

# 47th District includes mix of urban and rural concerns

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**Richard Hill, left, a resident of southeastern Howard County, talks with Roger Sublett, a Harrisburg resident, and other friends gathered Oct. 8 at Heuer's Cafe. Both Hill and Sublett regularly come in for breakfast at Heuer's, a family owned restaurant near Harrisburg and Sturgeon. Jamie Heuer has owned the cafe since 1999 and usually works the morning shift. Heuer's is known as a meeting place in District 47. | [Bridget Murphy](#)**

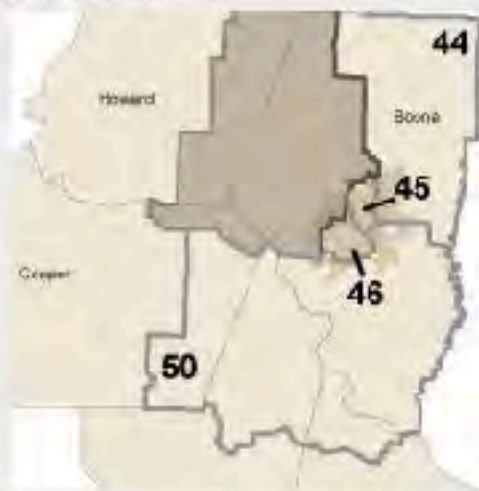
Missouri's new 47th District is diverse and includes parts of western and central Columbia, along with Harrisburg, Rocheport and Higbee. ; [BRIDGET MURPHY](#), [RACHEL ENGLISH](#)

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Missouri's new 47th House District includes parts of northern and western Columbia and parts of Howard, Boone and Cooper counties. It includes the communities of Harrisburg, Rocheport, Wooldridge and Higbee. Democrat John Wright and Republican Mitch Richards are seeking to represent the district.

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COLUMBIA — District 47 isn't trying to reinvent the wheel. It's just trying to reinvent itself.

As one of the newly apportioned Missouri House districts following the 2010 census, District 47 takes up a fairly big chunk of mid-Missouri, including parts of Boone, Howard, Randolph and Cooper counties. Its boundaries were decided by computer data, population numbers and, ultimately, the courts. The result is a district that represents almost everything that is positive and negative about living in small-town America today.

## Rocheport

Roughly 20 minutes west of Columbia lies the small but widely known town of Rocheport. A hub for the Katy Trail, Rocheport's economy relies almost entirely on tourism. Like other small towns that need visitors to succeed, it has been hurt by widespread economic problems.

Marcia Voss, owner of Whitehorse Antiques and

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treasurer of the Rocheport Area Merchant's Association, said she had to reinvent and diversify her business when the economic downturn hit.

"My business dropped noticeably," Voss said. "But I reinvented the shop. I changed the merchandise and started a rug-hooking class."

Rug-hooking involves pulling loops of yarn through a burlap or linen base.

Whitehorse Antiques is full of soaps, candles and fall decorative items for Halloween. It's not so full of antiques, though. Voss uses her back room for classes now.

Voss said nearly every shop in Rocheport had to reinvent itself.

A few blocks down from Whitehorse Antiques is Rocheport's Central Street, the main avenue through town, which is a short drive or stroll. It's lined with antique and book shops and deli-type restaurants and gives Rocheport a certain historical charm. Red brick buildings and small shops with large bay windows full of gifts encroach on the small sidewalk.

Conrad Yates, a Rocheport alderman, said the town has been able to shed the trend of decay that plagues so many other small towns across America.

"Small towns have gone from places to live that have vibrant economies to their current state of affairs, where they are all in decay," Yates said. "Rocheport is one of

those exceptions. While it was in a state of decay a few years ago, it has rebounded because it's so unique amongst small towns."

Yates, who graduated from MU in 1979, moved to Rocheport in 1990. He said about five people made a living there at the time. Now, it's more like 30. Some people even commute to Rocheport to work.

## **Higbee**

About an hour north of Rocheport, Higbee is home to fewer than 10 businesses. It lacks the vibrant feel of Rocheport but is trying to accomplish the same things, only under different circumstances.

Higbee's main thoroughfare, Division Street, is about as long as Rocheport's Central Street. But in Higbee, windows are boarded up, and buildings are abandoned. Weeds sprout through cracks in the sidewalks and streets.

A faded American flag waves in an island at the middle of what used to be the bustling intersection of Division and Randolph streets; it's the only sign of movement on the block. About a block west, near Railroad Street, are three of Higbee's five main businesses: Casey's General Store, R&R Sports Bar and the Higbee Depot Deli. The VFW hall and the Cooper's Oak Winery are a few streets away.

Although it's relatively quiet here, Higbee is growing. Bill Mealy, who used to work as an electrician in Columbia, now lives in Higbee. Mealy wasn't satisfied with retirement so he decided to open the deli next to the sports bar two months ago.

Mealy is one of few people who have moved to Higbee recently. He said it was the closure of the coal mines outside Higbee that really hurt the town. It's just now

starting to stabilize and grow.

Gene Hay, superintendent of the K-12 school in Higbee, also recently moved there. Hay formerly worked in the school district of Memphis, Mo. He said the Higbee school is a hub for the community but needs more help to grow. State government could help, he said.

