

These guys want to run your town

Werner supports city youth center

By **JOE WILBUR**
The Tattoo

Republican mayoral candidate Mike Werner says the city needs to do more for teens, including construction of a youth center, expanding the library and improving the schools.

"We should be talking to kids more," said Werner, "and see what they're interested in. I've talked to kids that think there should be a BMX track in Bristol and a youth center. Some of these things, the taxpayers can afford them, and it keeps kids out of trouble. It gives them something to do that's constructive."

Werner, a former mayor, said a youth center, a project much talked about in Bristol over the last few years, is something he could really get behind.

"There should be a place for kids, a place of their own. It should be away from the adults, something they're really into. We have to talk to them to see what they're really into. That's a project my friend Ron Burns at the Boys Club is looking into right now."

Despite the existence of good athletic and musical programs in the city, said Werner, there just aren't enough outlets for teens in the city. He suggests that teens should perhaps become more involved in city issues, more politically active.

"There's a good group called the Youth Chamber of Commerce," said Werner, "and they do some good things. There should be more groups like that, maybe even Young Republican and Young Democrat organizations like there used to be when I was a kid. It might be good for kids to see how a campaign works, and how the city really works, you know?"

Werner has been largely out of the public eye politically for a number of years. It was his growing frustration with the city's direction, he said, that

I'd like to help you son, but you're too young to vote...

By **JOE WILBUR**
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"If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal."
— Jello Biafra

There's going to be an election. Someone is going to be Mayor. Someone will always be Mayor. He'll kiss pigs. He'll praise Miss Bristol. He'll speak at the Mum Festival. He'll be passionately against blight. Does anyone think blight is a good idea? Does it really matter, to anyone under 18, who it is, provided he's taller than the podium?

Maybe. Maybe not.

If you're the average Bristol teenager, you know the score — our high schools are so far behind technologically it's not worth knowing where the computer labs are, the town's only entertainment (outside of sex and alcohol) is the occasional school musical, and downtown is, well, laughable.

As long as the economy is good, it's said, those who can and will vote will cast their ballots for as little change as possible. And that's probably true.

Feel differently? Too bad. You don't vote.

When was the last time anyone in a position to effect any of this asked you how you felt about Bristol? And what would you say?

The truth of the matter is that very little of what's done in Bristol has anything to do with teens. The city, the Board of Education, the chamber of commerce all have acceptable teenage public facades from beauty queens to student representatives, but they're there, almost without exception, to prove how concerned the Big People are while we play at the kid's table.

It smacks of my generation's

called him back into action.

"I was mayor of Bristol," said Werner, "but I left the position in the eighties. When I left for work my kids were still in bed. They hadn't woken up yet. And then, when I came home, they were in bed again, sleeping. I really felt my family needed me more than the city."

According to Werner, he took a job as director of the Greater Bristol Chamber of Commerce after serving as mayor and also remained active in the community, including volunteer work with the American Red Cross and the United Way.

"I watched for a few years," Werner said, "and was really dissatisfied with the way the city was being run. I didn't see anyone else on the horizon looking to change the way things were headed, so I said 'Hey, I'll run!' and here I am."

What disturbs him most about the city's direction, said Werner, is what he called the reactive attitude of Mayor Frank Nicastro and his administration.

"Frank seems to wait until he gets a call from someone or until he reads about it in the paper," said Werner, "and you have to be more proactive than that. It's all about planning. I see very little long term planning going on — and you need that."

According to Werner, his record on long-term planning speaks for itself.

"When I came into office the pension funds were really underfunded," he said. "We brought in a financial consultant they're still using today, saving the city millions. We created Technology Park with the Radisson and Otis Elevator, and I brought ESPN to Bristol. We were taking a long-term approach."

It's that sort of long-term planning, according to Werner, that should concern Bristol's youth.

While Werner acknowledges that the most prevalent question among teens is "what is there to

unceasing cynicism, but it's true. We don't vote. We don't pay a substantial share of the city's taxes. Most of us don't even watch the news or read the paper. We can't even score acceptably on math and reading competency tests. Is it wrong that the city as a whole seems so indifferent toward us? Of course.

But who can blame them? We have nothing to bargain with.

If you want to make an impact, establish credibility and go for it yourself, from the ground up.

It's the issues that are important, not the man. Write something. Draw something. Learn something. Teach something.

In a town the size of Bristol at least, and with Bristol's lotus eating mentality, it's not about who's in office. The town is largely a self-sustaining entity. Public opinion will dictate that which needs to be done is done.

The worst that can happen is that, when you come return from college for Thanksgiving or Christmas, downtown hasn't turned into the hotbed of consumer activity/ Norman Rockwell portrait of city seems to think it ought to be.

There's going to be an election. Someone will be Mayor. Someone will always be Mayor. Let's hope he's amusing.

Seeking sportswriters and shutterbugs

Do you have something to say? Does it matter? It all depends on how many people it reaches.

Published occasional Mondays, the award-winning *Tattoo* spotlights teen writers, photographers, and cartoonists. Under the direction of our fearless leaders, *Press* reporters Jackie Majerus and Steve Collins, we shed light on important issues from a student perspective.



