

An Informed Vote?

Local News Coverage
General Election 2003

A Report by the Grand Rapids Institute
for Information Democracy



GRID

Methodology

GRIID conducted a 30-day study of local TV and newspaper coverage of the local primary elections in West Michigan. From October 6 through November 3, 2003 GRIID monitored the *Grand Rapids Press*, the 5:30, 6 & 11pm newscasts of channel's 8 & 13, and channel 17's 10pm newscast (Monday through Friday only). The 11pm WZZM 13 broadcast was not included as it was regularly pre-empted by Monday Night Football. The 10pm Fox 17 News broadcast was not included for Oct. 7, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22 and 23 as these were pre-empted by baseball.

Each time a story about elections appeared, we noted the order of the story, length, who was interviewed, and for how long. We also noted if candidates were quoted or given airtime, and how often paid ads ran during the newscasts or appeared in the newspaper during the study period. We looked at story/article content to see if voters would be able to make an informed vote based on the information provided by the four news agencies studied. Lastly, we made comparisons between the election coverage and other topics covered by the three TV stations, including crime coverage.

This study was conducted by GRIID staff Jeff Smith and Tom Schwallie.

GRIID is an affiliate of the the Community Media Center. GRIID conducts media research, media trainings and teaches media literacy.

You can access our resources and past reports at www.griid.org

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Summary of Findings

- WOOD TV 8 had the best election coverage of the three television stations. WOOD TV 8 ran a total of 10 stories and was the only station to report at all on the Holland and Kalamazoo Mayoral races as well as the Grand Rapids 1st Ward race.
- WZZM 13 had only three stories about the election during the study period. Only one of these stories aired earlier than the day before the election. No candidate voices were heard in these segments.
- FOX 17 aired two election stories during the study period. These were a story on the Muskegon Casino vote and the Lowell city commission. The latter story focused on the fact that two of the candidates were married to each other, it did not discuss positions, platforms, or any of the other six candidates.
- During the study period the three television stations ran a combined 322 crime stories compared to only 15 election stories.
- The California wild fires, a story with no local relevance, received a total of 22 segments on the three channels. Channel 13 ran over twice as many stories about the lockdown of a local high school than it did on the various elections throughout West Michigan.
- The Grand Rapids Press provided better election coverage than any of the TV stations. The GR Press did provide some limited coverage of the elections outside of the Grand Rapids metro area. Given that areas such as Kalamazoo, Holland, and Grand Haven have their own newspapers, it is understandable that the GR Press did not cover all these areas in detail. Coverage in the GR Press of city council elections in Cedar Springs, Grandville, Kentwood, Lowell, Rockford, Walker, and Wyoming was non-existent (see page 9). Coverage of the 1st Ward election in Grand Rapids was fairly superficial as far as candidate positions and platforms (see page 8).

GR Press Log of Election stories Oct 4 thru Nov 3

10/8 **"Friends open drive to boost transit tax to help The Rapid"** *Cami Reister*
D3 11 inches

10/25 **"Prayer vigil backs transit millage"** *Melissa Kruse* 10 inches

10/26 **"Polpourri '03"** *Steven Harmon* A25 4 inches

10/28 **"Candidate uses flags to make signs legal"** *Terry Judd* D5 13 inches

11/1 **"Both 1st Ward candidates have gotten to know the constituency"** *Jim Harger*
A3 11 inches

11/2 **"Coast Guard City prepares to elect another new mayor"** *Chad D. Lerch*
and John Tunison A18 24 inches

11/3 **"Tense EGR mayor's race centers on economy"** *Steven Harmon* A1 40
inches

11/3 **"Grandville voters blitzed in push for Sunday booze"** *Keith Essenburg*
D1 13 inches

11/3 **"On the Ballot"** D4 (listing of local elections)



Election Stories

<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Story Subject</i>
10/07	6pm	26 sec	Bus Millage
10/27	6pm	3:31	Bus Millage
10/27	11pm	2:58	Holland Mayoral Race
10/28	5:30pm	1:52	1st Ward Race
10/28	11pm	3:10	Muskegon Casino
10/29	5:30	1:49	1st Ward Race
10/29	11pm	2:17	Kalamazoo Mayoral Race
10/30	5:30	2:40	Kalamazoo Mayoral Race
11/3	6pm	18 sec	Election Summary
11/3	11pm	2:00	Election Summary

WOOD TV8 5:30, 6:00 & 11:00pm Monday through Friday broadcasts

Voices on News 8

1st Ward Race

Roy Schmidt	29 sec
Marilyn Kludy	34 sec

Kalamazoo Mayoral Race

Bob Hopewell	23 sec
Robert Jones	24 sec
David Juarez	23 sec
Sean McCann	25 sec
Hannah McKinney	28 sec

Holland Mayoral Race

Albert McGeehan	41 sec
Randy Aalderink	39 sec

Bus Millage

In favor of	23 sec
Opposed to	19 sec

Muskegon Casino

In favor of	14 sec
Opposed to	20 sec



Election Stories

<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Story Subject</i>
10/7	5:30pm	48 sec	Bus Millage
11/3	5:30pm	50 sec	Election Summary
11/3	6pm	1:20	Election Summary

