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SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

A lobbyist with integrity

BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • AUGUST 10, 2008

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Nell Kuhnmuench (pronounced koon-munch) says she's proud to proclaim herself a lobbyist, a profession that carries some negative baggage. But Nell of East Lansing shrugs off the bad press and just gets back to being an advocate for a multitude of folks, including health care providers and multiple municipalities. In surveys of Lansing's powerbrokers, her name consistently ranks among the city's top lobbyists. Nell, a director of Governmental Consultant Services Inc. (www.gcsionline.com), shares insights into getting what you or your client wants.

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About her style, described as an insistent mother with a light touch: "Tenacity is one of my strong points. I also make every effort to know my subject as thoroughly as I can. Despite what people think, I try to simplify it. ... I don't know about the mother part of it. My boys might not think I have a gentle touch."

About negative reactions to lobbyists: "When my oldest son was younger, he used to give me a hard time about it and describe it in an inappropriate way to his friends, just because he thought it was funny. ... Many come here feeling that lobbyists are bad, that there's something wrong with us. ... I think over time, many of them ... come to appreciate the role that we play."

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Nell Kuhnmuench, a director of Governmental Consultant Services Inc., is one of the top lobbyists in Lansing.

(KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/Detroit Free Press)

NELL KUHNMUENCH

Job: Director of Governmental Consultant Services Inc., a Lansing lobbying team. Specializes in health, insurance and environmental issues.

Previous experience: Chief of staff for Bobby Crim and Gary Owens, when they served as Democratic speakers of the Michigan House. Once clerked for Michigan Supreme Court Justice James Ryan, a Republican.

Education: B.A. in business from Michigan State University and law degree from Cooley Law School.

Personal: Married to Roy Saper; two sons, Adam and Jay Saper.

Accomplishments: Rated one of Lansing's most effective lobbyists, according to a recent survey of 300 Lansing insiders by the Michigan Information & Research Service Inc. (MIRS)

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Lobbying is just another word for ... "What I am is an advocate. And one of the beauties of our form of government ... is that ... it gives us the right to stand up to our government and say it's wrong ... We don't have to be afraid of being shot or imprisoned."

Special interests can be your interests: "Many people also don't appreciate that every time they're concerned, the expression of their concern is that of a special interest. We're representing interests that want to have a voice in legislation that's going to impact them."

About Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama barring lobbyists' contributions: "It's a simple sign of the way that lobbyists are viewed so negatively. ... I think it's somewhat of a naive response."

The art and schedule of lobbying: "We can start out with an early-morning [breakfast](#) meeting or early-morning fund-raisers; we can have a couple of fund-raisers at noon, plus have a working lunch. We can have evening fund-raisers and try to do an evening dinner and, depending on the evening," might end up at a local watering hole.

If she could pass any law: "I would give people the opportunity to serve without imposed limits. ... One person, one vote is term limits."

The pitch: "Approach people in an open manner, understanding them and what their background is so that you can say to them, 'Because of X, I believe that this is consistent with your conservative background,' because you tend to want the free market to work well. You may approach another person on the very same issue with, 'I know you've been committed to this kind of justice, and I believe this takes us a step closer. ' "

Future elected office? Maybe, someday.

Contact **PATRICIA MONTEMURRI** at 313-223-4538 or pmontemurri@freepress.com.

In your voice

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tdwatkins wrote:

Nell is a quality person, who is as capable as she is tough. She truly is an advocate with integrity! She is a good person!

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