Mike Werner

do?" he said he thinks the question "what are we capable of doing?" is just as valid.

Beyond the obvious question of teen boredom, Werner said the city's basic facilities, from libraries to classrooms, are inadequate.

"We're way behind in our classrooms as far as computers go," said Werner. "We need to be moving much faster in improving them than we are, because our kids are going to go into the job market and even to college, without knowing some basic programs and things, because they never had them in school. You should also be able to research at the public libraries, but student who tries knows that the facilities are really inadequate for a city our size."

Like Nicastro, Werner said he sees Bristol as a great town — but a town that can be improved upon. Planning proactively and encompassing the city's many problems under one plan for improvement is essential, Werner said.

"There are lots of things to do," said Werner, "and you can't do it in bits and pieces. It's a lot of different things that interconnect into a big thing — and you have to be willing to see it that way, and to plan for the future. That's what it's all about."

**What's a mayor worth?
In Bristol, about \$80,000**

Nicastro wants teens at council meetings

By **MERISSA MASTROPIERO**
The Tattoo

BRISTOL — As a former truancy officer for local schools, Mayor Frank Nicastro knows what makes teens tick.

But his re-election platform includes only a few ideas to help students even though he said government "can't do enough for the teens of the city."

Nicastro said he would push for city support for the Miss Bristol pageant, continue funding alcohol and drug-free graduation parties and support the proposed downtown transformation that includes entertainment options for young people.

Asked whether there should be a youth center, he said only, "The more that we can do to keep our teens active in a proper setting, the better it is for the community."

Five years ago, the city's Board of Finance shot down a proposal backed by Nicastro to create a youth center in Forestville. The idea hasn't come up again.

The mayor commended local students for the way they have dealt with lengthy construction projects at both high schools.

The three-term Democrat said he would like to see more youths involved in government. He said he wished more teens would walk through his door.

Nicastro, who faces Republican Mike Werner in the Nov. 2 election, said his plan for city support for the pageant "deserves courtesy and it deserves merit."

"Miss Bristol represents the city," he said. "She is our ambassador."

I believe that what the city should do is take a look at the whole process and come up with some guidelines to see if there is merit there."

Nicastro said he "would like to see teens more involved in government, attend council

meetings, become more involved in the process in every respect."

He added that teens should "become objective not subjective. You get a better pulse on things."

Nicastro said Bristol can improve in its provisions for "proper" teen entertainment.

"No matter what we do, we can't do enough for the teens of the city. As far as I'm concerned, we can improve," Nicastro said.

Nicastro said he applauds students "for having the patience for putting up with renovations because this should have been done years ago."

The "Bristol school system has undergone some huge changes," he said, but it can always improve its programs.

The high schools aren't the only things undergoing a transformation, the mayor said.

Besides continuing with his regular agenda, Nicastro said he has big plans for the city that include an entire downtown revitalization, spreading from the central downtown to the west and the north ends.

"It would be nothing short of a major grand slam for Bristol," Nicastro said.

Proposed ideas for the plan include mall reconstruction, bringing in large retail businesses, an ice-skating rink, a hotel with conference rooms and a parking garage, which will "be built into the facade so that you don't even know it's a parking garage," said Nicastro.

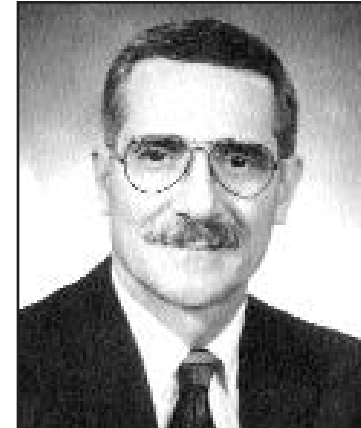
After the project has been approved and official plans are set, the completion will take two years, Nicastro said.

The goal is to bring "the old flavor of downtown back, which was lost many years ago," Nicastro said.

The mayor also plans to keep his basic current policies, such as his "open door policy."

Nicastro said when someone comes to him "with a request, to turn a deaf ear is wrong."

"I think the mayor would be



Frank Nicastro

acting poorly if he didn't take a good hard look at things," he said. "I have a responsibility to look into something." The "open door policy" is his reason for requesting the city to research getting involved with the Miss Bristol pageant, Nicastro said.

In his six years in office, Nicastro said his administration has been proactive — and successful.

"That's because everyone worked together as a team, no one person does it," he said.

As evidence, Nicastro said, he froze property taxes four years in a row and then delivered a tax cut this year to 95 percent of homeowners.

Before winning the mayor's office in 1993, Nicastro served as the school system's attendance officer for 17 years. He remains on leave from the position.

"I helped literally hundreds of children," the mayor said.

Nicastro said the mayor's position has "grown enormously" since he took it over. He said he chairs many boards and the job "requires dedication, it requires sacrifice, it requires the ability to think of the future."

"A mayor must think of the future, not just for his rein, but for future mayors so they don't get so strapped, like I did."