WZZM 13 5:30, 6:00 & 11:00pm Monday through Friday broadcasts



Election Coverage

<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Story Subject</i>
10/29	10pm	2:46	Lowell City Council
10/31	10pm	2:25	Muskegon Casino

FOX 17 10:00pm Monday through Friday broadcasts

Voices on Fox 17

Lowell City Council

James Maatman 16 sec

Cathy Maatman 21 sec

Muskegon Casino

Voices for: 8 sec

Voices against: 12 sec

Voices on WZZM 13

Bus Millage

George Heartwell 9 sec

Comparative Stories

	<i>California Fire</i>	<i>Kentwood School Lockdown</i>	<i>Michigan guy going over Niagara Falls</i>	<i>Election Stories</i>
WOODTV8	8	8	3	10
WZZM 13	9	7	5	3
FOX17	5	1	0	2
Totals	22	16	8	15

WOOD TV8 and WZZM 13 5:30, 6:00 & 11:00pm Monday through Friday broadcasts
 FOX 17 10:00pm Monday through Friday broadcasts

Ratio of Crime to Election stories

	<i>Crime Stories</i>	<i>Election Stories</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
WOOD TV8	115	10	11:1
WZZM 13	158	3	52:1
FOX 17	49	2	25:1
Totals	322	15	21:1

WOOD TV8 and WZZM 13 5:30, 6:00 & 11:00pm Monday through Friday broadcasts
 FOX 17 10:00pm Monday through Friday broadcasts

THE REGION

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Both 1st Ward candidates have gotten to know the constituency

► *Roy Schmidt and challenger Marilyn Kludy spent a lot of time going door-to-door ahead of Tuesday's election.*

By Jim Harger
The Grand Rapids Press

Believing he would face several challenges for his Grand Rapids City Commission seat this year, 1st Ward Commissioner Roy Schmidt said he started campaigning early and hard.

By early May, the three-term incumbent had raised nearly \$25,000 in campaign donations. He began walking door-to-door in July.

"You never really know," he said. "I always start out early."

Marilyn Kludy, the only other 1st Ward candidate on Tuesday's ballot, also spent most of her summer going door-to-door.

The 1st Ward encompasses the city west of the Grand River and south of Fulton Street, west of Jefferson Avenue SE.

It also includes the Garfield Park neighborhood south of Burton Street and west of Eastern Avenue.

As of the Oct. 24 campaign finance filing deadline, Schmidt had raised nearly \$47,000 and spent nearly \$18,000, mostly on advertising and mailings. Schmidt planned more mailings just before the election.

Kludy, a 32-year-old law student, is running on a much more modest budget. She plans to spend less than \$1,000.

One of Schmidt's mailings has Kludy upset because Schmidt used it to claim he is "the Right-to-Life candidate."

Kludy, who has led a youth ministry for 11 years and whose husband once chaired their Catholic parish's Right to Life chapter, said Schmidt's mailing implied he was the only pro-life candidate.

Even though she has been a supporter of the pro-life movement, Kludy said Michigan Right to Life told her they only endorse the incumbent if both candidates are pro-life.

Schmidt defended his mailing.

"We can both be pro-life candidates, but I'm endorsed by Michigan Right to Life," he said.

Both candidates say they are stressing constituent service above other hot-button issues, such as the future of the John Ball Park and Zoo or proposals to replace City Hall with a hotel to accommodate convention-goers.

With 12 years under his belt, Schmidt said he is focused on neighborhood problems he has solved over the years.

"They'll call on an issue and they know I'll call back," says Schmidt, 50. "My philosophy is that you've got to have the same vigor you had 12 years ago. I don't believe I've ever lost that."

Kludy said she hopes her door-to-door campaign will overcome Schmidt's fundraising.

"It doesn't take a lot of money to put on my shoes and go door-to-door," she said. "Those are the people who vote, and those are the people I want to meet."

"There are a lot of people looking for change," she said. "I haven't had a single door slammed in my face."

On the issues, both say they favor offering tax breaks to businesses that create jobs. They also support tax-free Renaissance Zones to encourage downtown housing.



GR CITY COMMISSION

Term: Four years

Salary: \$22,496

First Ward candidates:

■ Marilyn Kludy

Address: 1634 Lockhart Drive NW

Age: 32

Occupation: Law school student

■ Roy Schmidt

Address: 829 Myrtle St. NW

Age: 50

Occupation: Sales representative, Wyeth Inc.

Though she faces an uphill battle, Kludy said she won't regret the experience if she loses Tuesday.

"I've met a lot of people and thoroughly enjoyed it."

In the 3rd Ward, incumbent Commissioner Robert Dean is unopposed.

GR Press coverage of the 1st Ward race was not as extensive as their coverage of the 2nd Ward and Mayoral race during the October primary. Both the mayoral and 2nd ward races received "Addressing the Issues" pieces which posed a series of questions to each candidates along with their replies (see GRIID 2003 Election Primary Study). The GR Press did not run that style of article for the 1st Ward race, instead only providing the article above to their readership. This was the only article that the GR Press ran that gave any substantive coverage of the 2nd ward race.

