



Spicing up the mayor's race

By: **Andrea Zimmermann**

Editor's note: This story is the first of a four-part series that will profile each of the candidates running for Carbondale mayor.

Pepper Holder's voice was the loudest of the lively group of depressed men Thursday night at Big Boys Q'n.

True to his style, Holder had a view about everything - from President Bush to the university to patriarchy of the waltz to white supremacy in southern Illinois.

Often the members of the Depressed Men's Club, which meets every Thursday to discuss books and then moves to the bar, would shake their heads and chuckle.

Sometimes they would rise to the occasion and argue with him. Frank Glaub, possibly Holder's biggest opponent in the club, knows his friend is bound to spice up the race with his sometimes off-the-wall ideas.

"Who doesn't have a different opinion than Pepper?" said Glaub, who lives in Carbondale.

Known around town for his friendly demeanor and as a former local radio personality, Holder is now taking those opinions into a new arena as one of four candidates vying to become Carbondale's next mayor.



Media Credit: Dan Celvi

Mayoral candidate Pepper Holder shows Nariyah Jackson a novelty talking fish mounted on the wall of Dee's Quickstop. Holder is 1 of 4 candidates that will be on the Feb. 27 primary ballot

Growing up on the impoverished Northeast side of the city, the 57-year-old is the only Carbondale native running for mayor.

He said his historical knowledge of the city gives him an edge in the race, which will be narrowed to two candidates on Feb. 27.

Holder said he knew SIU's Delyte Morris through his father's moving business, the Rev. Linus Turley was his pastor at Rock Hill Baptist Church, and his mother was a friend of Annie Malone of Metropolis. Malone was a pioneer in black hair care products and is considered one of the first black female entrepreneurs.

Over the past 20 years, Holder said Carbondale has deteriorated from its friendly presence and he wants to

restore that.

Part of that plan includes bringing four more festivals to town that would feature music such as blues, gospel and bluegrass. He said he would hope to fund the venture, which would boost tourism, through a coalition of business sponsorships and city dollars.

Although Holder's first name is Melvin, his grandmother called him Pepper, and unlike some childhood nicknames, the pet name stuck. His name will appear as Pepper Holder on the Feb. 27 ballot.

Holder spent much of his youth working for his father's moving company. After high school he went straight into the workforce, taking on additional responsibilities in the company. But by 1983, business dwindled and the company closed.

Being a former businessman is a unique quality that he would bring to the mayor's office, he said. When his parents' business folded, Holder said he worked other construction and concrete jobs as well as running similar businesses, some of which were successes and failures.

His experience in business would give him a leg up in the office, Holder said. The TIF, tax-increment financing, district in downtown is a "fiasco" to Holder because he believes the businesses who received the tax break to move into that area are not the best choices for the town.

"We missed a golden opportunity to help the community," he said.

Being outspoken for the city's black community and a member of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Holder said he doesn't want to be pigeonholed. Holder said his opinions have often isolated him from blacks and the rest of the community, but he believes his ability to be friendly will help him reach across those barriers.

To him, treating the black population better will reap benefits for the entire community.

"If (the people of Carbondale) want to better themselves, others will have to be treated better," he said. "Share the wealth and treat all people fairly."

Unlike most political candidates, Holder said he isn't doing much fundraising. Instead, he said he is looking for dedicated volunteers to help get out his message of "People First."

"What I need more than cash money - I need good people," Holder said. "I feel people want someone who will speak for the people. With a minimum amount of money and a lot of good people, I can win this easy."

At the Depressed Men's Club, Holder knows he has a forum for his opinions, and Thursday night, he tested his campaign platform on the motley crew.

"His best quality is that he tells the truth," said Gene Kabbe, a member of the group and a senior studying radio-television. "His worst quality is that he tells the truth - the truth according to Pepper."

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