

St. John to leave post in 2008

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MIDDLEBURY — Edward B. St. John, the longtime first selectman known for his powerhouse Public Works Department and personal scandals, will step down next year.

St. John told the Republican Town Committee Tuesday he will not seek another term.

"I'm not running again be-

cause we basically have finished what we needed to do," he said Wednesday. "I have no regrets. I've enjoyed doing it for 24 years, through the ups and downs."

The ups and downs have been dramatic for St. John, a Republican who became a polarizing figure in recent years.

On Wednesday, his support-

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Edward B. St. John

WHO WILL BE NEXT?

Edward B. St. John, who has decided not to run for reelection after 24 years, said he endorses Thomas Gormley, a Republican, as the party's candidate. Gormley's experience as chairman of the Conservation Commission makes him qualified, St. John said. He endorsed Gormley over Francis G. Brennan, his longtime friend and campaign manager in 2005.

ST. JOHN: Supporters loyal, opponents fervent

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ers described him as a leader who changed the face of the town by adding parks and sewer systems, improving roads and town buildings and creating the well-equipped Public Works Department that constructed those projects.

St. John's detractors recalled embarrassing personal scandals that plagued him in recent years, including his admission that he lied about having doctoral and civil engineering degrees and a lawsuit in which he is accused of sexually abusing two teenage boys in the early 1990s.

William Stowell, head of the Republican Town Committee and a longtime ally of St. John, said he was sorry that recent events overshadowed St. John's more than 40 years of public service to Middlebury.

"There's more to Ed St. John than the last two years," Stowell said.

St. John's quest for the First Selectman's Office began in 1983, when he started as a challenger to Republican incumbent William P. Longo, who eventually dropped out of the race before St. John and his running mate forced Longo to a

primary. In the November election, St. John defeated his Democratic opponent George Hale III 1,545-845, considered one of the town's biggest election victories at the time.

Over the years, St. John became known for developing the Public Works Department, which built three town parks and transformed an old trolley line into the town Greenway under his watch. He encouraged the department perform construction for town projects rather than hiring outside contractors, an approach that was often criticized for the equipment purchases it required.

In May, St. John announced that he would step down as head of the Public Works Department, a position he held since 1984.

"Ed St. John was the driving force behind public works," said Michael J. McCormack, a Democrat who serves on the town's Public Works Committee. "Public works is what identifies Middlebury as a premium town to live in."

Elaine M.R. Strobel, a six-term selectman and friend of St. John, said the first selectman had foresight and vision in the numerous water and sewer projects he undertook.

"Ed didn't pave a road, dig it up two years later, then pave it again," she said.

Strobel said that St. John never made a profit from his position and that he taught her to "put Middlebury first."

But others believe St. John abused his powerful position. Fire Chief Paul J. Perrotti, who has clashed St. John in recent years, said St. John instituted the Fire Commission to punish the Volunteer Fire Department for not supporting him during the 2005 election.

"That was a personal thing that had a ripple effect on the department," Perrotti said.

Perrotti and St. John had a cordial relationship for years, but Perrotti said St. John turned against him after he complied with a Freedom of Information Act request that revealed St. John had signed letters as a doctoral degree holder, which he was later forced to admit he did not have.

Their relationship was further complicated because Neil Perrotti, the chief's brother, is one of the two men who accused St. John of abuse.

In 2006, St. John and Strobel voted to create a Fire Commission as an oversight board for the Volunteer Fire Department.

The department has insisted that Fire Commission has become mired in the department's day-to-day operations and recently has refused to recognize the commission.

Perrotti credited St. John with leading the Volunteer Fire Department, of which St. John was once chief, out of the 1960s by establishing its Tucker Hill Road Fire House.

But in recent months, Perrotti has said he'll have to wait for St. John's departure to accomplish anything.

"After 23 years of one regime, it's like an anvil taken off our chests," Perrotti said.

At age 64 in 2005, St. John faced his first challenge in eight years. He faced few contested races in his 24 years as first selectman.

Although St. John refused to be called a lame duck, he said comments from other town officials about waiting for a new administration have made it difficult for his administration to accomplish its goals.

St. John said he would be willing to serve the town in the future as a volunteer. He has no career plans after his term ends but expects that he will spend some time boating and caring for his 98-year-old mother.