ON THE BALLOT

Most cities will conduct elections Tuesday. Listed below are ballot issues and contested races.

KENT COUNTY

INTERURBAN TRANSIT PARTNERSHIP

For cities of East Grand Rapids, Grandville, Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming. Request to raise the current millage from .75 mills to .95 mills for five years.

CEDAR SPRINGS

Council member
(one to be elected)
Kathryn Bremner
Patricia A. Capric
(Incumbent)

EAST GRAND RAPIDS

Mayor
Andy Bartman
Judy Fry (I)

Ward I commissioner
John Bebour (I)
Chae Bok

GRAND RAPIDS

Ward I commissioner
Marilyn Kudy
Roy Schmidt (I)
Library commissioner
(two to be elected)
James Bots
Ruth A. Lumpkins
Roger L. McClary
Kenneth Scheeters

GRANDVILLE

Council members
(three to be elected)
Douglas Cox
Robert J. DeWitt (I)

Carol G. Pettijohn (I)
Joe Sierawski (I)
Dill Smitley

Beer and wine proposal
(to allow the sale of beer and wine for drinking on premises)

KENTWOOD

Ward I commissioner -
Term ending 2007
(one to be elected)
Robert D. Coughlin
Nancy McIntyre-Evencheck

LOWELL

Council members - two
highest assigned to terms
ending 2006; third highest
assigned to term ending
2003

James W. Hodges
Jim Mastman
Kathy Mastman
Alan J. Mathews
Charles R. Myers (I)
Jan Teelander

ROCKFORD

Council member
(two to be elected)
Mike French
Steve J. Jazwicz Jr.
Dan Metzger
Richard P. Neal
Janice C. Rogers

WALKER

Ward II commissioner -
Charles John Deschaine
Louis Randall Smith (I)
Ward III commissioner -
Steven Verulis (I)
Patrick Garva

WYOMING

Ward III council member
James R. Miller

Dawn E. Wickmann (I)
Proposal 1, property negotiations

Seeks to allow the city manager to negotiate the purchase and sale of property up to \$7,500 in value.

Proposal 2, pool levy
Seeks .75-mill levy for construction and operation of an aquatic center.

CEDAR-SOLON

District library millage
Seeks .88 mills to establish, operate and support the Cedar-Solon District Library. The millage would replace the existing .50 mill library tax in the City of Cedar Springs.

OTTAWA COUNTY

COOPERSVILLE

City Council
(three to be elected)
Mark Douglas (write-in)
Clint Maki (write-in)
Edward Moore (write-in)
Steve Salinas
Charles Vander Kolk (write in)
Roger Whitman

FERRYSBURG

Council member
(three to be elected)
Torr Spookman (I)
Larry Mahabill (I)
Joe Lyons

Barbara Johnson
Janet Joiner

GRAND HAVEN

Mayor
Roger Bergman

John Nassei

Council member
(two to be elected)
BR Bissell
Lynda DeLano (I)
Michael Fritz
Edward Nieuwenhuis

HOLLAND

Mayor
Randall Aaldarink
Albert McCoshan (I)
Council member at large
Jerome Krebs (I)
Michael Viola-Ma
Ward IV council member
Darryl Raterink
Bob Vande Vosse (I)
Ward VI council member
Greg Alspach
David Hoekstra

HUDSONVILLE

Mayor
Donald VanDoeselaer
John Wallace
Ward I
Gordon Krombeen (I)
Dad Redder

SAUGATUCK

Council members
(three to be elected)
Catherine Simon
Jeff Spangler (I)
Glenn Soxer
Henry Van Singer (I)

ZEELAND

Council member
(three to be elected)
Allen Dannenberg (I)
Sally Gruppox (I)
Glenn Kass
Kevin Klynstra (I)
James Pratt
Victor VanDeventer

OTHER AREAS

HASTINGS

Mayor
Robert May
Barry Wood
Ward I council member
Ted Bustance
Cun Cybulski
Ward II council member
Dorothy Hawkins (I)
Kim Townsend
Ward III council member
Don Bowers
Michele Kaman (I)

IONIA

WARD I council member
Sean Buckingham
Gordon Kelley (I)

NEWAYGO

Council member
(two to be elected)
Wayne Bunstead (I)
Richard Paton
Rachel Wisner Simard

NEWAYGO COUNTY

911 Operational Surcharge renewal
Shall Newaygo Co. be authorized to charge up to 15 percent (not to exceed \$3) of the telephone service rate to finance operating costs of 911 emergency telephone system?

WHITE CLOUD

Council member
(three to be elected)
Harm Becker (I)
Mike Kymes (I)
Charles Smith
Theresa Wenstrom (I)

The GR Press Ran this list of local elections on Nov. 3, the day before the general election. Of the elections listed here, the GR Press only ran stories about the races or candidates enclosed in a box.

