

## Civility rules in North Mankato debate

### Mayoral candidates Dehen and Zellmer stress economic development

By Brian Ojanpa

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**NORTH MANKATO** — The placid and decorous city of North Mankato had a mayoral debate that was similarly civil Tuesday night.

Incumbent Gary Zellmer and challenger Mark Dehen fielded an hour's worth of audience questions at South Central College and generally were more in agreement than at odds as the Nov. 2 general election nears.

The Greater Mankato Growth-sponsored debate produced queries ranging from softball lobs to be hit out of the park to a quirky query about how the candidates felt about some people's desire to raise chickens in town. The question was no doubt sparked by Mankato's recent go-round with the issue, and Dehen and Zellmer were in agreement: No thanks.

Dehen said there would have to be "100 per cent sign-off by neighbors" for such an activity to hold sway, and Zellmer said although the notion might sound nice, it's fraught with problems.

Both agreed that policing would be problematic.

Zellmer said some budgetcrunched cities no longer perform animal control at all, and Dehen said policing urban fowl operations would be a "nightmare."

Of the more serious questions posed during the debate, only one produced anything akin to a clash.

When a question claiming that North Mankato marketing efforts seem nonexistent, Zellmer essentially decried the notion as bullfeathers, while Dehen called for North Mankato to revisit its decision to part company with area

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Gary Zellmer

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Mark Dehen

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marketing arm Greater Mankato Growth.

“Somewhere the ball got dropped between GMG and North Mankato,” Dehen said.

Zellmer lauded the work of Greater Mankato Growth but, as he and other North Mankato officials have said in the past, questioned whether the pairing is costeffective for North Mankato and in its best interests.

“We don’t want to see GMG get between us and the developers, and that’s a sticking point we’ve got to work out,” Zellmer said.

“North Mankato has to have its own brand, its own identity. If we can keep that, we can work with GMG.”

To the question, “What is the most important challenge facing North Mankato and what are you going to do about it?” Zellmer cited the city’s long- range question of its own: “Where are we going to go with our long- range economic development plan?”

Zellmer said he sees the plan calling for more planned growth with attendant infrastructure.

Dehen agreed, specifically stressing the need for downtown business district development, with suggestions coming from regular public forums.

The candidates also fielded the simplest question of all: “Why are you running for mayor?”

“Good question. I ask myself that all the time,” Zellmer joked before citing his long ties to the community and his desire to give back to it.

“You want to help people,” he said. “This is not a job for glory.”

Dehen answered by alluding to the inspiration provided by his late father Dave’s public service, which included a 12- year tenure as North Mankato mayor.

“I’ve knocked on 3,000 doors and most people have asked that question,” Dehen said. “I look upon this as an opportunity to provide a fresh new look and some fresh input.”

