

# The Campaign Business; Teacher and former entrepreneur Carl Adair says experience counts. That's why the Republican candidate hopes voters will elect him mayor of a city where Democrats traditionally rule.

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**T**his is the second of two profiles of the leading candidates for mayor in Baltimore's Sept. 14 Republican primary

Talk about shopping for votes. Needing some, Carl Adair heads to the supermarket.

Adair, a Republican running for mayor, is shaking hands outside the Stop, Shop & Save at Mondawmin Mall. Actually, he's standing in the parcel pickup lane, where Johnny Dow is loading groceries into the trunk of his car -- and complaining about the state of public affairs in Baltimore.

"I'm at a point where I don't even feel like voting. Nobody seems to make any difference," says Dow, a 49-year-old mechanic from West Baltimore. Then, looking up from the trunk and into Adair's face, Dow asks, "Where you been all this time?"

"Been in the business community," Adair says. "I'm a different breed than what you've got out there."

Seems Adair is not only shopping, he's selling. A veteran of several unsuccessful runs for office as a Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic town, he's selling his candidacy -- and, for him, that means selling a life story that begins on a truck farm in segregation-era Virginia, that wends through Baltimore's public schools and decades of business ownership.

"Once you find out from whence I came," he tells another voter, "I know you'll switch over to me."

Ask Carl Adair what he'd do about Baltimore's crime problem, and he says he'd crack down on drug dealers and encourage the police commissioner to press on with programs that have helped cut the crime rate. Ask him about the city's troubled school system, and he says it's up to the state, and not the mayor, to "fix them up," although he does call for disruptive students to be placed in crisis classrooms.

When the subject of real estate taxes comes up at a candidates forum, he tells voters, "I believe we are going to have to stop taking money out of people's pockets." But he offers few specifics for his proposed tax cut.

And while other candidates worry about the city's declining population, Adair volunteers an opposing opinion.

"You can quote me on this: If we can keep a base around 625 [thousand citizens] in this town, it will be a good population for Baltimore City," he says in a recent interview. "We don't need to be crowded. If we can keep a population of 625, 650 thousand, and get a good tax base, we'll be all right."

Democrats and Republicans alike may say the city is in a crisis state. But Adair says conditions are not so dire. He tells voters: "Why do you think the big hotels are being built downtown? Because there is no money in Baltimore? Don't fool yourself. Baltimore City is better than you think."

Perhaps Carl M. Adair has seen too many struggles in his 65 years to find the current conditions to be as bad as described. When he talks of wanting to be mayor, he talks of his past.

He talks of owning a chain of gas stations at a time when black businesses struggled for financing. And he talks of being the only full-time black teacher in a city junior high school, of rising to become a college dean and a member of government commissions.

These days, he teaches English to special-needs students at West Baltimore's Edmondson Westside Senior High School. He's also chairman of the board of trustees at Douglas Memorial Community Church.

Addressing the audience at St. Bartholomew's Church, site of a recent forum for mayoral candidates, he asks for their votes and says, "I come to you with a broad background."

Later, he says that he thinks he can win the Republican primary. And, even though Democrats outnumber Republicans 9-1 in Baltimore, he thinks he can defeat any Democrat in November.

"I have a shot against all of them. Let's face it, if you're talking about credentials, nobody can top this," he says. "Some of them are so young, they don't even know what I'm talking about. What have they done?"

## Growing up

Adair was raised in Exmore, a town on the Virginia side of lower Delmarva. His father, with the benefit of only a third-grade education, was a truck farmer who also operated a lunch wagon and a small bus service and established a small store with a single gasoline pump. Young Carl worked in the fields and worked that gas pump. His mother was a Republican, and Carl followed suit.

Adair says a high school principal played a key role in getting him a football scholarship to Norfolk State University, where he played the line -- weighing all of 180 pounds. He earned a degree there and, later, from Virginia State University and Coppin State College, he said.

Adair joined the Army in 1956 and eventually was stationed at Fort Meade. Discharged from active duty, he worked as a bricklayer in Baltimore and then as a teacher. He recalls that in 1959 he became the only black teaching full time at what was then known as Patterson Junior High School.

