

If she loses the race, she'll live

BY DAN WILLIAMSON

A dozen years ago, a newly appointed Democratic City Council member running in a special election was bounced by a neighborhood activist who'd never run for anything before. Believe it or not, Peggy Fisher's win over Lisa Griffin in 1995 was the last time a non-incumbent Republican won a Columbus council seat.

Heidi Samuel is hoping to be the next.

Samuel is running against Democrat Priscilla Tyson, who was appointed to replace Mary Jo Hudson, who left council in January to join Gov. Ted Strickland's cabinet. The winner will complete the final two years of Hudson's term.

While all City Council candidates say they intend to focus on neighborhoods, Samuel has the background to support the claim. She's an active member and past president of the Eastmoor Civic Association and Block Watch.

Talking about her campaign last week, Samuel didn't mention the Peggy Fisher precedent from 12 years ago. Maybe that's because she doesn't remember it, or perhaps she's smart enough to know she's facing a tougher challenge.

Fisher had the benefit of a popular Republican mayor, Greg Lashutka, who helped fund her campaign—in part because of his personal dislike for Griffin.

Samuel, by contrast, is going to fund her

campaign without the benefit of a well-heeled benefactor. Republicans no longer hold any citywide offices, and the Franklin County GOP has its hands full trying to hold onto its few remaining county offices and judgeships.

Nevertheless, Samuel got off to a pretty good start, raising \$18,130 in the first half of the year. That outpaced Tyson, who had raised \$13,345 according to the July 31 campaign finance report.

But Tyson has the advantages of incumbency as well as assistance from the coordinated Democratic campaign, led by Mayor Mike Coleman. In fact, Tyson already has an introductory TV spot on the air.

So what is Samuel's strategy for undercutting Tyson's inherent advantage as an incumbent?

"There is no strate-

gy," Samuel said.

At least she's honest.

Samuel is hoping there is enough hunger for change among Columbus voters that she can win them over one-on-one with her no-nonsense demeanor. She's meeting people at candidate forums, community events and at their doorsteps.

Her message isn't new, though she delivers it more effectively than most other council hopefuls have in years past.

She thinks more resources need to be spent on crime, and more information needs to be available to residents about crime in

their neighborhoods. For example, she's fond of a feature available on San Jose's city website through which users can track up-to-the-minute police reports near their homes.

Samuel also thinks neighborhood groups should have a more influential voice in city government and believes the all-Democratic city government is prone to secrecy and groupthink.

Running in a blue city, Samuel is careful to point out that she likes Democrats just fine; she said Hudson was an excellent councilwoman and also praised current Councilwoman Maryellen O'Shaughnessy.

But she's tired of those unanimous votes.

"I can't remember the last time I saw the 'no' column lit up," she said.

Tyson is betting that voters are perfectly happy with the illuminated "yes" column. She said she doesn't sense a great deal of frustration among the electorate about city government and intends to build on the successes of the current council and Coleman administration.

As for crime, Tyson said, "We're one of the safest large cities in the country. And so with that in mind, we have done an excellent job in terms of managing crime."

Given the fact that Republicans haven't won a single council seat this decade, the odds are that Tyson will prevail.

Samuel said she thinks she has a legitimate chance to win, but she doesn't give the impression she'll be devastated if she doesn't. In fact, she acknowledged spending long Monday night council meetings with six Democrats isn't her idea of bliss.

And though she said she enjoys talking to voters, she'll be happy when the campaign is over.

"There are areas of politics," Samuel said, "that I would rather rip my fingernails off than go through."



Jeffrey Konczal

Tired of unanimous votes: Republican City Council candidate Heidi Samuel