

Sun makes fifth bid for council seat
By Patricia Jiayi Ho Staff Writer
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SAN MARINO - If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try and try again. City Council candidate Eugene Sun isn't letting multiple defeats get him down. He has decided to campaign for one of two seats in the March elections.

"You can't say I'm not sincere," said Sun, who makes his fifth bid this year.

Along with challengers Dennis Kneier, Stephanie Johnson and Benjamin Salvaty, he will run against incumbents Emile Bayle and Vince Filutze.

Although for Sun the glass is half full, some political observers say it is a tough, uphill climb for candidates whose names appear on the ballot too often.

"Politics is three strikes and you're out," said Jack Pitney, a professor of government at Claremont McKenna College. "You can find plenty of examples of politicians who won something on their third try, but after that, the odds grow steeper."

Too much name familiarity can lead to voter fatigue, Pitney said.

"There is definitely an eternal optimist out there," said Douglas Johnson, a fellow with the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at CMC.

Sun's efforts year after year "probably does convey dedication on his part, but I don't think that gets him any points," Johnson said. "Why waste a vote? People are reluctant to vote for someone who has lost repeatedly."

It may also get harder and harder to raise money, Johnson added.

Sun said funding his campaign is the last thing on his mind. The 61-year-old engineer-turned-real estate agent said he plans to lend himself money and raise what he can. He collected \$1,536 between Jan. 1 and 20 and lent himself \$988, according to campaign finance statements.

His previous runs were in 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2003. He chose to sit out the 2005 cycle, he said, to focus on fundraising for the new library.

Sun was born in the Sichuan province in China. After World War II, his family moved to Taiwan via Hong Kong. He speaks Mandarin and some Cantonese.

He moved to conservative San Marino in 1986 when his daughter entered the first grade. With some hesitation, he admits he is a registered Democrat. But, he says, sitting on the City Council is about community service, not politics.

Couched in the typical courteous San Marino fashion, Sun said it is time for a change.

"We owe a debt of gratitude to \ for their time and effort," he said. "But it's time for fresh blood, a fresher perspective. We have so many talents in our city, it's time for someone else ... to have the chance to serve."

Bayle is running for his third term and Filutze for his fourth. The city has no term limits.

The two similarly give kudos to their perennial challenger, but add that there is something to be said for experience as well.

"It's always good to have new blood, but they have to stand the test of an election," Bayle said. "The best man should be in that position."

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Filutze points out that he had attended Planning Commission and City Council meetings for over 20 years, missing only about a dozen of them.

"I have a history in the city that no one can match," he said.

With six candidates vying for two seats, it is hard to predict whether the vote will be fragmented and how that will play out for incumbents and challengers. The optimist tempers his tone.

"It's a wash," Sun said. "It's going to be a tough campaign."