He tells voters how he marched on Washington with Martin Luther King Jr. Later, outside Edmondson High, he points to a maple across a parking lot and says, "I guess I was standing as close to Martin Luther King as I am to that tree."

He worked as a professor and dean of students at Coppin State. He operated four Amoco stations and a garage in Baltimore. After more than three decades in the business, he sold the stations in 1996 and returned to the public school system.

### Longtime Republican

For decades, Adair was a mainstay in Baltimore's vastly outnumbered Republican Party, but party leaders say he has been less active in recent years. He ran unsuccessfully for the House of Delegates in 1974 and ran four unsuccessful races for the City Council. In 1980, he was honorary co-chairman of the Reagan campaign in the city.

When he talks of Republican politics in Maryland, he talks of people like Harry A. Cole, who was the first black in the state Senate and the first black judge on the state Court of Appeals, and Charles McC. "Mac" Mathias Jr., the GOP moderate who represented Maryland in the U.S. Senate.

Adair's years in politics brought him appointments to the city planning and human relations commissions and to the city's Board of Elections Supervisors.

He invokes names from the last four decades of city politics to describe his vision, saying, "I'm taking a little bit of [Theodore R.] McKeldin, a little bit of [William Donald] Schaefer, a little bit of Kurt Schmoke."

Recalling his decision to make a run for mayor, he mentions another familiar name in city Republican politics: Samuel A. Culotta, veteran of no fewer than a dozen campaigns for office, including a successful run for the House of Delegates in 1954.

"Sam Culotta saw me at church this summer and said, 'Carl, what are you doing these days?' " Adair says. "I talked to my pastor. I talked to my wife. She said it was the right thing to do."

Culotta, still practicing law at the age of 75, says he has signed on as Adair's campaign manager. Another veteran city Republican, former Delegate Samuel Hopkins, has endorsed Adair.

"We want to get another Republican elected before we pass on. People have got to stop voting for people because of the party they're in."

Culotta, invoking the name of the city's last Republican mayor, says, "We're all remnants of the McKeldin leadership. Us old-timers, we're all for the man we've known for 30 years, maybe 40."

While leading Democratic candidates for mayor have raised as much as \$1 million in contributions, Adair's campaign makes do with barely \$3,000. As a result, his campaign is largely limited to shaking hands and

passing literature with the man and woman on the street, making phone calls and attending political forums.

At the forum at St. Bartholomew's, Adair says that the key to leadership is choosing effective advisers.

"A leader is one who can pick people who can get the job done," he says. "If he or she thinks they know it all, it's a joke."

At least one voter in the audience is impressed with Adair's approach to politics.

"He seemed to have a real level head," says Catherine Van Allen, a city schools teacher for 25 years who now works as a guidance counselor at Patterson High School. "He seems to have a lot of experience in a lot of different fields."

### Approaching voters

A few days later, Carl Adair heads to Mondawmin Mall for a round of campaigning. He wears a suit -- he's on his way to a dinner later in the evening -- as he mixes among the shoppers who seem eager to get their groceries and get home.

With him are his brother and his sister-in-law. His brother, Alvis V. Adair, says he always helps out with Carl's campaigns. After all, when Alvis won election to a Republican party position in Washington, D.C., Carl pitched in.

Carl approaches voters, addressing them in a quiet voice that still bears a Virginia drawl.

"I'm a businessman, educator and farm boy," he says, "I'm looking forward to helping somebody."

Goals Wilson, a retired shipyard worker and registered Republican, challenges the candidate: "How are you going to make it better?"

Adair tells him about his plan to meet with the police commissioner, about the need for a cut in the property tax rate. Wilson is unconvinced.

"The city doesn't have any money," he says. "These people tell you they can cut down on dope, or help education, but they never do anything."

If this crowd is anything like Baltimore in general, it is overwhelmingly Democratic. Johnny Dow, the man loading his groceries, says he is a Democrat -- adding, "But I can be independent."

"If a Republican can make the changes, it doesn't matter to me."

He's fed up. He wants to know what the black elected officials have done to help their black constituents.

What about the elderly African Americans who are virtual prisoners to urban violence?

"When you can't walk out of your house in your own neighborhood, when black people are your own worst enemy, you've got a serious problem," Dow says. "We're at a point where we want a change."

"We put all the Democrats downtown," he says. "What have they done for us?"

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