"I truly enjoy serving the city of Bristol because there's no better feeling in the world than to see projects pass and know you had something to do with it," Nicastro said.

"If you're gonna be the mayor, be the mayor."

Riding the school bus blues

By **HEATHER PILARCIC-MURAWSKI**
The Tattoo

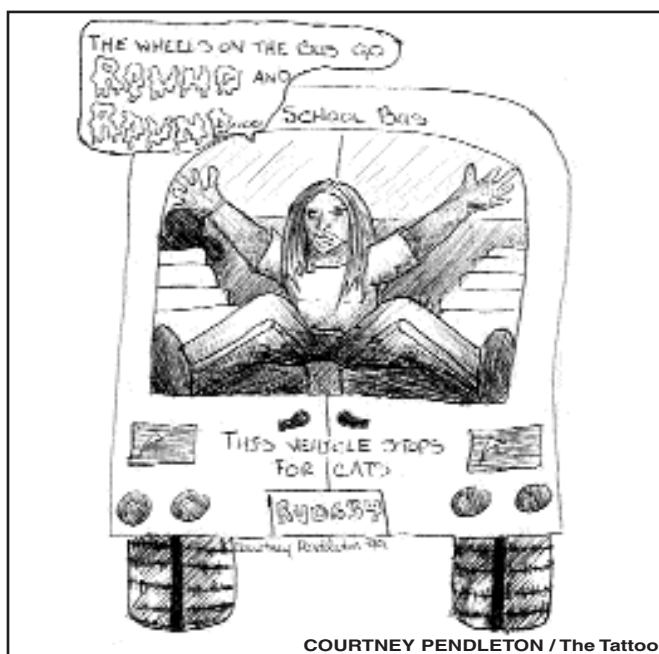
It's bad enough that I have to rely on the bus to get to school. It's not my fault. I'm simply not old enough to drive, and unlike some of my more fortunate friends, don't have an older sibling to drive me, either. So it's the bus for me.

It wouldn't be so very bad to ride the bus, if only the bus riding experience could be normal. In the first seven days of school, we had four different drivers. One morning the bus came so late that I had to go home and get a ride. Another time, a cat showed up at the bus stop. It's starting to become funny.

There's something new at the stop every morning. One day, the bus passengers noticed an incessant beeping noise. The bus driver apparently did not know how to turn off the switch that was alerting him that something was wrong with the brakes.

While I'm venting, I'd also like to point out that it wouldn't kill anyone to have the route start a little later, so that I could perhaps get a little more sleep. I have to get up at ten of six, so that I can get dressed, pack up my homework, if I'm not running late grab some breakfast, and make it down the street by ten of seven. The bus arrives at school at quarter after seven, and I stand around for half an hour.

While public transportation to school has its ups (at least I don't have to pay for gas) it's also got more than its share of downs. If students have to take the bus, and if taxpayer money foots the bill, the ride should at least be more enjoyable.



COURTNEY PENDLETON / The Tattoo

In defense of teen apathy, cynicism

By **MERISSA MASTROPIERO**
The Tattoo

Both mayoral candidates, Mike Werner and Frank Nicastro, would like to see teens more involved in government. Nicastro would like to see teens attend city council meetings and Werner thinks teen political parties are a good idea.

Teens obviously have the opportunity to attend the meetings or form mock political parties, but they aren't currently participating. Why?

"It is pointless," said Sara Nadeau, a senior at Bristol Eastern High School. "They're not going to listen to us anyway."

While many think teens are apathetic and don't care about life in general, some teens would put their time in government if they saw it had a purpose. But it usually doesn't.

Teenagers learn about the government around them and see it as a waste of time.

As students, they learn that the people's vote for president is meaningless. They see the majority of teachers are against block scheduling, yet we still have it.

They learn that less than half of voters cast a ballot, and they see political parties ganging up on presidents for lying about sex.

They see people frustrated with government and unhappy with its decisions. And as adults, they see that those with connections are the ones that are heard.

Teens aren't apathetic, they are just realistic. They do have an opinion, they just don't bother to voice it too loud. What's the point when it will only lead to a sore throat?

Talking to the government should be a conversation between two parties. Today it seems it's simply the people babbling to themselves.

All in all, what people put into govern-

ment is what they should get out of it. Those that put their two cents in, get the government demanding taxes. That's what it boils down to — just cents.

The equation should be the people putting their ideas and the government carrying out those ideas. That's the purpose of government, after all.

"It's important for us to develop our sense of civic duty," said Matt Gaul, a senior at Eastern. But he said, "Basically, there's a voting age for a reason. Our opinions are too easily swayed by outside forces. While politicians should be concerned about our needs, they might not coincide with our opinions."

The problem is not that teens don't get involved, it's that when they do, nothing is done.

The candidates can say all they want that teens should get more involved in government, but if they don't pay attention, we aren't going to respond.

Opinion

Give our advisors a call at 589-5316 or drop them a line at SteveJackie@prodigy.net. You could find yourself chatting with big shots, reviewing books and movies, or unearthing the deep seated inadequacies and triumphs of your own school system.

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Other comments? Questions? Call Steve or Jackie.