

Home / News

http://www.columbiainmissourian.com/news/sixth-ward-council-candidate-peters-wants-to-bring-council-community/article_94b863f7-981c-5f8d-8edb-c24776d4b944.html

Sixth Ward council candidate Peters wants to bring council, community together

BY KELSI ANDERSON *Mar 30, 2015*



Kelsi Ander

Betsy Peters talks with attendees at Pascale's Pals event

COLUMBIA — The Holiday Inn Executive Center was packed as hundreds of people arrived for the 17th annual Pascale's Pals benefit auction on March 13. Servers balancing platters full of glasses of red and white wine patrolled up and down the line of guests dressed in their finest as they waited to be admitted.

Later, when everyone was seated at their tables and halfway through the live auction, the quick-talking auctioneer asked who would give money to support the benefit. When he asked for \$500, Betsy Peters was one of those to raise her paddle.

"I came to support this program," said Peters, a candidate for the Sixth Ward Columbia City Council seat in the April 7 election. Pascale's Pals is a charity that benefits the MU Women's and Children's Hospital, where Peters is a physician.

As a neonatologist, Peters cares for premature and ill infants, and she teaches residents and medical students as an assistant professor in the MU School of Medicine's Department of Child Health. She likes to support the hospital when she can.

The benefit was packed with hospital employees, and little time passed between each rotation of colleagues who came up to greet Peters.

"We all know each other — doctors, nurses, social workers, pharmacists," she said.

At the benefit, Peters conceded she was a bit weary after spending the previous night on a cot in her office while on-call for a sick baby. That was the second time that week she had slept in her office. She usually only has to stay there overnight once a month.

"At this time, I'd usually be at home with a cat on my lap watching the 'Wheel of Fortune,'" she said with a laugh. "I'm becoming my parents."

Peters has always been interested in city government and has regularly attended council meetings since 2011. When Sixth Ward Councilwoman Barbara Hoppe decided not to run for a fourth term this year, Peters decided to go for it.

"I'm always willing to be more in charge," she said.

Scott Brundage, a forester and the treasurer of Peters' campaign committee, has known Peters for 50 years. His family moved into a house just down the street from Peters when she was a child.

"I watched her grow up," Brundage said. "She's smart as a whip, hardworking and very, very conscientious of what's good for everybody that makes common sense."

Brundage said that Peters has a "Does it make sense?" attitude.

"She's not one to do something spur of the moment and find out there's unintended consequences that later you come back to regret," Brundage said.

Peters grew up in Columbia but spent much of her adult life elsewhere. In her 25 years away from home, her last stop was Texas before she moved back to Columbia in 2010 to be closer to her brother and sister and their kids.

"Dallas was a nice place, but it was too big," she said.

A smaller community suits Peters, whose resume paints a picture of someone invested in community affairs. She's treasurer of the East Campus Neighborhood Association, an alternate on the Columbia Board of Adjustment and a member of the Rock Quarry Road Scenic Roadway Stakeholder Advisory Group.

Peters tries to be hands-on in promoting the change she wants to see in her neighborhood. The City Source newsletter named her Volunteer of the Month in February for her efforts to keep East Campus clean and trash-free.

On Saturdays, Peters can usually be found at church, the St. Thomas More Newman Center, where she volunteers as a Mass coordinator.

"The good thing about being Catholic is that you have five or 10 Masses to choose from, so you just go when you have time," Peters said with a laugh. "But it's a nice time to sit and reflect."

In her free time, Peters likes visiting with friends, watching films at Ragtag Cinema and biking. Another pastime of hers is playing bridge at the Columbia Senior Center.

"They may look like little old ladies, but they're pretty good card players," Peters said.

Peters rents properties to students in East Campus. She said that although some of her neighbors don't care for the student presence in the Sixth Ward, she enjoys it.

"I know a lot of people roll their eyes, but I like the ebb and flow of students," Peters said. "It adds a real vibrancy to the town."

College students can be a bit silly at times, she said. She laughed at the memory of a student tenant who complained about her house being cold. Peters came to the property to have a look.

"I told her, 'Well maybe if you put the storm windows back on, that'll help,'" Peters said.

One of her biggest priorities if she were elected would be to make the council more middle-of-the-road.

"We need to come back together. We've gotten so polarized," she said.

She'd like to bridge the divide on the council and bring the community together to face important issues.

"We need to come together and keep this a good place to live," she said.

Supervising editor is Scott Swafford.

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