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THE FLOODS OF 2008

A sophisticated, targeted campaign from supporters

By Adam Belz
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — One target was older women.

If someone was over the age of 65, registered as a Democrat or independent, and female, it's likely she heard from Vote Yes! For Our Neighbors in the leadup to Tuesday's local-option sales tax election.

Supporters of the tax decided if they could mobilize the oldest Democrats and independents in the electorate, especially women, they could probably get the tax passed.

The 1 percent sales tax increase may have been approved without an organized campaign — the victory in Cedar Rapids was that decisive. But the veterans of Barack Obama's presidential campaign who came here to help pass it ran a well-organized, sophisticated operation. They also had more than \$43,000 to work with.

Gary Ficken and Dale Todd were the faces of the Vote Yes! campaign, and local groups ranging from the Cedar Rapids

Area Chamber of Commerce to the Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 125 endorsed the tax and gave money. But the ground troops were a handful of field organizers who learned the trade in the campaign to elect Obama.



Dale Todd
Vote Yes!
co-chairman

"It's obvious that the Obama campaign has spawned a new generation of political operatives," Todd said.

Battle-hardened by — and nostalgic about — the Iowa caucus that helped launch Obama to the White House, the campaign workers used a bare concrete room at 1430 First Ave. NE over the past few weeks. They had three conference tables, some laptops, two printers, dozens of manila envelopes full of fliers and a space heater.

One of the campaign

► YES, PAGE 6A

LOCAL-OPTION SALES TAX ELECTION

C.R. could see bigger tax share

Those with the tax will get larger cut; those without may try again

By Adam Belz
and Rick Smith
The Gazette

The city of Cedar Rapids could see more than \$1 million more per year in local-option sales tax than the \$18 million it had expected.

That's because five cities in Linn County turned down the tax Tuesday, meaning the jurisdictions that did pass it — Cedar Rapids, Linn County and eight other cities — got a bigger share of the pie.

Leaders in the five cities where voters rejected the tax — Marion, Hawatha, Robins, Center Point and Walford — acknowledged Wednesday they'll be talking about putting the sales tax on the ballot again so their cities can share in the revenue.

The Marion City Council, for one, will discuss the issue tonight and will consider seeking another vote, perhaps as early as August.

"I still think that our people

were confused," Marion Mayor Paul Rehn said. "I would like them to know exactly what the ramifications are."

Marion voters rejected the tax 2,227 to 2,044, or 52.1 percent to 47.9 percent.

The sales tax revenue would have helped pay for major sewer work in the city, a job likely to be more expensive for homeowners if it's funded by bonds and paid off with property taxes.

The earliest a city could return the sales tax to the ballot would be Aug. 4 or, if not then, Nov. 3.

Cities could go about it one of two ways, according to the Iowa Secretary of State's Office.

First, supporters could gather signatures equaling 5 percent of the number of Linn County residents who voted in the Nov. 4 election.

Or supporters could ask the Cedar Rapids City Council — which is the governing body of more than 50 percent of the county's population — to put the tax on the ballot again.

If that happens, the sales tax proposal would go on the ballot in every town that hasn't approved it.

Hawatha Mayor Tom Theis said his council, too, would



Paul Rehn
Marion mayor

► SALES TAX, PAGE 6A

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► YES, PAGE 6A

After last night's meeting, Vernon said getting the new flood chief on staff quickly was less important than deciding who he or she would answer to. Colleague Brian Fagna said he wasn't going to get side-tracked by titles, but he liked the idea of a flood-recovery specialist.

Vernon said the council would hire the person to work with Proster and would get regular, day-to-day updates on flood recovery. She said corporate leaders would pay for the position.

"The big spirit of the thing is a faster, better recovery

► FLOOD, PAGE 6A

Data released by First American CoreLogic shows home prices in Cedar Rapids rose 4.63 percent in December when compared with the final month of 2007. The gain represented the highest home price appreciation of 951 statistical areas in the nation tracked by the Santa Ana, Calif., provider of real estate, property and ownership information.

Iowa City home prices decreased 9.01 percent in December from the same month in 2007, according to First Ameri-

can, compared with 1.8 percent in

► HOUSING, PAGE 6A

Mortgage delinquencies

	Dec. 2008	Dec. 2007
Cedar Rapids	2.7 percent	1.8 percent
Iowa City	1.4 percent	0.7 percent

Mortgage foreclosures

	March 2009
Cedar Rapids	411
Iowa City	84

Source: First American CoreLogic and RealtyTrac. Quotas available.

can's lost social history of their housing wealth, which will continue to put significant stress on consumer balance sheets.

As homeowners encounter financial stress because of layoffs, mortgage delinquencies are rising in Cedar Rapids and Iowa City.

First American data shows 2.7 percent of Cedar Rapids mortgage loans were 90 days or more past due in De-

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TODAY'S WEATHER

Mild, slight chance of rain
TODAY: 57-61
FRIDAY: 52-59

Yes/Found inconsistent voters

▶ FROM PAGE 1A

workers was Michael Halle, 24, of Champaign, Ill. A graduate of Illinois State University and a volunteer for Obama's campaign in Iowa, he returned to Cedar Rapids in early February after Todd, another Obama campaign worker, called to ask for his help.

