

MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Activist seeks role inside system

Susan Eagle hopes running for board of control will prompt debate on social issues.

By Chip Martin
The London Free Press



Susan Eagle
says a seat on board of control would give her access to financial decisions that could help the disadvantaged.

An advocate for the marginalized in society opted Friday to become a bit of an advocate for herself.

Susan Eagle said that by seeking a seat on London board of control she hopes to encourage debate on pressing social issues — even if she can't get elected.

"But I'm running to win," stressed the 41-year-old United Church minister, who acts as a community outreach worker and is pastor of the Kilworth-Delaware charge.

"A byproduct of every election is that you encourage and invite

debate on public issues," she said. "I'm taking this seriously."

In the past decade, Eagle has spoken for single mothers, children, immigrants, the working poor and welfare recipients. She delved into landlord-tenant matters, among them the high-profile battle on behalf of Cambodian and other immigrants at the formerly infamous apartments on Cheyenne Avenue.

Eagle said that, as an activist or community development worker, she spends time at city hall working on behalf of people.

That job is similar to those done by ward councillors, she said.

But she said she is running for board of control because "a lot of our issues are city-wide ones," and by making wise financial decisions, controllers can help the disadvantaged.

"Many of the financial decisions we take are related to the health and well-being of the community," she said.

POWER: Eagle said she hopes her work as an activist would stand her in good stead in city hall's corridors of power.

"As an activist, I'm not trying to undo the system," she said. "Lots of the time, it's just trying to make the system work."

"I believe in open, strong and principled city government," she told about 30 supporters.

Eagle said among her priorities is to involve more citizens on advisory committees and see that city hall recognizes the growing diversity of London.

Cheyenne developer 'sitting on fence'

An old foe is an unlikely observer at community advocate's day in the spotlight.

By Chip Martin
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Community advocates don't always make friends, Susan Eagle knows.

She was reminded of that fact Friday when the target of one her latest landlord-tenant tussles showed up for her announcement that she's running for board of control.

"I'm here as an observer," developer Peter Sergautis said when his presence among Eagle's 30 applauding supporters was questioned.

Sergautis purchased and has

renovated two apartment buildings, formerly known as 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave. (since renamed Oakville Avenue).

After putting \$500,000 into the buildings, he's crossing swords with Eagle and some of his tenants over rent controls and hydro bills.

"She and the tenants have been harassing me," he said. "I've been inundated with complaints. She's been advising tenants not to pay their hydro."

"I wanted an opportunity to ask some questions," he said, as he sipped a free coffee. "But this didn't look like a very good

forum and I'll have other opportunities."

Asked if he supports the latest candidate for board of control, Sergautis said: "I'm sitting on the fence. I'm simply out to establish the truth. Has she used the tenants as a stepping-stone into politics? I'm reserving judgment. I came to see about her political plans."

Eagle didn't seem rattled.

"The nature of taking a position on any issue is you're going to have a difference of opinion," she said.

She added she's convinced Ontario's rent review board and London Hydro will vindicate the tenants on the current dispute.

"I'm an activist. And I guess this is all connected to being an activist."