



East Lansing City Council candidate Phil Bellfy poses in his office in 262 Bessey Hall, backed by one of his three libraries. An MSU professor and published author, Bellfy writes and teaches, mostly about Native American culture.

## **MSU professor runs for City Council**

By Kate Jacobson

Phil Bellfy is an activist. While at college in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Bellfy was heavily involved in campus advocacy groups, supporting everything from feminism to anti-war groups. Now, as a professor at MSU, he has continued to use his voice in local politics. After enlisting himself as a write-in candidate, Bellfy said he hopes to be elected to East Lansing City Council for the first time to do what he does best: advocate.

### A history of action

Bellfy was born in Livonia, Mich., in 1946. In a city that has been deemed America's least multicultural city from census data, Bellfy said his was the only Native American family on his block, which made for an interesting upbringing. After graduating from a high school in Detroit, Bellfy was drafted into the U.S. Air Force.

After being discharged, Bellfy enrolled in Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie. There, his activism took off. He joined various student groups and became involved in the student government.

"It was when I was in the service that I developed a very, very strong taste for politics," Bellfy said. "I was opposed to the war, I was opposed to my participation in that war as an active duty member and I was not shy about telling my superior officers."

Moving to East Lansing in 1976, Bellfy got his master's degree and a Ph.D. from MSU and quickly became a professor in the American Indian Studies Program in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures.

Along with working as a professor, Bellfy has acted as an adviser to campus groups, including MSU's Slam Poetry Team.

The team's president, English junior William Langford, said Bellfy has been dedicated to the team and to students for the more than two years he's known Bellfy.

"A lot of professors seem to lose touch with the realities their students face. He is not that kind of person at all," Langford said. "All of his efforts are to see individuals. He's done a lot to reach students in his classes, to say, 'what would you like to learn?'"

Since arriving at MSU, Bellfy has run for various political seats, including the state Senate. However, he never has won a position.

If elected, he said he wants to represent the voices of East Lansing residents above all others.

"I never have been in the business of running for public office so I could win," he said. "It's mainly because there are certain issues that the public should hear about and I am capable and willing to get out and talk about these issues with people."

#### Hot-button issues

Since its inception, Bellfy has been critical of the City Center II project, a development planned for the corner of Abbot Road and Grand River and Evergreen avenues. He's publicly spoken against the project at City Council meetings and is concerned about city officials' actions regarding the project, including the exclusion of public input, Bellfy said.

"They just ignored us because they had already done six years of planning and they were committed to the project without doing their due diligence," Bellfy said.

Bellfy has been involved with many of his neighbors to speak out against the project and attempt to gather support against it. He has advocated for more transparency from city officials about the project and other developments, such as the East Village project to redevelop the area surrounding the Cedar Village Apartments.

Bert Seyfarth, an East Lansing resident and friend of Bellfy, said he, Bellfy and other residents rallied against the project, but their voices fell on deaf ears. Seyfarth said residents weren't necessarily upset with the redevelopment of the area, but rather its design and the lack of transparency from city officials, Seyfarth said.

"City Council didn't listen to any of the comments, as far as I can tell," he said.

Seyfarth supports Bellfy for council because he said Bellfy would be more supportive of residents' interests.

"He looks at things very carefully," Seyfarth said. "Phil is the kind of guy who is very thorough-going."

Bellfy said student rights also are issues close to his heart.

James Cuddeback, a friend of Bellfy and editor of the community forum Web site Publicresponse.com, said Bellfy is willing to listen to all local voices, including students.

"Phil Bellfy will work to include everyone at the council table as he makes his decisions," Cuddeback wrote in an e-mail. "Phil has a balanced personality and comes to City Council ready to lead with intelligence."

#### Write-in candidacy

Because he is a write-in candidate — he did not enter the race until after the candidate deadline — Bellfy's name won't appear on the ballot. Instead, supporters must write his name as an alternative to the three official candidates — Mayor Vic Loomis, Councilmember Kevin Beard and challenger Hans Larsen. Although Bellfy has garnered support from neighbors and friends, political science associate professor Corwin Smidt said anyone running a write-in campaign faces challenges.

"(A write-in campaign) takes a lot more campaigning and efforts on the candidate's part," Smidt said. "You may be able to recognize a name from a sign, but it's hard to remember an actual name and then write it down on the ballot."

Despite the challenges, Bellfy said he is confident he has the support needed to win a seat on the council and bring a new voice to the group.

"I've been involved in politics for a really, really long time," Bellfy said. "I think everybody should be able to inform the public. It's an education process."

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