

ELECTION OF 1961

Frank Stankowicz was well-known in Niles for more than 40 years. Appointed a policeman in 1929, Stankowicz was elected clerk in 1937 and then, in 1941, mayor. He was re-elected in every election with comfortable margins until 1957 when he won by less than 150 votes.

In February, previous to an election, candidates generally file their declarations regarding the office each will seek in the upcoming April election. As anticipated, Frank Stankowicz filed for re-election as mayor. Leader of the Progressive Economy Party, his slate included Ed Marszalek for clerk, and John Sapit, Kevin Barry, and Joe DiMaria for trustees. Some commentators noted that he had not placed seasoned pros on his ticket as he had in all previous elections.

In mid-February, Stankowicz "leveled a heavy salvo at opposition parties," reported *The Life*, February 23, 1961. Stankowicz claimed the opposition parties are insulting the intelligence of Niles citizens. They are "promising all things to all men, promises they know in good conscience cannot honestly be fulfilled without resultant harm to the entire village."

Stankowicz explained, "To attempt to relegate village government responsibilities to the position of a proving ground for amateurs or self-seekers is foolishly asking for disaster itself."

Stankowicz pointed out the accomplishments of his administrations: one of the lowest tax rates in Cook County, no deficit spending or financing in providing village services; free garbage and rubbish pick-up; an award-winning fire department and ambulance service at no extra cost to taxpayers; the lowest fire insurance rates in Illinois for communities of comparable size; the lowest crime rate when compared to surrounding communities; a police department that provides excellent protection to families and their children; and an administration that opens its records to the voting public.

The Life article noted that this "blistering attack" was surprising because the campaign was so young. During his campaign Stankowicz continued to emphasize his long experience in Niles government, continually reminding voters that the low tax rate in Niles was the result of his administration, and cautioned voters to beware of the promises of his opponents because they would not be able to fulfill them.

The Action Party was headed by John F. Stanley. His running mates were Walter J. Lorenz for clerk and Roy Berquist, Gregory Clark, and Raymond Wilkins for trustees. Stanley was a member of the village board of trustees at the time. He was very active in promoting and was generally given credit for having the massive Golf-Mill shopping mall constructed on the village's northern boundary and then annexed to the village. He brought to the attention of voters, and gave reasons why, Niles would need a new zoning code. Along with other candidates, he took a strong



*Frank Stankowicz
Mayor, 1941-1961*

position on the "hot issue" in the campaign: the amount of multiple unit dwellings that would be permitted in Niles and what types of restrictions would be placed on future developments of multiple unit dwellings. Stanley wanted them strictly controlled.

This election was the first run for public office for Nicholas Blase. As head of the New Era Party, Blase and his slate of candidates included Marge Lieske running for the office of clerk and Kenneth Scheel, Robert Wentz and Leonard Szymanski, candidates for trustees.

Blase was active in two community organizations. As president of the Greenwood Estates Homeowners Association, he was able to convince contractors that they had to return to the homes they built in Niles and install the proper construction designs for drain tiles using only approved materials. This was completed at a modest cost to homeowners. Blase's running mate, Szymanski, was very active in the Kirk Lane Homeowners Association. Kirk Lane was actively involved in assisting in the development of other homeowner associations. Since many Niles residents were actively involved with homeowners associations, they were probably favorably disposed toward the New Era candidates. Wentz and Scheel, New Era candidates for trustee, were active on the zoning board and had taken definite positions on annexation concerns that won the support of many voters.

Blase was also president of the Niles Citizens Committee, which tackled major concerns of citizens that local government agencies often ignored. At the time of the election, the committee was advocating a Niles Recreation Center, a project strongly supported by the people, and attempting to have all Niles citizens in one voting district. This issue so confounded actual voters and so discouraged potential voters that many probably believed the problem without solution. In some elections, Niles library voters voted at one polling place, Niles park district voters voted at another polling place, and Niles voters for village government may have to vote at yet a third polling place. When all three votes were cast the same day, a voter would usually have to visit two different voting booths to cast ballots. It was confounding, confusing, and probably exasperating. The fact that a committee would take on potential solutions for such problems might have caused a small glimmer of appreciation in voters. Blase, who would later call the committee the most important committee in Niles, was, no doubt, the beneficiary of this appreciation.

