

# OUR CENTURY

## 1989

### AT A GLANCE

#### The political wall in council falls

After 16 years, Cleveland City Council had a new president-elect — one who had been one of the few critics of council President George Forbes and tax abatement. At an organizational caucus, Jay Westbrook outpolled James Rokakis with the help of black council members — and, though he denied it, Mayor-elect Michael White.

Councilman Dan Brady compared the change in council to a contemporary event: "We've seen the Berlin Wall of Cleveland politics come tumbling down."

A major piece of legislation remained for the outgoing council. It was the \$122 million in tax abatements for the Jacobs brothers' 60-story Ameritrust headquarters on Public Square. Council was demanding that the Jacobses promise \$6.1 million in aid to projects in the wards. The Jacobses offered \$500,000. Council accepted, 18-2. "This is a development we could all applaud," said ex-critic Westbrook.

White, who had also been critical of abatements, agreed.

The police drug scandal refused to go away. Five narcotics detectives were acquitted of drug trafficking. That prompted a demonstration in front of City Hall. The U.S. Justice Department said it would review the actions of the narcotics unit in allowing Arthur Feckner to sell a half-million dollars worth of cocaine in the Central neighborhood.

U.S. Rep. Louis Stokes started his own investigation. Mayor George V. Voinovich said the city would not cooperate, and Forbes backed that decision. But amid continuing criticism, Voinovich in July suspended Police Chief Howard Rudolph for 30 days.

"We're at a flashpoint in this neighborhood now," a shaken Councilman Michael Polensek said after a meeting at the Italian Cooperative Association. "I've never seen the anger and hostility that is out there."

On Jan. 20, in a fight between black and white youths in Collinwood, Shon Hickenbottom shot and killed Rocco Marcellino. Both were 18. Community Relations Director Earl Williams immediately organized community leaders to cool off tensions. Polensek and Councilman Roosevelt Coats traveled the streets to urge calm. Accompanied by his parents, Coats and black leaders, Hickenbottom surrendered to police.

The Plain Dealer observed: "Collinwood had walked the tightrope of an unsigned peace treaty negotiated on the streets, by telephone and in so many neighborhood meetings that those who participated could no longer recall the number."

In August, four black youths were wounded by shotgun blasts in Slavic Village. Councilmen Earle Turner and Edward Rybka organized a Good Friday march from black and white churches to Calvary Cemetery. Marchers carried signs that read, "No More Racist Violence," and sang hymns and civil-rights songs.

Councilwoman Fannie Lewis announced a meeting to promote racial harmony. Over Forbes' objections, six of the 11 white council members and five of the 20 blacks attended. They agreed to attend a church service in Lewis' Hough ward to pray for racial peace.

The Cavaliers swallowed hard and matched the Washington Bullets' \$5 million salary offer to Mark Price. He and his young teammates won 52 games, a team record (to be matched in 1993-94). They were 6-0 against the Chicago Bulls, their opponents in the first round of the playoffs. The series went to the deciding fifth game at the Coliseum. With the Cavs leading, 100-99, and time expiring, Michael Jordan leaped high and launched a 16-footer. In "Cavs: From Fitch to Fratello," Joe Menzer and Burt Graeff record the outcome: "End of game. End of season for the Cavs."

John McNamara — "Johnny Mac" — was the latest Indians manager. Tom Candiotti and Greg Swindell each won 13 games and Bud Black won 12. The Indians' earned run average of 3.65 was their best since 1976, as Russell Schneider notes in "The Cleveland Indians Encyclopedia." Unfortunately, their batting average was .245, the lowest since 1972, despite Joe Carter's 35 home runs and 105 runs batted in. The Tribe finished sixth, their sixth losing season in the last seven. But who was counting?

The stadium's other tenant, the Browns, looked like champs in Bud Carson's debut as coach. They beat the Pittsburgh Steelers, 51-0, and went on to a 9-6-1 record and another Central Division title. Then, with rookie Eric Metcalf running back a kickoff 90 yards, they outlasted Houston, 24-23. That put them in the American Football Conference title game for the third time in four years, all three against Denver.

No memorable description like "The Drive" or "The Fumble" applied to their 37-21 loss. The Broncos' John Elway threw for 385 yards and three touchdowns. Bernie Kosar, playing hurt, threw for two Browns touchdowns, but also was intercepted three times.

Ten-year-old Beverly Mihaljevic failed to come home from school on Oct. 29. Her parents, police and Bay Village neighbors searched frantically. Beverly's friends said a man had called her on the phone and told her that if she met him after school, he would take her shopping for a birthday present for her mother.

Three months later, her body was found in an Ashland County ditch. Now, 10 years later, the FBI and Bay police still are appealing for clues.

# The emergence of Mike White

By Fred McGunagle

His first act when he was elected mayor, George Forbes declared, would be to appoint a "drug czar."

"How do you spell drug czar?" he asked. "F-O-R-B-E-S!"

In the council chamber, 650 cheering supporters rose to their feet. At home, 90,000 Cleveland voters watched the videotape on the 6 o'clock news. WJW Channel 8 gave an amazing 12 minutes to the campaign kickoff of the 16-year Cleveland City Council president.

