

Executive Profile

Gretchen Driskell, mayor of Saline and agent at Swisher Commercial

Since her first term in 1999, Gretchen Driskell has gradually become perhaps the most popular politician in the history of Saline.

Today, Driskell is serving her fifth term while balancing her duties as a real estate agent for Swisher Commercial. She has dominated every election in which she had an opponent.

Her sustained leadership in Saline and business involvement is beginning to gain notice locally. She's a member of several prominent government and economic development groups, including the Ann Arbor SPARK executive committee and the National League of Cities transportation infrastructure committee.

Driskell, a former accountant, is the chairwoman of the SEMCOG transportation policy committee and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study. She also serves as a member of the state Commercial Board of Realtors and multiple other committees.

Because of her success as an elected official and a local businesswoman, Driskell can't avoid questions about whether she aspires to higher office or whether she'll seek another two-year term as mayor in 2008.

"I'm not prepared to talk about either of those," she said.

But Driskell's passion for public service and the city of Saline are topics she'll discuss readily.

Saline breathed a sigh of relief Nov. 15 with news that Johnson Controls has reached a tentative agreement to purchase the Automotive Components Holdings plant on Michigan Avenue. The plant has 1,350 workers.

But the city had been planning for years for the possibility that the plant would shut down by diversifying its tax base.

"There's a real sense of pride in the community about preserving and protecting what we have and then building on it," she said. "The city has always had a very pro-business stance."

The mayor, who is also serving as interim city manager after the resignation of Larry Stoeber, often credits the city staff for Saline's positive news.

"Our council changes every year and the thing that has the most continuity is our staff," she said.



Background

Education: Bachelor's in accounting from Lynchburg College in Virginia; MBA from George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Family: Ryan, 19; Matthew, 17; and Marielle, 13.

Residence: Saline.

INSIGHTS

Guiding principle: Treat people how you want to be treated.

Best way to keep competitive edge: Education, whether that's networking or reading or talking to people, going to conferences, classes. I'm one of those kinds of people who likes all of the above.

How to motivate people: That's about listening to what people are passionate about and supporting them.

Measure of success: I think a measure of success is reflective of the people around you and their accomplishments.

CONFESSIONS

Best career decision: Running for mayor.

Worst career decision: I don't really have one right now, because I haven't had too many careers.

What keeps you up at night: Budget. Only about one month a year do I have sleepless nights.

Guilty pleasure: Ice cream.

Something most people don't know about you: I love flying. I've been on all kinds of air flights. Skydiving, helicopter, hot air balloon, glider.

How many e-mails do you get a day: About 100, which she describes as "not that many."

TREASURES

Favorite Book: "The World is Flat," by Thomas Friedman. I think every ninth grader should read it as part of their curriculum.

We're sort of sheltered, so I think it really helps people who aren't in global business or don't have a global outlook on the world – it really makes you think about things.

Favorite vacation spot: On a sailboat in the Caribbean.

Favorite music: I like all different kinds of music.

Technology that you couldn't live without: I use to swear I'd never even have a cell phone.

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