

Sunday, October 30, 2005

Report from the front: Race too close to call

College Hill demonstrates how tight mayoral contest is

By Howard Wilkinson
Enquirer staff writer

COLLEGE HILL - In front of Beth and Tom McLean's home on Belmont Avenue, near their towering castor bean plants, are two "We're Pepper People" yard signs.

Just across the street, their neighbors have "Mark Mallory for Mayor" signs flanking their driveway.

The dueling yard signs say a lot about the Cincinnati mayor's race in this traditional bellwether neighborhood, and maybe a lot about the city at large.

"I think the neighborhood is pretty much split between Pepper people and Mallory people," said McLean, standing out on the carefully landscaped lawn one morning last week. "Everyone always says that College Hill is the mirror for the city. I think it will be true this time."

History suggests that as goes College Hill, so goes Cincinnati. That neighborhood, along with Mount Airy, comprise a ward of about 18,500 registered voters that candidates can not afford to ignore.

As the yard signs indicate - and as the Sept. 13 primary showed - the race for mayor between State Sen. Mark Mallory and Councilman David Pepper could be close.

They each won about 31 percent of the primary vote, and no independent polls have been done since. Heading into the Nov. 8 election, they appear to be nearly tied.

Along the newly-renovated streetscape of Hamilton Avenue, College Hill's "Main Street," there were some signs last week of the mayoral battle.

Passersby on the 5800 block of Hamilton Avenue can peek inside the storefront windows of Mallory campaign headquarters and see volunteers with telephones at their ears and fingers flying across computer keyboards.

Meanwhile, some Hamilton Avenue businesses are plastered with flyers announcing an upcoming David Pepper "meet-and-greet" event at Bacall's Restaurant.

On the corner of Cedar Avenue and Hamilton, Amos Robinson walked his beat as a member of the neighborhood's Citizens On



ZOOM Enquirer photos by Michael E. Keating
Community activist Amos Robinson wants to see community-based adult parole officers working in College Hill.

RETURN TO WARD 23

In August, The Enquirer reported on Ward 23, an area of the city that has been a good predictor of politics. At the time, residents of the neighborhood - which includes College Hill and Mount Airy - knew only that they wanted a strong leader for Cincinnati. But it was too early in the campaign, they said, to make up their minds.

This past week, the Enquirer returned to College Hill to find out, two months later, what residents think now - and what that might foretell for the Nov. 8 election.

ADVERTISEMENT

RELATED STORIES

- [A new plan for City Hall](#)
- [Strong leadership a top priority](#)
- [E-voting system: 'It's easy'](#) (10/30/2005)
- [Lebanon tries to right its ship](#) (10/30/2005)
- [Noe indictment could boost Dems at polls](#) (10/30/2005)
- [I have issues with all five of these issues](#) (10/30/2005)
- [Little Miami bond issue bigger](#) (10/29/2005)
- [Six run for four seats on Loveland Council](#) (10/29/2005)
- [Election calendar](#) (10/29/2005)
- [\\$2M needed for ballot scans](#) (10/29/2005)
- [Campaign Notebook: Pepper poised to spend \\$1M](#) (10/29/2005)
- [Pepper TV spot called negative](#) (10/29/2005)
- [Strong leadership a top priority](#) (10/29/2005)
- [Enquirer mayoral endorsement](#) (10/29/2005)
- [Non-Ohioans donate to change state election laws](#) (10/28/2005)
- [Elections genteel in Indian Hill](#) (10/28/2005)

Patrol unit, as he talked about the neighborhood he adopted when he moved from his native West Virginia more than 30 years ago.

"Look right there," Robinson said, pointing to an elderly couple walking hand-in-hand down Cedar toward the neighborhood post office.

"That's what we want from our mayor, from our city council," said Robinson. "We want people who are going to help us have the kind of neighborhood where folks like that can walk down the street and feel safe.

"I'm not interested in Democrat; I'm not interested in Republican," said Robinson, as Arlene Weaver, another neighborhood volunteer, walked by, picking up trash with a long, pointed stick.