Blase and his party frequently spoke about Niles having an independent government. They called for public forums on issues affecting the people of Niles and supported rigid control on multiple unit dwellings.

Ed Ciccone was the presidential candidate on the Niles Improvement Party. His running mates were Michael Provenzano for clerk and Gerald Sullivan, George L. Loechl, and Douglas J. Strutz for trustees.

The key issue for the Improvement Party was the appointment of a village manager. Neighboring towns had appointed village managers. It could easily be demonstrated that governments were more efficient in those towns. The idea of a village manager and the end results may have been desired by voters. However, discussion of such a radical change for Niles government was not an easy campaign theme to explain. Everyone was for efficiency, but the details might invite numerous questions: The village manager would be appointed by the mayor, may be removed by law, would be the chief administrative officer in the village, must attend all board meetings and is responsible to the board of trustees, makes recommendations regarding village government, makes recommendations regarding hiring and firing, recommends pay scales, recommends consolidation of offices, investigates complaints against the village and the services the village provides, is the village purchasing manager, handles all finances for the government including estimated funds available, the annual appropriations, and the tax levy, and keeps an inventory of all village properties.

Voters probably listened more sympathetically when the Improvement Party spoke about how they would rectify traffic problems in the village.

Two other announced candidates probably influenced some of the voting. Ben Sosnowski filed his candidacy for village clerk and indicated he would run on a full ticket that would be filed later. Those candidates never filed and Sosnowski withdrew from the race. In the previous election Sosnowski ran on the same ticket with Stanley, who almost ousted Stankowicz. Sosnowski's support of Stankowicz after his withdrawal was not easily explained.

James Kozak, who had run as candidate for clerk with Stankowicz in previous elections, filed as an independent candidate. Kozak was an extremely popular candidate but his comment after filing--"It's now up to the people to decide if I'm to continue my job"--seemed to indicate he did not feel comfortable either as an independent or as a member on any of the slates running candidates.

Although the positions of candidates were frequently printed in the local press, and *The Life* asked, "Will this be the year that Frank Stankowicz tastes defeat?" Only *The Niles Bugle* published a strong editorial on the eve of the election.

As expected, voter turnout was heavy. The *Niles Bugle* reported, "The startling upset was unbelievable because of the decisiveness at which the non-professionals swamped the 'pros.' The New Era Party won 14 precincts out of 20 and Blase, low man of the four winning candidates on his ticket, received 700 votes more than Mayor Stankowicz who finished second in the four-man mayoral race."

Kenneth Scheel, Robert Wentz, and Leonard Szymanski were elected trustees. James Kozak, the only independent in the race, was re-elected village clerk.

The Niles Police chief, Robert A. Romey, submitted his resignation as did the village attorney, Henry Wells. Other resignations and new appointments soon followed.

A month after the installation of the new officers, Mayor Blase announced that no new gambling stamps had been issued to Niles and the jar games of gambling, detailed in the Chicago metropolitan press, had been removed from the village. The mayor also said that he and members of the committees of the board of trustees would be available at convenient times to meet with individuals or groups who have concerns to express about the village.

As Mayor, Blase became Niles Liquor Commissioner, governing the protocol for businesses to obtain and hold permits to sell liquor in Niles. Later, in 1985, he appointed a trusted associate, Nicholas Costantino, as Assistant Liquor Commissioner to preside over liquor hearings. Costantino instituted educational seminars for the benefit of liquor permit holders.

In office but six months, Blase appointed himself and two trustees to a special committee. It would "work out technicalities (so that Niles would) eventually get a village manager."

The New Era in Niles was well under way.■