

Karin Norington-Reaves Says Serving the People is What Really Counts Most

Candidate seeks run for Sixth Ward Aldermanic Seat

by Lesley R. Chinn

Some would think that as a three-year resident in the 6th Ward, Karin Norington-Reaves is still "wet behind the ears" on the issues.

But that wasn't the case last summer when Norington-Reaves put her com-

munity activism to the test when she notified residents about a gas company sending their representatives to solicit customers to participate in a program that locked in rates for five years.

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Karin Norington-Reaves

Norington-Reaves

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Impressed her desire to serve the people, residents felt that this was the kind of leadership that was missing. From that standpoint, Norington-Reaves believed she received the community's blessing to run for 6th Ward alderman.

Norington-Reaves, who believes her relatives and lifelong friends are her connection to 6th Ward issues, gives her the strength to carry out her mission to win. "I've had ties to the community all my life, but I just didn't grow up here," says the member of the Wabash, Indiana, and Michigan Block Club Association.

Norington-Reaves long list of credentials include her service as a lobbyist for the Citizens Utility Board; executive director of Teach for America's Chicago region; a trial attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice, and a staff attorney in the Maryland attorney general's office where she represented the child and adolescent division of the department of health and mental hygiene. Norington-Reaves is currently a part-

increase in consumer utility rights workshops to help people save money on their gas and light bills.

When it was mentioned that there are agencies that provide such services citywide and statewide, Norington-Reaves said the programs are underutilized. "With LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program), it's something like 20 percent of the people who are eligible and actually utilizing it," she noted. "So you've got this money built up and set aside for folks to use and people don't know how to access it."

By working with Teach for America, Norington-Reaves also mentioned that she was responsible for placing teachers in the 14 schools in the 6th Ward, citing Deneen Elementary and Robeson High School, as prime examples. Through her connections in this field, she wants to see more after-school programs created in the ward to help children stay off the streets.

Norington-Reaves believes that this challenge is not too big or too small. Through her interactions from constituents at numerous community meetings and on the streets circulating petitions, the aldermanic candidate found that respect, humility and accessibility is lacking.

To increase outreach, Norington-Reaves wants to create satellite ward offices outside the alderman's office

"I recognize the fact that there is a small budget that the alderman's office has to operate with but I think there are some creative ways to make that possible so you can truly have your finger on the pulse of what's happening in all the different segments of the ward," she explained. "Our ward is very diverse in terms of geographics, social economic levels, and education—there's a wide range of backgrounds out there and we have to make sure that we're accessible to everybody."

Norington-Reaves also wants to see the creation of community advisory councils to help better train and serve the people. "We have so many folks who have been professionals and we have to call upon pulling those resources together," she stated.

Asked if that was similar to the existing community councils that are comprised of these same active and retired professionals, Norington-Reaves said it is, but she wants to go a step further. "The option exists to strengthen the community councils, but I'm talking about something doing very specific training and truly give back to the community."

After speaking with other aldermen about how to obtain services and ensure that constituents' needs are met, Norington-Reaves says that the key ingredient is building relationships inside and outside the ward. "I

time professor at Loyola University School of Law, Institute for Health Law and a full-time director of school and corporate relations for Innovations for Learning.

Through these credentials, Norington-Reaves wants to see an

offices outside the alderman's office. She cited Kennedy-King College and Chicago State University or using another elected official's office within the ward as possible examples of access points for residents to reach the alderman.

ships inside and outside the ward. I think that an alderman needs to be a facilitator, mediator, and a negotiator," she stated. "You have to know when to compromise, but you also have to know when to stand firm."