

Political consultant talks about mayoral campaign

by Beverly Denver

Nancy Sims is Senior Vice President at Pierpont Communications where she leads the public affairs practice. This thriving practice area specializes in reputation management and includes crisis communications, civic engagement, community and governmental relations, stakeholder communications, market research and more. Sims has worked in the public affairs arena for more than 30 years. Prior to joining Pierpont, she owned her own public affairs and political consulting firm for 15 years. Sims talked to Houston Woman Magazine recently about the current mayoral campaign, the candidates and the issues.

Houston Woman: Were you expecting all of the candidates in the race to run for mayor - even before they announced? Or, were there any surprises?

Sims: Since Houston has term limits, it was well known that Bill White could not seek re-election. Some of the announced candidates have been planning to seek the office for years. Others, were a little later coming to the decision. The process, however, has generated a strong group of contenders.

HW: What do you think will be the key issues in the 2009 mayoral campaign?

Sims: While the candidates seem interested in talking about Quality of Life issues, the voters will be concerned about finances and safety. Crime always increases during tough economic times and the issue will be very present. As well, voters will be concerned with the financial issues that are dominating the new. Candidates will be forced to take strong positions on balancing budgets and tax increases.

HW: Could you tell us what you see the strengths are of each candidate?

Sims: Houston is fortunate this year to have very strong Mayoral contenders. All of them have some experience at City Hall and understand the workings of municipal government. Each of them brings unique talents and issue strengths to their candidates.

HW: What about the challenges each will have to overcome if he



or she is to be elected in the fall?

Sims: The next Mayor will face mounting city debt, deteriorating infrastructure, public safety issue, pension funding and more. We should ask why anyone would want the job. It will be a serious task. While the candidates all are interested in expanding green space and improving the quality of life in Houston, they will have difficult challenges ahead.

HW: What is the best way for these candidates to get their messages out?

Sims: Voters still respond to media campaigns. These days, however, campaigns must be multimedia—a strong use of free media, paid media and the Internet. This group of candidates also plans to spend time addressing the voters. They already have forums scheduled on a near weekly basis. They will discuss and debate the issues. Voters will have no excuse for not meeting and/or seeing them in public.

HW: Do you think a smart use

FIFTEEN
MINUTES
WITH
**NANCY
SIMS**

“Social media will be more important in this campaign than ever before. With the consolidation of traditional media, both locally and nationally, candidates will have to rely on the viral nature of social networking and the utilization of social media tools to spread their message.”

of social networking at play yet by any of these candidates?

Sims: Social media will be more important in this campaign than ever before. With the consolidation of traditional media, both locally and nationally, candidates will have to rely on the viral nature of social networking and the utilization of social media tools to spread their message. Facebook, Linked-in, Twitter, Blogs and more will be essential to communicating their message and building support for their campaigns.

HW: Given the level of interest in this race, do you expect a high voter turnout?

Sims: We could only hope that this election spins a strong voter turnout. Historically, Houston voters take little interest in city government and average between 25 percent to 30 percent turnout. With strong candidates, deployment of social media tools, numerous public forums and more, we hope to see turnout increase. Wouldn't it be great if we

could say that 50 Percent of Houstonians selected their next leader?

HW: You have just launched www.MayoralMusings.com. Why did you decide to start this blog?

Sims: In fact, I started the blog as a resource for voters. I have personally been committed to increasing voter participation all of my adult life. Citizens need to remember that government is of the people, by the people, and for the people. We get the government we deserve.

It is my sincere hope that the blog will become a point of information and ideas for the campaign. It is much more than a basic commentary blog. We have set up tabs for the candidates to post information about their campaigns — press releases, issue statements, public appearances, endorsements and more.

The idea is for www.mayoralmusings.com to serve as a central point of information on the campaign. I will also be providing analysis and comment.

HW: Will readers have an opportunity to post their own comments on the blog?

Sims: Absolutely! There is a comment section. As the site expands and includes information on issues and press statements from the candidates, readers will be able to post their comments on specific topics. Comments are already up and running!

HW: Do you think the blog will appeal primarily to a certain demographic? Women more than men? Gen Xers vs. Baby Boomers?

Sims: I hope the blog appeals across generations and genders. As an Adjunct Professor at the University of Houston, I have a number of students and former students who will follow the blog.

Professionally, many clients and vendors have requested that I provide them information. I hope the readership reflects my many sources and contacts in the community and becomes widely read.

Most importantly, I hope that everyone forwards the site to their friends and family, so that people can go to one location and learn all about the mayoral candidates and campaigns. Be sure to visit www.mayoralmusings.com today and every day!