

News Local  
2003-01-12

## Local man finds common thread leading to change

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Nathaniel "Hank" Hankins can't retire. He's tried several times.

At 67, Hank has tried his hand at several things: A non-commissioned officer with Air Force intelligence, Ethicon supervisor, United Methodist minister and councilman.

His resumé reads like a composite of several people. But Hank believes a common thread can be found in all his life's choices - and that's the desire to make a difference. Recently, he's been doing that by helping the bishop put together the forum and a race task force that will work with the mayor and city council.

"I've wanted to be a part of being in power," he said. "Unless you can be in there, you can't really affect change. And the change doesn't have to be drastic.

"I want to make sure I live in a city, a place, that I can advance because of what I know and not so much of who I know."

The answer makes sense when you understand why.

Hank is all too familiar with racial epithets. And although he graduated in the top 10 percent of his class, employers didn't ask how he did academically. They simply handed him a broom.

Traveling the East Coast in the '50s, he's had to sleep on the roadside because no one would rent him a room. And he's lived fearing something bad might happen to his wife on a bathroom stop.

"There's got to be a better way than this," he thought.

The way Hank sees it, the better way has come through community involvement.

He ran for a Single Member District council seat in '92 after eight years with the city planning commission.

Other blacks had run unsuccessfully. But that didn't keep the council race from being about race.

"I ran as a candidate who happened to be black," he said. "I don't have to go out and say I'm a black candidate - because once you see me you know I'm

black."

He did, however, have to fend off his naysayers who said Hank only would represent minorities in his district. But he took the criticism in stride.

"Ignorance," he said, "still is a part of that."

In a crushing loss, Hank tallied 30 votes fewer than his opponent. He lost the race, but took the seat. After Gary Strom relocated, council members unanimously appointed Hank to fill his unexpired term.

"I took it in stride because it wasn't for me I thought," he said. "I prayed about it. I had a peace about it even though I didn't win. I had no idea that's still what God wanted me to do. . . . I lost the election but I still had the opportunity to serve."

He's at a loss as to why, more than 10 years after he served two terms as a councilman, other blacks do not give the seat a run.

"I'm disappointed that no others have run, because I was hoping by me running and serving others would see that it was an opportunity to serve," he said.

But former Mayor Dick Funk, who described Hank as "steady" and "even-handed," said he was certain Hank could be the man for the job.

"He's an outstanding guy trying to do what's right," Funk said. "That's what the Lord said is all we have to do is what's right.

"I think if he ran again, he'd get elected. He's the kind of people we need more of."

Esta es la vida de nosotros.

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