

# 14th and U

BY TANYA SNYDER

## How Our Neighborhood Changed Southeastern Missouri Politics

### Fabulous 16

My favorite news tidbit of the month is this little item from the Department of Culture Clash. A fundraiser for a Democratic candidate for Congress held in a U Street bar led to wild allegations about his sexual orientation.

Upstart politician Tommy Sowers of southeastern Missouri is challenging Republican Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson in the November general election. Sowers got some impressive A-listers together for his shindig at Local 16, including former DNC Chair Howard Dean and former General Wesley Clark. He's got an uphill battle against the eight-term incumbent in a heavily Republican district, but he's giving it the old college try.

Within days of Sowers' Local 16 event, a letter to the editor appeared in his local paper, using the choice of venue for the fundraiser as a launching pad for making the case that Sowers is gay. After all, the letter writer says, Sowers held a fundraiser in the "notorious U Street corridor" – and then he goes on to correct himself – "Rather, it's famous for the homosexual community and notorious for everyone else." The letter questions "the judgment of a man seeking to represent the people of Southeast Missouri holding a fundraiser at a gay DC nightclub."

The letter is signed by Josh Bill, who, CQPolitics reports, used to work for Emerson's husband when he represented the district in Congress. Bill says in his letter that he discovered Local 16's supposedly gay nature from a gay and lesbian website called "Fun Maps," which includes Local 16 on its list of gay bars.

Right under the part of the letter where Bill talks about finding Local 16 on Fun Maps, he says, "Personally, I'm glad my father is not around to see what Tommy Sowers wants to do to his Marine Corps." Pretty blistering commentary. (Earlier in the letter, Bill says Sowers' only political positions are that he "supported Nancy Pelosi's health care

bill, and he supports an openly gay military." That, along with the fact that his Facebook page doesn't mention his marital status, is clearly grounds for outing Sowers in public.)

The brief notoriety of our fair neighborhood in the political sphere of rural Missouri may not end up having much effect on the election outcome, however. Before the Local 16 scandal ever surfaced, Emerson was beating Sowers in polls 71 percent to 18 percent.

### Why Bikeable City Measures Help Us All

The best thing about bicycle improvements in DC is that they don't just benefit bicyclists. They're also good for pedestrians who are tired of bikes whizzing past them on sidewalks too narrow to accommodate them. And they're especially helpful for drivers who get exasperated with bicyclists who weave between cars at a million miles an hour but still slow down the cars behind them when traffic is moving.

So whether you walk, bike or drive near 16th and U streets, DDOT has a gift for you.

First, they're putting in bike boxes on 16th Street on both sides of U Street. Bike boxes are

A cyclist at 16th and U, where there will soon be a bike box for her to wait for the light to change. Photos by Tanya Snyder



Local 16 featured prominently in Missouri's local politics this month.

painted onto the asphalt to designate where bikes can wait for the light to change. Cars wait behind the box. This helps avoid one of the most dangerous situations bikers commonly find themselves in – trying to go straight as the car to the left of you is turning right. A driver turning right from the right lane won't usually look to make sure there's no one coming up from behind since there's no traffic lane to their right – but cyclists often ride between parked cars and the right lane. Bicyclists have been killed this way in DC, including a young woman hit by a garbage truck turning right in Dupont Circle two years ago.

So, bike boxes give bikes a chance to go before cars start trying to turn right. The downside is that cars can't go right on red on intersections with bike boxes.

The other big change will be a contraflow lane on New Hampshire Avenue between T and W. It's the same idea as the new bike lane on 15th Street, where cyclists can ride against traffic. A sensor in the roadbed will know the biker is there and will give a signal allowing riders to cross to the bike box on 16th Street.

These new bike lanes will integrate into an ever-growing network of safe bike routes in the city. For now, though, it's just a pilot project. DDOT says, "The Federal Highway Administration has approved of this experiment. If it proves successful it will be incorporated into the reconstruction of U Street NW." No word on how long the experimental phase will last. ♦