The other mayoral candidates had a chance to shine for 120,000 voters who watched the 10 and 11 o'clock news. All blew their chances to deliver pithy "sound bites." On WUAB Channel 43, Romona Robinson voiced the impression Forbes had hoped to create: "George Forbes is now being considered the front-runner."

Forbes recognized that crack cocaine had become the biggest issue in Cleveland. His strategist Gerald Austin, who had advised the Rev. Jesse Jackson in his 1988 presidential campaign, recognized that TV had become the way to reach voters.

After years of ignoring City Hall in favor of "soft news," all four TV news directors had, as usual, made the same decision: Politics is "good TV." Suddenly, TV crews took over council meetings. Forbes' rivals were slow to catch on.

The Oct. 3 primary shaped up, in effect, as a white primary and a black primary. Three white candidates were battling for the right to oppose Forbes in the general election. County Commissioner Tim Hagan had a lead in fund-raising, thanks to his connections with the Kennedys and other deep-pocketed Democratic donors. Municipal Court Clerk Benny Bonanno was running a traditional campaign, knocking on doors in high-turnout precincts. Ralph Perk Jr., the school board president, was a last-minute entry — to the dismay of Bonanno, since Perk appealed to ethnics.

There was one more candidate, though few gave him a chance. State Sen. Michael White figured to get few white votes and everybody knew Forbes had the black vote locked up. Still, White kept campaigning 16 hours a day, as he had since February. He shook hands on buses, then took another bus and shook more hands.

Forbes ignored the early joint appearances. A typical result: When the others appeared at a Hospital Association luncheon on Sept. 13, the TV news lead was that Forbes wasn't there. Channel 8's Bob Cerminara summed up the others: "Those who were at the luncheon today basically shared the same ideas."

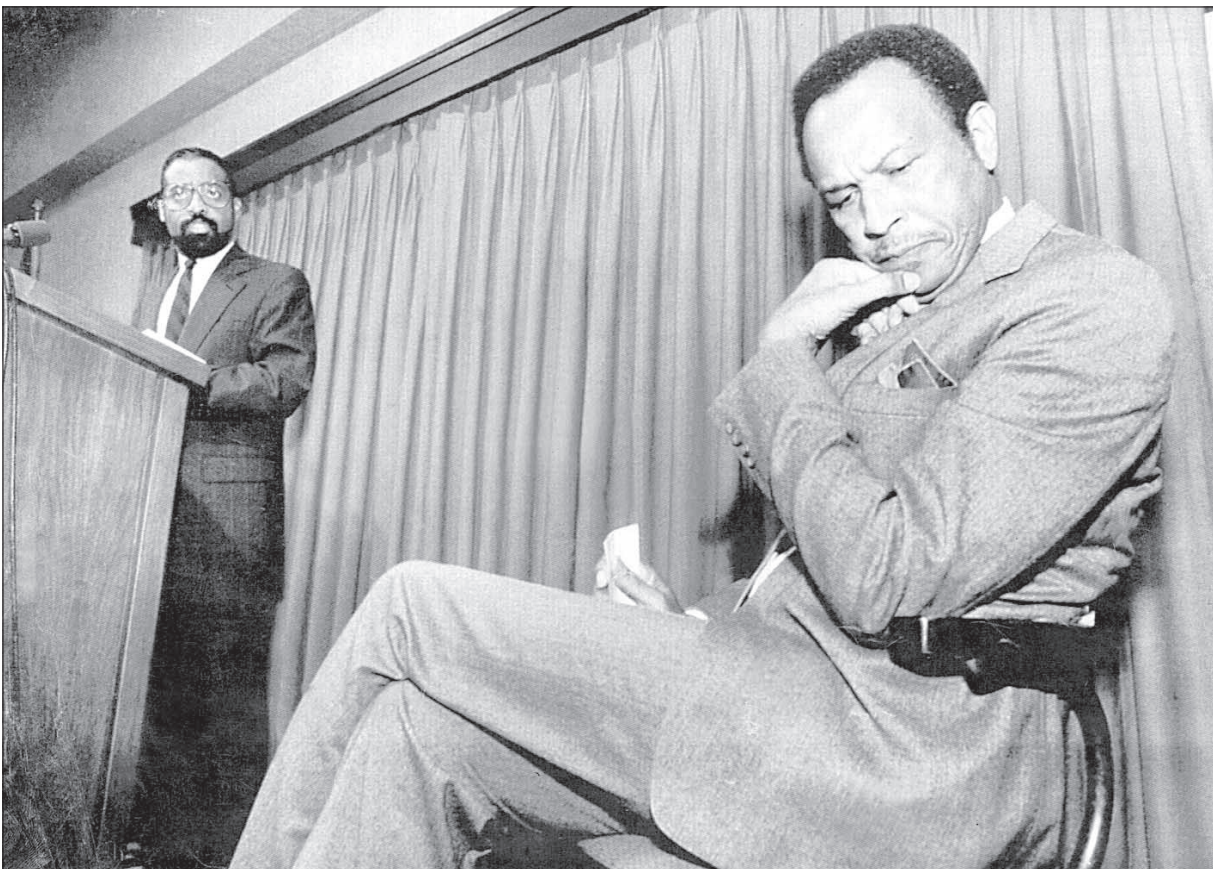
Forbes couldn't ignore three televised debates. It turned out he was not ready for prime time. He scowled and glowered on camera. When Perk talked about politicians who became wealthy in office, Forbes appeared to hang his head.