Halle was paid about \$800 a week to put together a strategy and run the campaign.

He was joined by Derek Eadon, 25, of Elmhurst, Ill., Lenae Frazer, 22, of Chicago, Dan Martin, 24, of Schaumburg, Ill., Scott McLean, 26, of Salt Lake City, and Shira Miller, 24, of Evanston, Ill. — all of them workers for Obama's campaign in Cedar Rapids in 2007.

When he arrived, Halle pulled voter lists from the Linn County Auditor's Office and picked out voters whose turnout was inconsistent but whose voting records indicated they'd probably support the 1 percent sales tax increase if they did vote.

"It's the best use of resources, to expand on the universe

of people who might vote," Halle said — he uses the word "universe" a lot. "The goal is to talk to only people who are in support, and who aren't likely to vote."

Drawing on contacts from 2007, Halle and the others mobilized about 75 volunteers — many of them

Coe College students. They knocked on about 7,500 doors, specifically at the homes of people

who voted one to three times in the past six elections and were likely sympathetic to the local-option sales tax.

Those who voted in only one or two of the last six elections received phone calls from volunteers.

Halle figured that people over the age of 65 typically make up close to half the electorate in a special election in Cedar Rapids. The targeted campaign paid little attention to young voters.

With robo-calls, mailings,

door-knockings and live calls, the campaign contacted 20,000 people, four times each, Halle said.

Some 21,981 Cedar Rapids residents voted in the election, a 25.1 percent turnout.

"We had a short window of time, so we realized we didn't have the resources we might normally have," Todd said. "The techniques were much more sophisticated."

The Cedar Rapids Tea Party, which opposed the tax, raised about \$650 and didn't hire anybody to help with the campaign.

"We did not have the capital and the PR groups and staff behind us," said Tim Pugh of Marion, who headed the group. "A lot of ours was trial and error, see what we can do."

They did some robo-calls and some live calls, but no mailings. Door-knocking was limited, he said.

"You're talking about some average people off the street, who didn't really have the funding, and we didn't really have the experience," Pugh said.

Contact the writer: (319) 398-8273 or adam.belz@gazcomm.com



Michael Halle
Champaign, Ill.

Sales tax/Less money raised

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discuss trying the tax again. "Voters didn't understand it at all, apparently, and we've got to get the message out better," he said.

Robins voters narrowly rejected the tax, 290-351.

The result was irksome in Robins City Council member Marilyn Cook because, as she sees it, the only effect will be to deprive Robins of sales tax its residents will pay in Cedar Rapids.

"We voted to give our money to Cedar Rapids," she said.

Center Point also is investigating a second election.

"We're probably going to sit back and see what some of the other cities do as well."



"We voted to give our money to Cedar Rapids," she said.

Linn County local-option sales tax

Some ballots were incorrect in a Wednesday count. These are the unofficial totals, by city and unincorporated areas.

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Cedar Rapids			Springville (cont.)		
At the Polls	11,177	7,812	Absentee	4	2
Absentee	1,791	1,201	Total	108	85
Total	12,968	9,013	Walton		
Marion			Fairfax/Public Library	10	21
At the Polls	1,891	2,500	Absentee	2	5
Absentee	147	197	Total	20	26
Total	2,044	2,227	Walker		
Atterrett			Grant/Walker	104	40
Otter Creek/Atterrett	73	39	Community Room	0	1
Methodist Church	2	4	Total	113	41
Total	78	43	Unincorporated		
Center Point			Taft School	4	0
Washington/Center	177	180	Dakota Church	10	5
Post/City Hall	7	5	Erkine School	5	5
Absentee	7	5	Bethany/Arlock Church	194	106
Total	194	195	Boulder/St. Joseph	37	19
Elly			Parish Hall	1	0
Patterson/Ely Library	153	116	Arroyo/Springville	71	80
Absentee	1	5	Library	1	0
Total	154	121	Buffalo/Camp Wakonda	28	43
Fairfax			Clinton/Dorsey Point	80	55
Fairfax Public Library	218	107	YMCA	1	0
Absentee	19	12	Dakota/Pharm High	64	94
Total	237	119	School	120	115
Hawthorn			Fairfax/Fairfax Public		
Hawthorn 1/1 City Hall	116	108	Library		
Hawthorn 2/Hoga Church	290	289	Fairfax/Police Fire Station	19	15
Absentee	34	35	Grant/Walker	20	55
Total	440	422	Community Room		
Linton			Jackson/Cannon Legion	41	33
Linton Community Bible	147	127	Center	41	68
Center	6	6	Linn/MacKnights	150	178
Total	153	143	of Columbus		
Mount Vernon			Linn/City Hall	42	39
Mount Vernon	143	78	Main/Fairfax Civic	26	28
Center					

Housing/Foreclosure rates are rising

▶ FROM PAGE 1A

in negative equity and 60.385 mortgages, or 29.7 percent, are in near negative equity, do-

RealtyTrac data shows 466 home mortgages were in foreclosure in Cedar Rapids in De-

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workers was Michael Halle, 24, of Champaign, Ill. A graduate of Illinois State University and a volunteer for Obama's campaign in Iowa, he returned to Cedar Rapids in early February after Todd, another Obama campaign worker, called to ask for his help.

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