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My failed mayoral bid

Posted Monday, November 7, 2011 9:37 am

By Kevin O'Hara

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PITTSFIELD

Eagle readers may recall that I received the Key to the City from Mayor James Ruberto a while back. It was presented to me at the publication party for my memoir of growing up in Pittsfield. Given the stage, I jokingly announced my intentions of running for mayor in the next election. The good mayor countered, "You're welcome to it!"

Note my surprise when a few friends actually asked if I'd consider running for the Corner Office. Hmm, there was certainly a ring to it. I had been known as Sgt. O'Hara and Nurse O'Hara, why not Mayor O'Hara?

I worked diligently on my speech, invited my core group to the house, and kicked off my campaign by lifting the "Key" above my head like Arthur his Excalibur, and exclaiming, "This, dear friends, is my Key to City Hall!"

But my committee's initial cheers fell silent when my campaign manager brought up a sticky matter. "Kevin, your past drug history could pose a problem. Half the city knows you got high in Vietnam."

"Cripes, that was 40 years ago," I fumed. "Besides, I have an answer ready for anyone who brings up the topic. You know how President Clinton said he never inhaled? Well, I'll simply tell my critics I never exhaled."

Laughter filled the house, but my manager remained stone-faced. "Believe me, the council chamber doesn't need another stand-up comic. Now, before we fill your coffers, we'd like to hear your platform."

Nodding, I addressed the assembly. "As your next mayor, I will make our beloved city the quietest in all New England. A tranquil city brings peace, and with peace comes prosperity."

My manager screwed up his face: "How do you propose to accomplish this preposterous plan?"

"I'm going to ban every leaf blower from the city environs. Those who currently own these ear-splitting unneighborly machines will be mandated to trade them in for good old-fashioned garden rakes. Same goes for gas-belching lawn mowers. It'll be push-blade mowers for the populace once I take office."

Committee members grumbled, but I went on, undaunted.

"Snow blower licenses will be required and issued under my personal scrutiny, and be dependent on the size of one's driveway. I know the owner of a Ventrac KX523 whose driveway is the size of a bacon strip. Guess who's getting a new snow shovel, mateys?"

"Cars with automatic starters will also be banned. I know a North End guy who idles his car 30 minutes before taking a five-minute drive to work. And I'm definitely going to wage war on drivers who assault our ears with foul-mouthed, bass-thumping music. Not only will the perpetrators be arrested, but will have their cars impounded until they sing a medley of Wayne Newton's Greatest Hits on local cable TV."

Despite mounting groans, I sputtered on. "Popcorn will be banned from all movie houses. Yes, popcorn! Nothing is worse than being surrounded by an ensemble of kernel-crunching gerbils delving elbow-deep into boxes of popcorn that could feed a family of five for a week."

I looked up to find my supporters hastily preparing to leave, as if their cars were double-parked in a handicapped slot. My campaign manager, hat in hand, spoke up for the delegation. "Kev, we'll give you a tip -- don't run. And keep your Key handy. You might need it to escape this city with your life."

They shuffled out the door, one by one, as I called out after them. "But you haven't heard the half of it! I'm going to make every citizen become an organ donor. I'm going to fine households who refuse to recycle their weekly trash. I'm going to take CVS on West Street by eminent domain and build a stadium befitting this historic baseball town. I'm going to have our children go to school at 9 a.m., not the bone-chilling dawn. I'm going to..."

My committee paid no heed, just roared away, and my hopes of becoming mayor with them.

On Tuesday, the citizens of Pittsfield will elect a new mayor, and I wish him the best. But he best do a great job on the peace and prosperity front. If not, you might shortly see "O'Hara for Mayor" signs popping up all over this proud but pandemonious city.

Kevin O'Hara, an occasional Eagle contributor, is author of "A Lucky Irish Lad."

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