

‘Underdog’ Kelty tops Peters

Faces veteran Henry for mayor’s seat in fall

By Benjamin Lanka
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After defeating the GOP’s favored candidate, the self-proclaimed underdog in the race for Fort Wayne mayor will battle another long-term elected official come November.

Architect Matt Kelty upset Allen County Commissioner Nelson Peters in Tuesday’s Republican primary election to set up a fall showdown against Democrat Tom Henry, who has 20 years of experience on the City Council.

Kelty took 50.3 percent of the vote to Peters’ 46.7 percent in the Republican primary, according to unofficial results. Only 661 votes separated the two.

Henry easily won the Democratic nomination, taking 82.4 percent of the vote.

Kelty ran an aggressive grass-roots campaign, focusing on his conservative values and vision for a city with a smaller, less-intrusive government. He often touted himself as “the conservative candidate” and garnered the support of many right-to-life and pro-family groups.

He said neither his beliefs nor his strategy will change come the fall.

“I’ll work my tail off,” he said. “I look forward to redoubling the work of our campaign.”

A noticeably exhausted Kelty credited his victory to his efforts to build campaign momentum starting in October and carrying that through the primary. During the campaign, Kelty was first out with most things: He was the first to announce his bid for mayor, the first to run TV ads – last Christmas – and the first to file for mayor, edging Peters by a few hours.

Peters was the front-runner as the race began. Not only did he hold a prominent local elected office, but he had the vocal support of Republican insiders.

In fact, almost every Republican officeholder in the county endorsed Peters – a feat almost unprecedented in competitive primaries.

Peters said he was pleased to have run a positive campaign and said running the race will make him a better commissioner.

He made no question of whom he will support this fall.

“We must coalesce around (Kelty) to move this Republican Party forward,” Peters said. “Matt will be a great leader for this community.”

Peters and Kelty hugged after Peters’ concession speech.

Several Republican members of the City Council who backed Peters in the primary told the crowd at Republican Party Headquarters that they will support Kelty in the fall.

Kelty said he hoped the competition would create a stronger Republican Party in Allen County.

Henry faced little challenge against two long-shot candidates and did little campaigning. He named his campaign director only a week ago. Henry had served on the council for 20 years and now runs his own insurance and consulting firm.

He lost his bid for re-election in 2003 by fewer than 200 votes against Councilman Tom Didier, R-3rd.

Henry said he did enough to feel safe in the primary election but spent most of his time building his war chest and meeting with supporters. He said his campaign has already developed a strategy to campaign against Kelty, which he said will be a much more active campaign than voters saw for the primary.

Kevin Knuth, Allen County Democratic Party chairman, said he believes Henry has an excellent chance to keep the mayor's office in the party. He said the party will run an aggressive campaign.

"You'll see a lot of Tom," Knuth said.

Two-term Democratic Mayor Graham Richard is not seeking re-election and is supporting the Henry campaign.

Following the two Republican front-runners on the ballot were Ivan Hood with percent and Wilbert "Duke" Brown percent of the vote, Teresa Licari with 0.6 1.8 percent. with 0.6

Following Henry in the Democratic primary were Tom Cook with 13.5 percent and Fred Steinke with 4 percent.

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