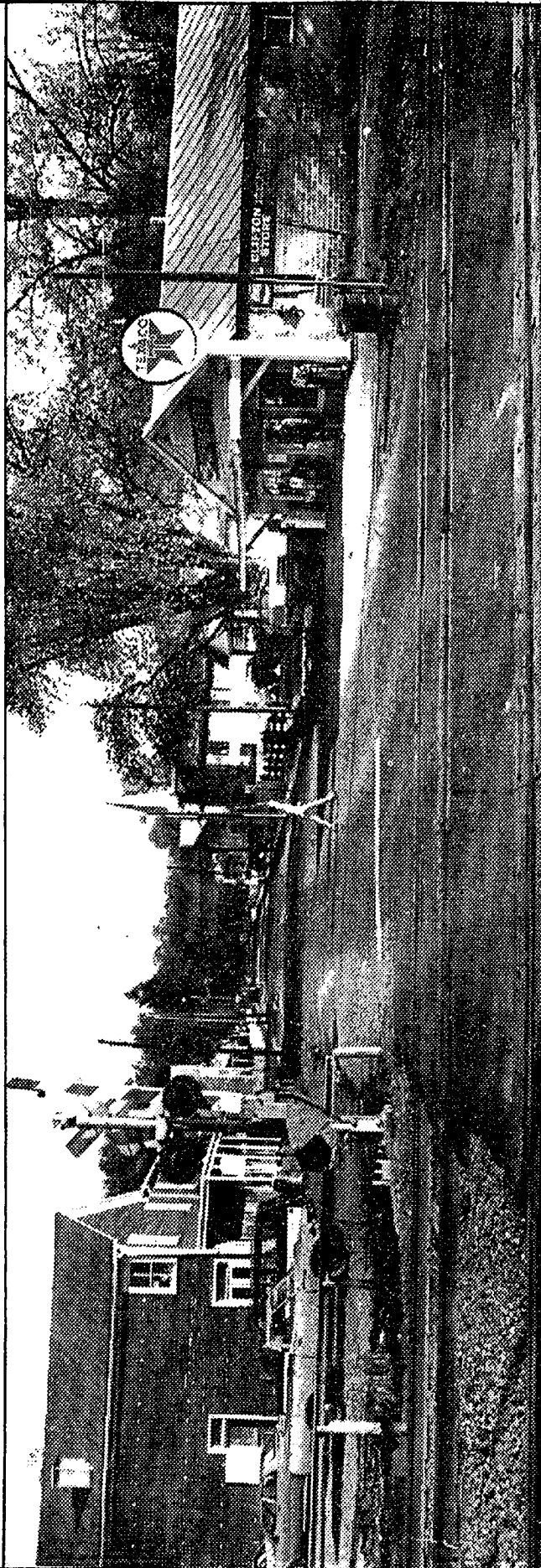


Candidates in Clifton, Va., Don't Run, They Stroll
By Mike Sager Washington Post Staff Writer
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Mayoral candidate Wayne Nickum (sunglasses), 38, an IRS agent, is known as a workhorse, a "nuts-and-bolts candidate."



Mayoral candidate Bob Lindholm, 54, personal investment counselor, "I have developed skill and tact in dealing with people."

Photos by Bill Sprad - The Washington Post

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Maybe the best way to figure this Tuesday's mayoral race in Clifton, Va., is to stop in at Lee's Superette. A red brick general store with a Texaco sign out front, it's across the creek at the head of Main Street, not hard to find in a town a quarter-mile square.

Earl Lee runs the place when it needs running. Other times he's propped behind the counter, white hair tousled and trifocals perched at the end of his nose, filling his unofficial role as town pipeline and pundit. Lee has lived in the studied Victorian town in southwestern Fairfax County for 22 years, seen many an election in his time.

"The mayor is pretty much taken for granted here," says Lee, popping another miniature Mr. Goodbar. "We have a charter, so we have to have a mayor . . . There's nothing of enormous significance for him to do, and there's only about 70 voters here anyway."

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CLIFTON, From B1

The biggest line item on the town's \$20,000 a year budget is \$1,500 for mowing the grass, and Lee says the biggest issue in the mayoral race between candidates Bob Lindholm and Wayne Nickum is the need for a sidewalk on the east side of Main. Both candidates agree one is needed. Neither candidate belongs to a political party; candidates don't so much run as stroll. Outcomes are based more on popularity than anything else, kind of like balloting for senior class president.

"There's really no urgent reason why one or the other should be elected," Lee says. "Kind of nice that way, isn't it?"

Clifton, population 175, seems to agree. About 28 miles from downtown Washington, wind chimes tinkle and the smoke from backyard barbecues signals the quiet life so important to Clifton's mix of old-timers and commuters, who like to say they leave their troubles on the other side of Popes Head Creek, which runs at the north edge of town.

