s always an opportunity where if you bring in different eyes that have not grown up with in the family so to speak of within the office, it gives a new perspective to the office and allows for different ideas to come out, different thoughts and that type of thing.”

### **A Working Relationship**

Even though their respective campaigns will sometimes disagree, and the very nature of political opponents is volatile; the pair have a unique situation in that Manary is continuing to serve as Haines’ deputy. The two have very nice things to say about each other, at least publicly.

“I like Ann a lot; I’ve known her for years,” Haines says of Manary.

Manary offers the same praise for Haines, “Scott and I get along really well. I wouldn’t want anyone to think that Scott hasn’t been fair, or that he hasn’t been super nice to me. I don’t blame Scott for wanting to advance his career.”

Because of this unique situation, the awkward question of Manary’s future employment is brought up, should Haines be victorious on Election Day. “He has his views on our conversa-

tions, and I have mine. Now, whether he said I'd be fired, whether I believed I'd be fired, that's debatable, I suppose," says Manary. Haines has previously publicly stated that politics should play a role in who his deputy is, because he believes it's necessary to share similar broad philosophies.

Haines says he hasn't planned ahead regarding Manary's current position, "You know, that is something that I have no idea. Ann and I have worked together well. We have, I think, really maintained through this whole thing, you know, professionalism. I have no idea what's going to happen, I have no idea if she wants to work for me. I have no idea what's going to happen after the election."

Manary says she hasn't ruled out staying on as deputy clerk if she loses the election. As far as her job security, she says, "Ask Scott that. It would be hard, but I don't know."

### **A Misunderstanding of Events**

Both campaigns have a different story for the events that occurred leading up to Haines' appointment.

According to Manary, she found out about Haines' intent to run via a phone call, where a supporter told her that Haines was at Rep. Camp's annual picnic at the Tridge with campaign t-shirts.

Haines contradicts that story by saying he did not try to sneak into the race whatsoever. In fact, he says he even sent out a press release several months before that included his intent. "I believe – if you go back to April or May, I'd have to double-check, I had sent out a press release and announced that I was not going to run for State Rep. and that I was seriously considering at that time of running for the clerk's position."

To Manary, it seemed as if Haines was trying to slip under the radar, in an attempt to bum-rush his appointment before anyone blinked. Haines disagrees, and pins the blame for the misunderstanding on the *Midland Daily News*.

"I'm going to be very honest with you here – and this will probably upset the *Midland Daily News*," Haines says, "but if you go back and look ... Karen announced her retirement to

the judges and the board of commissioners, that was given to the judges, that was given to the board, and that was in an information packet and it's my understanding that the *Midland Daily News* got it. However, they missed it. They didn't see it – they failed. A press release was issued for my appointment, and the *Midland Daily News* went: "Wait a minute here! Karen Holcomb hasn't retired!" – But she had."

### **The Appointment**

Scott Haines' appointment to the Midland County Clerk's office was viewed as controversial because two of the three judges on the appointment panel had GOP ties. Most notably, Jon Lauderbach, who currently serves as Midland's chief circuit court judge, and who Haines admits, is a long-time friend and campaign donor.

"I think it's a difficult situation – you know friendships are created over years and years and years, and we all change jobs over those years. So, the fact that Jon and I were friends long before he became a judge, the fact that he became a judge and then had to become involved in the appointment of the County Clerk is more coincidence than anything else," says Haines when asked about the potential conflict of interest. "He was in a very tight race himself, and it could have just as easily been someone else that was a part of the decision."

Manary doesn't blame the potential conflict of interest on the appointment panel as much as she blames the local GOP. When asked if she thinks the panel of judges had their minds made up as soon as they saw Haines' name next to hers, she flatly says, "Yes."

Manary believes the local Republican Party "ordered" the judges to appoint Haines.

"Even in my positions when I make decisions, I have to look at all the facts. I have to do the research... I have to make the best decision for the community. What they did was, they skipped that part, and they didn't look at any facts. They simply made a decision based on someone telling them what they should do. They didn't look at any facts. They didn't get any information, and they didn't do any research. And that bothers me because the rest of us are required to do that for our jobs and I would think that they should have been required to do that as well," she says.

Even after her disappointment with the appointment, Manary doesn't draw a parallel between the decision the judges made with the county clerk appointment and the decisions the judges make on the bench.

"I watch these judges on a daily basis. I'm there, I work with them, and I am very confident with the decisions they make on the bench are the right decisions. I would never call into question their integrity."

She also says that she doesn't have any animosity toward the judges as well.

"Absolutely not. Even though they're the ones that made the decision, I don't believe it was their decision. I truly believe they were told to do what they did. It wasn't them; they didn't get to make the decision. That's my problem. They were told that this is the person we want for the position and this is the person you're going to appoint. So, I would never question their integrity so to speak on the bench. For years, this town has been controlled by the Republican Party. They've been able to make all the decisions. I just think that it should be up to the people. I have township people that are afraid to come out and publicly support me."

According to Manary, Judge Dorene Allen, who served on the panel as well, said "Scott was the most experienced." But Manary says Allen wouldn't elaborate. "That's all she said every time she was asked. That was all she would say, then it was 'no comment'"

Judge Paul Clulo, the third judge on the panel, is perceived in most local political circles to be a Democrat. "As far as Judge Clulo goes, the perception was that Judge Clulo was a Democrat," says Haines.

Manary says that she had a meeting with Clulo shortly before Haines' appointment, where he told her, "I've got 35 letters sitting on my desk, telling me that they think you should receive this appointment. People are killing trees for you." However, Manary says, "Judge Clulo said that whatever [Judges Lauderbach and Allen] decide, he was going to agree with them because he wanted it to be a unanimous decision."

After Manary's meeting with Judge Clulo, she says she was very disappointed. "It was definitely politically motivated. Anyone who says it wasn't is not looking at it through a clear

pane of glass. There's no question in my mind it was simply all politics and nothing more."

Haines, however, doesn't feel like a victim, or victor, of a political maneuver. "First of all, I don't perceive to know what the judges [political] ties are," he says. "I think there's evidence you can look at or there's things that you can see and say "Sure." I mean Jon Lauderbach has been involved in Republican politics for a long time. He worked for Dave Camp, he worked for Bill Schuette. Does he have Republican ties? Sure. When he ran for judge, I supported him in that – I've been friends with him for a very long time."

In responding to Manary's comments, Haines says, "I can sit here today and tell you that I never asked anyone to call the judges on my behalf."

### **Moving Forward**

"I think people need to understand what happened. I'm sure people are going to read this piece and some of the comments I've had, they're not going to be happy with me, but those are people who aren't going to vote for me anyway. I just feel like the entire community should be able to make the decision," says Manary.

Haines sees the election as a way for everyone who disagrees with his appointment to rectify the situation. "You know, I think to really put a blame on it, if you want to, there again it has to be the process, not, you know, the appointment itself," Haines says "I think that you have to look at and you have to talk to the judges about why they appointed me. I obviously believe I'm the right person for the job."