Gradually, one of the Faceless Four opponents began to attract attention. White scored points with his oratory and condemned those who pitted blacks and whites against each other. "The West Side is not the enemy of the East," he said in one televised debate. "What's an enemy of people on the East Side or West is people who sell drugs, teachers who don't teach, judges who aren't putting those drug pushers away."

He repeatedly used such triads: "The mayor must have the will. The mayor must have the vision. The mayor must have the commitment." It was the Old Testament cadence of the black church, and it stood out amid the botched sound bites of his opponents.

On Sept. 24, The Plain Dealer came out with a surprise: "Mike White for Mayor." Editorial page Director Mary Anne Sharkey wrote later that editorial board members feared they were throwing away their endorsement.

A poll published five days later was another surprise: Forbes 23 percent, White 16, Bonanno 13, Hagan 11,



PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTO

Above, George Forbes glowered through the City Club debate while, below, Michael R. White emerged from the pack. In the background are mayoral candidates, from left, Tim Hagan, Ralph Perk Jr. and Benny Bonanno.

Perk 4. Television news anchors held up The Plain Dealer for those who didn't get the paper and proclaimed that White was now a legitimate contender.

The vote count was similar: Forbes 46,000; White 31,000; Bonanno 28,000; Hagan 11,000; Perk 6,000. If Perk hadn't run, Bonanno would have gotten most of his votes and finished second.

As it was, White was now the favorite for November. The "black Cinderella" had won 24 percent of the white vote to 7 percent for Forbes, and figured to pick up most of the Bonanno, Hagan and Perk supporters.

Suddenly, money began to flow into White's campaign. So did charges that could have doomed him a week or two earlier. His first wife said he beat her. He was cited for nearly 200 housing code violations in properties he owned. Then his second wife said he beat her too.

Forbes dumped Austin and his "tough job, tough man" slogan. His new handler, William Silverman, ran commercials showing him playing with his grandson. On TV, a laughing, smiling Forbes freely admitted past mistakes.

In a debate on WKYC Channel 3, Forbes conceded, "I'm running more against the old George Forbes than against Michael White." He agreed with White on most issues. Told he had 30 seconds to close, he said to White, "You can have it." White, nonplused, said "George, how's the family?"

"Fine," answered Forbes. "I'll tell my wife you asked about her." At the end, they almost leaped across the table to shake hands. Then they walked in front of the camera and hugged.

It took White a while to realize he had been had. He called a press conference the next day to say, "I don't intend to let my opponent in the final few days cozy up to me. There are clear differences between the council president and me."

Everybody waited for Mayor George Voinovich to endorse Forbes, who had loyally protected him from criticism and talked up his candidacy for governor. Finally, Voinovich said he would make no endorsement. A Plain Dealer cartoon showed his statement written on a knife stuck through Forbes' back.

In the end, Forbes' favorite saying caught up with him: "What goes around, comes around."

White voters remembered his gibes at "honkeys" 15 years earlier on his WERE radio talk show. The classic line of the campaign was reported by council candidate Patrick O'Malley: At a senior citizens card party in Old Brooklyn, a woman in her 70s came up to White. "I don't care if you beat your wife," she said. "I'm going to vote for you anyway. I'm just not going to marry you."

The vote: White, 85,000; Forbes, 68,000. White carried every white ward, Forbes every black ward.

At One Cleveland Center, a crowd of hundreds chanted "Mike! Mike! Mike! Mike! Mike!"

The impossible dream — the one that White had dreamed since he was 14 — had come true.

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### LOOKING AT A YEAR

**April 19:** An explosion on the battleship Iowa kills 47 sailors, including Cleveland's Clayton Hartwig.

**March 24:** The worst oil spill in history begins, as the supertanker Exxon Valdez runs aground off the coast of Alaska.

**May 31:** Accused of violating con-

gressional rules, House Speaker Jim Wright resigns. A week later, he is succeeded by Rep. Thomas Foley.

**June 10:** The Rev. Jerry Falwell announces the disbanding of the Moral Majority.

**Aug. 24:** Pete Rose is banned from baseball for life for allegedly betting on games.

**Oct. 17:** An earthquake in San Francisco kills 66. The quake, registering a 6.9 on the Richter scale, causes a weeklong delay in the World Series.

**Nov. 8:** Douglas Wilder becomes the first black elected governor of a state, winning the Virginia gubernatorial election with 50.19 percent of the vote.

**Deaths:** Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Japan's Emperor Hirohito, author Robert Penn Warren, entertainers Bette Davis and Lucille Ball, artist Salvador Dali, boxer Sugar Ray Robinson, historian Barbara Tuchman.