

## Tom Sager's responses to two questions from the Rolla Area Chamber of Commerce

1. *What have you done in the past to support economic growth, improve the business climate and enhance the quality of life in the Rolla area?*

A. For 18 years I was a part of Rolla's largest economic engine, UMR. Before my retirement, I helped train thousands to take their place as productive members of society. My area, computer science, is critical, not only for students in my own field, but students in every branch of engineering and science. Most of my students were able to command high salaries on graduation.

Unfortunately, few were able to find jobs in Rolla. While I was doing my part to produce a technically proficient workforce right here in Rolla; others, whose job it was to create employment for these graduates here in Rolla, fell down on the job. Most of my students had to leave the Rolla area to find gainful employment.

B. For nine years I have been working to save Rolla's historic Buehler Park I provided critical services to the park preservation group. I have been the liaison with the attorneys who have defended our park in court. I was in charge of the fundraising efforts that raised \$40,000 in 1997 for an injunction bond, without which Buehler Park would have been destroyed forever years ago.

Buehler Park draws many travelers off Interstate 44, particularly those traveling with small children in need of a park area where their children can exercise and eat, while the parents rest. This is a boon to motels and restaurants on the west side of town, and also to Rolla businesses in general.

When the subject of selling Buehler Park first came up, I put forth five ways in which Buehler Park's ability to draw travelers to Rolla could be enhanced:

i) Place signs on I-44 near the Martin Springs exit encouraging motorists to stop and "**Visit Rolla's Historic Buehler Park, 1 Block Off Interstate.**"

ii) Build a safety fence separating Buehler Park from Kingshighway. This would make the park safer for young children. (I offered to donate all necessary materials, if the city would build the fence and agree to honor the letter and spirit of the warranty deed that Buehler Park be used "**for park purposes only and none other.... FOREVER**".)

iii) Build new restrooms and replace worn playground equipment. This would enhance the recreational value of Buehler Park and its ability to draw travelers to Rolla.

iv) Buy the Forest Service land across Kingshighway from Buehler Park and connect the two properties with a pedestrian/bicycle bridge. This would enhance both the recreational and promotional values of both properties. The bridge could be designed through a contest promoted through UMR's fine civil engineering department.

The funds to implement these four ideas were, and still are, available in the form of the motel tax, whose specific purpose is to promote tourism and conventions. Unfortunately, those in charge of spending the motel tax fell down on the job. None of these five ideas were implemented.

**C.** Over the past 13 years, I have been involved in the support of parks, neighborhoods, children, historic preservation, the recreation Centre, and the Rolla Free Public Library - all of which are necessary to the quality of life in Rolla. I am particularly proud of the role I played in helping to save the Main Street railroad bridge from destruction and its conversion to a pedestrian/bicycle bridge.

*2. As mayor, what are your specific plans to stimulate economic growth, improve the business climate and enhance the quality of life in the Rolla area?*

**A.** My highest priority, should I be elected mayor of Rolla, is to build the industry necessary to create high-paying jobs right here in Rolla. I have already begun talking to professors at UMR, landowners in the Rolla area, and people with money to invest in new high-tech businesses. The interest is definitely there. I think we have all the talent necessary to build high-tech research and business enterprises right here in Rolla.

**B.** The people of Rolla need to work together to build the kind of community that we all want here. I would work hard as mayor to bring diverse segments of the Rolla community together. I would work hard to reestablish trust in city government so that we could move forward. I would run an open and honest government, providing the people of Rolla with accurate timely information. I would work hard to put an end to tax giveaways, the use of eminent domain to take private property for private development, and the robbing of funds from infrastructure such as parks and libraries to fund development schemes that do not work.

**C.** I would take a good hard look at our past efforts at economic development: what has worked and what hasn't. Discard what doesn't work. Build on what does. In particular I would take a good hard look at the philosophy put forward by some that economic development can be driven by corporate retail establishments. I do not believe that we should be bending over backwards, giving away tax revenues to attract these establishments to Rolla. They end up forcing locally owned businesses to close their doors. In general, they provide jobs that pay little more than minimum wage.

An example, is the way in which the city of Rolla, against the wishes of its citizens, welcomed the corporate pornographic establishment, Family Video, which put the locally owned clean establishment, Adventuretime Video, out of business. Locally owned business does 5 to 10 times more per dollar spent for a community than corporate owned businesses.

**D.** As mayor, I would work hard to see that some of the motel tax money is freed up for the development of parks and other infrastructure that would enhance the quality of life here in Rolla. An excellent example of what I would like to do with this money is implement the four ideas for the development of the Forest Service land and Buehler Park put forward in **1. B.** above. These ideas would enhance Rolla's ability to attract travelers off of Interstate 44, as well as enhance the quality of life for those living in the Rolla area.

Thank you for this opportunity to address your membership, the media, and the public.