

Metro/State news *Star Tribune*

# Politics go out the window in effort to help John Drew

By Chris Ison  
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The times when politicians throw away politics to just help somebody come all too seldom.

But in St. Paul, a colleague's misfortune has brought politicians, business representatives and just plain folks together on a mission that has nothing to do with politics and everything to do with being friends.

When Council Member John Drew was taken from his seventh-floor office after suffering a heart attack Nov. 9, people thought about what made John Drew a neighbor and friend, not his politics. They thought about a guy with a wife and two kids. They thought about warm handshakes, talking baseball and going to lunch.

It was friendship, not politics, that brought 15 people to a meeting in City Hall Friday to organize a fund-raiser for Drew, who after losing in the Nov. 3 election, is expected to



John Drew

serve the last two months of his council term at home, recovering. The impetus was the prospect of their friend being jobless, burdened

with campaign debts and without insurance at a time when his health won't even allow him to look for a job, much less handle the strain of adapting to a new one.

"John ... is very special," said Bill Levin, a member of the fund-raising committee who lives in Drew's Highland Park neighborhood. "There are lots of situations in which someone can step back from seeing someone leaving public office and think partisan thoughts. But you've really got a cross section here of business, labor, people, who really think this is a special person."

Retired Council President Vic Tedesco often said Drew was almost too nice to be a council member. He needed to be tougher, to take a stand and stick with it. Others have cited those characteristics, and then they add in the next breath, "But he's such a nice guy. He cares so much about people."

Nobody wants to see a nice guy get dealt the hand that Drew was dealt

Nov. 9. After January, depending on the outcome of a workers-compensation claim, he could be without income for some time and could have to pay about \$250 a month to keep the family health insurance he now gets for free through the city, said his aide, Andrea Albrecht. Interest is mounting on the \$6,000 loan he received from a bank to help finance his 1986 campaign for state treasurer, she said. His \$35,500 City Council salary and his earnings from his previous jobs as a state representative and a computer expert with MSI Insurance have hardly made him a rich man.

The fund-raising committee believes it can raise as much as \$15,000 at a fund-raiser to be held Jan. 12, from 5 to 7 p.m. Tim O'Gara, who owns O'Gara Bar and Grill, has offered to be host for the event and pay at least half the cost of the food.

People who know Drew could have predicted his response to all the fuss: "The last thing I want is pity," he said when contacted at his home. "I

don't want people to think I'm wearing rags right now. I have a debt, but a lot of people have debts. It's not a life-or-death situation."

But organizers say the motive behind the fund-raiser is appreciation, not pity. They're simply doing what John Drew would do for them, they say. "I think they like John as a person," said developer Sherman Rutzick, a member of the committee. "I think John needs a lift right now. If it can help him relieve the stress and pressure, that's why I'm helping."

Tickets will be \$50, though committee members said those who can't afford that are welcome to contribute what they can. The committee also hopes that people who can't attend the fund-raiser will donate money anyway. All resources used to throw the fund-raiser will be from private funds.

Committee members said they don't care how Drew uses the money. He can use it to pay off the campaign debts, help pay for insurance, make

his house payments or anything else.

"People who are contributing to John are contributing to John, and they don't care how he uses it," said Council Member Chris Nicosia.

The committee will send out about 3,000 invitations, and as a testimony to their commitment, fellow council members have agreed to share their lists of potential campaign contributors, valuable items in politics, to help raise the money.

"You're sure you're comfortable bringing that list?" Council Member Kiki Sonnen asked, only half-joking, at yesterday's meeting. "Because some people want to run for mayor."

"Everybody has the same list anyway," Nicosia said with a laugh. "I'll tell ya', when I retire, I don't want to be on that list."

(People who want to contribute can send checks payable to Friends of Drew, P.O. Box 2021, St. Paul, 55102.)