

# City Commission Candidate

## Al Heilman boasts business background

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Opinion Editor

Citing a need for more careful management of Kalamazoo's resources in the face of projected budget shortfalls and plans for better student integration in the community, Al Heilman is seeking a fourth term on the Kalamazoo City Commission on Tuesday.

"We know we are going to be in a major budget crunch and tough decisions in services as we know them are going to be difficult," he said. "I am a business person, and bring to the commission many years of business and governmental experience."

Heilman has been a city commissioner for six years, serving a term as Kalamazoo's vice mayor, and spent 10 years on the county board of commissioners. He is the proprietor of Heilman's Nuts and Confections in Kalamazoo.

Tax incentives are one piece of Heilman's plan for keeping businesses in Kalamazoo.

"State law allows for certain tax incentives for communities to compete with other communities and states," he said. "With a recognition of what these incentives can bring to the city, I favor tax incentives. Tax incentives are used to save jobs, increase the number of jobs and add to the tax base where we wouldn't gain without."

The tax base and student population intersect on the housing issue.

"All college towns have the problem of investors buying single-family homes for conversion into student housing," he

said. "There has to be a happy medium in the number of these rentals. I have studied the zoning of Bowling Green, Ohio as to the way they handle housing. I do think a variation of their operation could work here. As students mature and buy homes of their own, I think they will come to understand the need for some kind of housing plan and control."



Al Heilman

Besides zoning, one of Heilman's ongoing concerns has been the role of students in the community.

"I believe we are growing in respect to each other," he said. "We need each other. We have regular meetings with the administration and I believe it is time for us to meet with students, too."

This concern is based, in part, on his own experience as a student.

"I understand the privileges of being a student away from home and the responsibilities it entails," he said. "Therefore, I do know limits of sociability of living in the community as a student. I did that."

Heilman said he also supports stronger economic ties between students and the community.

"As a business person, I have

tried to promote the recognition of the relationship of the large number of students we are fortunate to have in Kalamazoo," he said. "It is difficult, however, to get everyone to do co-op promoting to capture the attention of so many. I do believe we can continue to better focus on the student population by convening a meeting of students and businesses to find the kinds and types of goods and services wanted, and then set out to deliver."

A strong proponent of Kalamazoo, Heilman also expressed frustration by people who frequently speak negatively about the region.

"I think the commission and city residents need to be more positive in thinking and talking about our city," he said. "We have so many good things in Kalamazoo, and when I hear the negative comments about our good city, I'd like to stop the individuals and ask them to 'get a life.' We have some challenges, but we can solve them with cooperation. Attitude and trust are needed to improve ourselves."

This focus on trust and good cheer offer an insight into Heilman's opposition to Proposals A and C. Proposal A would amend the city charter to include sexual orientation and conduct as a "special class," and that this class may not receive "protected status" by the city; Proposal C would amend the charter to require the city and its contractors to pay a "living wage" to employees.

"I don't believe that 'one issue items' should change the city charter," he said.