"If David Pepper is going to do it, fine. If Mark Mallory is going to do it, that's fine too. We just want somebody who will help us keep what we have here."

Very soon, College Hill voters like Robinson will choose which of the two politicians will lead the city; and which nine of the 31 candidates for Cincinnati City Council will work with that mayor.

A bellwether ward

College Hill, with about 16,000 residents, has long been considered a political bellwether, along with its neighboring community of Mount Airy. Together, they make up Ward 23, where the racial demographics and voting age population most nearly match the city as a whole.

Two years ago, Ward 23 voters picked all nine members of council with Pepper running first, as he did citywide. In September, the ward picked Pepper and Mallory as their top mayoral candidates - although Mallory ran first there and second citywide.

More than 100 College Hill residents gathered Tuesday for a candidate night at the Gulden Center of the Twin Towers Retirement Community. They heard two-minute speeches from a stream of municipal court, school board and council candidates. Pepper and Mallory, though, never made it - they were in Winton Terrace that night for a televised debate.

Robinson was at the candidates' forum, as was McLean, who runs the farmer's market that runs weekly from April through October.

McLean said she generally votes Republican in national elections but said party "doesn't matter much" in local races.

For example, she said she would not have supported Charlie Winburn - the only Republican candidate in the mayoral primary and pastor of a College Hill church not far from her home - even if he survived the primary.

Pepper, she said, "knows city hall and he has been a help to us in College Hill. I think he is the candidate who is ready for this job."

Mallory, she said, "is a decent man, a smart man." But his acceptance of an endorsement from the Black Fist, a small black separatist organization that stages protests on Fountain Square and at City Hall, troubles her.

"I don't know why he just won't tell them he wants nothing to do with them," McLean said.

70 years of voting experience

Elizabeth Kelly, a Twin Towers resident who had celebrated her 92nd birthday the Sunday before, listened carefully to

• [18 levies let you decide](#) (10/28/2005)

RELATED LINKS

• [Elections special section](#)



ZOOM

Beth McLean cultivated a plant from seeds in the Aiken High School greenhouse, a recently discovered resource for College Hill residents, who want to protect what they have.

the council candidates.

She has been voting Republican for nearly 70 years, but faces a choice between two Democrats. She said her party appears to have given up on the city.

"I may end up voting for Mallory; I'm not sure," Kelly said. "The only drawback is that all of his experience is in the statehouse, not city hall. But, then again, maybe that's a good thing."

Ken Lyon was at the Tuesday night event, too. He lived in College Hill while working for Procter & Gamble back in the 1960s. His work took him and his family to California for six years before returning to Cincinnati in the 1970s. They moved right back into College Hill, across the street from his old house.

Today, there is a Mallory sign in Lyon's front yard.

"I'm of a mind right now to go to the polls and vote the 'outs' in and the 'ins' out," Lyon said.

Lyon said he wants the kind of mayor and council that will "make policy and set direction and let the city manager and the people who run the departments do their jobs."

"When I hear a council candidate say, 'I'll solve your problem in 48 hours or less,' I get turned off, real fast," said Lyon.

Ralph Visconti, the co-owner of the Visconti & Lechler Pharmacy, a long-time neighborhood fixture, agrees with Lyon about the kind of mayor and council College Hill needs.

Heis excited about the prospect of the planned Linden Park Commons development coming to the corner of Hamilton Avenue and North Bend Road, just half a block from his store.

It will be a mix of retail shops, offices, condos and townhouses that will replace an abandoned Kroger's, a vacant Shuller's Wigwam restaurant and a failed chain drug store.

"That's going to help not just our business, but the whole business district," said Visconti.

It is a College Hill Community Urban Redevelopment Corporation project that will be built with private financing and \$800,000 appropriated by city council.

"That is the kind of help we need here in College Hill," said Visconti. "We are not particularly dissatisfied with the help we have had from City Hall. We just want to make sure that whoever is elected doesn't forget us."

Email hwilkinson@enquirer.com

[Print](#) | [Go back](#) | Copyright 2005, *The Enquirer*