Even so, Clifton is a rural town with fewer and fewer native rural residents. Country antique is not only fashion, it's required by town ordinance. Residents have to petition the town council for permission to put a tool shed in their backyard or a fence around their lawn. And no one in Clifton lives in their own house. Mayor al hopeful Lindholm, a personal investment counselor, lives in the Cross house, once occupied by a town mortician and wheelwright named Cross. Lindholm's dining room was the "slumber room" of the funeral parlor.

Like-wise, candidate Nickum, an IRS who investigates tax-exempt organizations, lives in the Harris House. Little is about the Harris family who lived house in the 1830s. But its occupant 1890s was J.M. (Matt) Fullmer, a

one-time Clifton mayor who used to yolk himself up with an ox to repair the streets.

Like Lee's Superette, where penny candy is sold alongside Vic de France bread and soccer shin guards have a place below 1830 brass lamps, Clifton is a hybrid, a place where small town turn-of-the-century values have been carefully mixed with mowed-lawn suburban lifestyles. Yet, in all its deliberateness, it's still the kind of town that doesn't have a traffic light and doesn't need one. In Clifton, people are glad to yield. They know their neighbors will, too.

So it is that every two years, when it comes time for politics, the first thing on the agenda is to ask the mayor if he's planning to serve another term. If he is, tradition says he runs unopposed. Politics here are a polite affair—so polite, in fact, that for years the candidates didn't even file with the county board of elections as required by law. The county stopped that practice in the late 50's.

"People feel like once the mayor's in and he's doing a good job and you got him all trained, why go through the trouble of electing another one," says three-term incumbent Mynor Floyd MacIntyre, a stooped but sharp-eyed man of 69, who has stopped into the Superette for a cup of coffee and a pound of talk.

This year, Mac, as the mayor is known, decided it was about time to let someone new preside over the town and its council meetings, held monthly in a room above the firehouse.

Thus Lindholm and Nickum, both town council members, decided to take their chances and spread the word they were running. If the issues aren't at issue, as everyone agrees, voters have a clear choice of differing personalities, though the activities of both men reflect what is important to people who live in Clifton.

Lindholm, 54, a town resident only 3 1/2 years, has been on the council for three years, having first been elected to fill the unexpired term of Pat Layden, who had to resign when AT&T transferred him to Cincinnati. He is chairman of the town litter control project, a member of the annual Clifton Days celebration food serving committee and was self-appointed cocaretaker, along with his wife Lois, of the town square before it was included in the grass-mowing contract this year.

Six feet tall with deep blue eyes, he wears his silver hair carefully coiffed, his suits carefully pressed. The other day Earl Lee's wife Mary told him he looked handsome. "I do, don't I?" Lindholm replied with a toothy smile.

He has a cat with no name and was once president of his senior class at Richmond Professional Institute, now part of Virginia Commonwealth University, and saw action in Korea as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. He is past president of the U.S. Junior Chamber International Senate, a member of the Fairfax County Salvation Army Advisory Board, a genuine Kentucky Colonel, chairman of the Hugh O'Brien Youth Foundation. For 15 years Lindholm has been a lap counter at the Indianapolis 500, paying his way in exchange for \$30 and a box lunch. For the last few years he's counted for Gordton Johnson.

"I'd like to be mayor," Lindholm says, "because I think I can make a very good contribution . . . well, good's not the word I'm looking for. I have a background spanning leadership activities and dealing with people. I have developed skill and tact in dealing with people."

Nickum, 38, has lived in Clifton 11 years. He wore his Sony Walkman most of the 800 hours it took him to build the garage behind his house. He has been a coun-

cilman since 1974, with a brief absence after he lost against Mac in 1976 for the mayor's seat. Known as a town workhorse, a "nuts-and-bolts candidate," he says, he has served on the Clifton Mowing Committee, the Natural Gas Pipeline Committee, Town Sergeant Committee and Odd Fellows Hall Committee.

He collects antique hats and mugs and pictures of owls, and played the sousaphone in the band at Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, was sergeant of arms for his freshman class there, too.

"I want this town to be able to give the impression, when someone drives through, that this is a great place to live," Nickum says.

So far, as elections go in Clifton, the mayoral race has been pretty hot. A few weeks ago, Lindholm introduced Clifton's first campaign flyer in history, printed on blue and green paper. It was quickly labeled a "propaganda sheet" by Clifton citizens.

Nickum quickly countered with his own propaganda sheet. But from there, say Mayor Mac and Earl Lee, Lindholm has seized the momentum, showing up at a Saturday morning trash collection line behind the firehouse to distribute a second flyer and scheduling for tomorrow a tail-gate party with a keg of beer—"Very Very Causal (yard clothes will do)," his third flyer advises.

Lindholm says he also tried to organize a candidate's debate, "but that didn't fly." "Lindholm hasn't been here very long, but he's smooth," Earl Lee analyzes. "Wayne's a hell of a hard worker, but what he needs is a PR man to do his talking for him."

In his modest way, however, Lindholm pronounces Nickum the favorite: "Wayne's a really good guy. Whoever wins, nobody's going to take any gas, I don't think."