

Mayoral candidate pledges salary to fund GED program

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SARATOGA SPRINGS -- Republican mayoral candidate Scott Johnson has spent more than \$36,000 of his own money in his bid to unseat incumbent Democratic Mayor Valerie Keehn.

On Wednesday afternoon, Johnson pledged he would turn over the mayoral salary of his entire term to fund GED classes at Jefferson and Vanderbilt Terraces should he win the city election Tuesday.

Johnson spoke in front of the Ford Community Center at the housing complex on the city's south side.

"During my door-to-door campaigning in the Terraces, I met many single mothers who said they could really use a better and less difficult way of getting a GED," said Johnson, whose mother moved the family into federally subsidized housing at Jefferson Terrace when he was 12 years old.

Johnson was born in New Jersey, but has lived in Saratoga Springs since he was 3 years old.

"Growing up in the Terrace, I witnessed firsthand how difficult it can be for many single parent mothers, or those with limited education, to escape economic hard times and provide a better life for their families," Johnson said.

"Unfortunately, until they get that diploma or pass the GED, there is a ceiling that limits how successful they can be in their lives.

"Hopefully, this program can level the playing field."

Johnson, who pledged to donate his \$14,500 annual mayoral salary to fund the classes, was a partner in the Albany law firm that represented the state in lawsuits filed against major tobacco companies in 1997.

The firm -- Thuillez, Ford, Gold & Johnson -- was awarded millions of dollars in fees after a settlement was reached.

"I'm not in this race for the money," Johnson said, pointing out that, in any case, money should not be a factor in deciding what is best for the community.

His \$14,500 annual salary would be applied to expenses for programs that would be held at the Ford Community Center.

"I come from a very modest background," he said. "I know that education is the key to advancing."

According to the Saratoga County Board of Elections, Johnson showed a closing balance of \$35,372.84 in his 11-day pre-election filing report, which was issued Oct. 26.

He loaned his campaign \$36,460.90.

Incumbent Mayor Valerie Keehn reported a closing balance of \$15,061.92 for the same period.

Mayoral candidate Gordon Boyd, who is running on the Independence and Conservative lines, showed a closing balance of \$3,188.04 on Oct. 5, the last filing date available on the county Board of Elections Web site.

Boyd loaned himself \$15,000 for his campaign.

Election Day is Tuesday.