"It affects us harder when they talk about budget cuts at the legislature," Hay said. "The local money isn't enough to fulfill what is required for the school and city."

Hay said that in addition to getting more education funding, the town really needs to be cleaned up. That includes fixing rundown homes and finding a way to build new houses.

Driving through Higbee, it's easy to see what Hay's talking about. Many of the streets need to be repaved and are full of potholes. Some homes are falling apart. One on the edge of Higbee was recently destroyed by fire. A "No Trespassing" sign hung among the debris. But no sign of any cleanup effort is clear. Road signs are faded and look more off-yellow than mustard yellow.

But it's Higbee's school and its few business owners that keep the town running. Rick Switzer owns the R&R Sports Bar next to the deli. Switzer has lived in Higbee for 37 years and opened the bar in 2010 to give people another place to socialize.

"I don't make much money doing this," Switzer said. "But it's good for the community."

## **Harrisburg**

About 30 minutes north of Columbia, along Route E, is Harrisburg, another small town in District 47 trying to prosper. Residents aren't afraid to boast about the

town in District 47 trying to prosper. Residents aren't afraid to boast about the prowess of the Bulldogs basketball teams at Harrisburg High School, where the boys have won two state championships and the girls another since 2006. Two signs at the city limits, beneath another that lists the population as 286, call attention to the feats.

School funding, however, doesn't score as highly in Harrisburg. State budget cuts are partially to blame for a financial situation that forced the district to cut to a four day-a-week schedule, with school days running from 8 a.m. to 3:42 p.m. Like Higbee's, Harrisburg's schools are an integral to the community.

Jan Sublett, owner of C&S Grocery in Harrisburg, has two daughters-in-law who teach at Harrisburg High. Sublett says they could have chosen to work anywhere else or in any other profession, but they decided to teach. Sublett's sons are no longer in the Harrisburg school system, but she still feels the need for the state to invest more in the local schools.

"My daughters-in-law could have been nurses, but they chose to be teachers, and they love it." Sublett said. "I would like to see more of an effort to increase our education funding."

Down the street from the general store, the red letters "BBQ" are painted on the front of a one-car-garage sized building. The outside of the building is bland and white. An old sign, although missing a few letters, lets people know the place is open for business. This is Lonnie Ray's BBQ, where the menu features tamales, deep-fried corn and brisket sandwiches with cheese and onions that are so big and messy they're hard to pick up in your hands.

Lonnie Ray's owner Mike Whiteley said he opened the restaurant in Harrisburg in 2004 because he felt he could better establish his recipes and work out any kinks in

his business strategy without facing the publicity, the taxes and the pressures that might come with a Columbia location. That decision, he said, has helped him survive the economic downturn.

Whiteley said he's looking for politicians who represent people with small businesses like his.

"Who's looking out for us?" Whiteley said. "We need someone to work hard because I'm working hard, and we need someone to stand up for the middle class."

Whiteley, who lives in Columbia, said his Harrisburg eatery has become well-known around mid-Missouri, so much so that he now has the responsibility of hosting the SEC referees at Lonnie Ray's every Friday night before home games.

## **Columbia**

While District 47 covers a large section of Boone County and parts of Howard and Randolph counties, it also includes part of northwest Columbia. The district's boundaries extend far enough into Columbia to include sections of the First Ward west of Pershing Road and along with the west Columbia neighborhoods of Rothwell Heights, Smithton Ridge and King's Meadow.

Marcy Snakenberg, a resident of the Stonecrest neighborhood west of Scott Boulevard, has lived in Columbia for about 15 years. She said she has two main concerns this election year: education funding and women's issues such as equal pay.

"I feel we're going away from the philosophy of (women) being treated equally," Snakenberg said. "I fear it going back to the way it was before the '50s."

Snakenberg, who worked in telecommunications with Verizon and is now retired,

said she was among the first waves of women who were hired to executive positions with Verizon. Snakenberg also has two grandchildren who have graduated from MU, giving her an interest in the future of education in Missouri.

"I want someone who cares about those who haven't been as fortunate as others," Snakenberg said. "My concern is in the future of my grandchildren along with women's rights and their ability to compete in the workforce."

Henry Warren, president of the King's Meadow Neighborhood Association, said he's looking to see economic growth and more stability in housing prices. Warren said King's Meadow, which is home to many duplexes, has experienced the same economic consequences as many other neighborhoods.

"We have a mix of all types of economic classes," Warren said. "There's a few doctors and professors that live here along with a number of retired residents."

The 47th District's mix of rural and urban communities is a challenge for both Democrat John Wright and Republican Mitch Richards, who are competing to represent the area. Richards said that part of the challenge presented by redistricting is learning "what does the First Ward have to do with rural parts of Boone County?"

"A good representative is one who represents both areas," Richards said. "The real challenge is sometimes when you have to make a decision that will favor one over the other a little more."

Wright acknowledged the challenge, too.

"It's a very diverse district," Wright said. "It has been a challenge getting to know all parts of the district, but it's something you need to understand to best represent



the district."

While business owners and residents of the 47th are waiting to see what happens in this year's election, it's clear they won't wait on politicians to help them survive and grow. They'll take it upon themselves to reinvent their businesses and the towns and neighborhoods they call home.

*Supervising editor is [Scott Swafford](#).*

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