

This doctor plans to heal new city's growing pains

BY SHERI CRAIG

"Call me Dr. Dobkin," says the future mayor of Mississauga. "It took a lot more work to get the doctor title than the mayor title."

Jan. 1 when the town of Mississauga becomes a city, Martin Dobkin, 31, will take over the responsibilities of public office. What sort of man is this new mayor?

"Dull," say some detractors. "he has limited imagination."

"Not true," reply several campaign workers. "Determined is more the word. Once he makes up his mind, he usually sticks with it."

"What kind of man am I?" Dobkin tilts his chair back behind the desk and runs a hand through his hair.

"I never think about things like that."

He rather reminds you of Dustin Hoffman in the movie, The Graduate. He's quiet, self-contained, essentially a private kind of person. But the graduate was confused and Dobkin, you get the feeling, knows where he's going.

He came from downtown Toronto, son of a furrier, the eldest of four boys. "We were poor," he explains about his childhood. "It wasn't something dreadful we were just very poor."

His father opened a business in Port Hope while the family was still in Toronto and then Dobkin big city rat race entirely and move everybody to nearby Cobourg.

Martin was 13 at the time and he recalls the move as a real culture shock, going from downtown Toronto to not even downtown Cobourg but a house a little ways outside the town.

"I hated it for three years and then I liked it. I wouldn't ever move back to a big city now"

Dobkin graduated from high school in Cobourg and went onto medical school at Queen's University to study there from 1960 to 1966. He interned for a year at the Montreal General Hospital, specialized in paediatrics the next year at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and then, looking for a job in private practice, he answered three ads, one for an office in Brampton, another in Oakville and the third in Cooksville. He chose Cooksville.

Meanwhile his brother's fiancée was talking about a nice girl who lived just down the street. Michele was from Casablanca, Morocco, had lived in Paris for two years and spoke French beautifully. Martin would have to meet her.

The brother's fiancée arranged a blind date. Martin mustered his high school French; Michele's English was hesitant. They married five years ago in June and now have three children, Edward, 4, Caroline 2, and Alain, six months.

Dobkin worked for two years for Dr. Ann Smith in Cooksville and then he decided to open his own practice. He bought a house in Applewood Hills, built a barbeque in the backyard, set up an office in his basement and opened for business.

So there he is a family doctor, well settled in the community. Most of his patients are his neighbours.

"I walk to half my house calls," he says.

Do you make many house calls?
"If I feel they are necessary."

And then all of a sudden last June, without any real notice or indication that he might even be interested, Dobkin announced he was going to run for mayor.

"What do you need it for?" his friends asked. "You don't have a chance. You don't know what you're doing."

But that's where they were wrong. Dobkin knew exactly what he was doing.

He had decided last Christmas. "Basically I have always been interested in politics. I had it in my mind that I was going to run for something someday. And I was getting more and more upset about the direction the town was heading. I thought I could recognize a real grass roots feeling for a change here."

"I figured I had at least a 50-50 chance to win."

So for six months Dobkin worked quietly, formulating his platform, recruiting campaign personnel, planning.

When he finally announced his candidacy, everything was arranged to the last detail. Dobkin knew the date his flyers would be printed, when signs would be ready and when they would be distributed to go on lawns. He held weekly press conferences to issue policy statements, everything carefully planned building up momentum for the campaign.

Really amazing organization.

"Yeah," Dobkin says matter-of-factly, "there was no other way I could ever have won."

Michele attended the first all-candidates meeting because she had never been to one before. After that she stayed home and left the campaigning to her

husband.

"I ran on my own platform and my own merits," Dobkin says. "My wife is self-conscious about her accent and besides she's busy with the kids. You can't keep getting babysitters all the time."

Michele had been hesitant about the whole idea of the election.

Most women are pretty conservative, they don't like any new ideas," Dobkin explains. "They like security and don't like the idea of disturbing things. At the beginning Michele didn't want me to run.

"Neither did my mother. She thought that if I ran and lost, it would look bad.

"I don't agree. If you don't try for things you'll never make it. You can't go through life worrying about losing."

He shrugs and toys with the stethoscope lying across his desk. Then he grins suddenly.

"You know if I actually realized what I was doing what I was tackling, I probably would never have had the nerve to run for the mayor's job. That's one of the advantages of being you. You're so naive you don't know what you are getting into.

"I never imagined what tremendous power and prestige the mayor has just because of his office."

The prestige part really doesn't appeal to the new mayor.

"I'm not going to have a chauffeur and a limousine," he says. "That costs Mississauga \$14,400 each year.

"I'm going to use my own car or take a cab. If we need a limousine, we can rent one.

"I just wouldn't feel comfortable riding in a limousine. It's not my personality."

What other plans do you have Your Worship, Dr. Dobkin? What do you plan to do with your new job?

"It's all down in my platform," he says ticking off items — development, citizen representation, protection for new home buyers, recreational facilities, election controls and tax relief for pensioners.

"Nothing in that platform can't be done realistically or hasn't already been done somewhere else. Details for everything have been carefully worked out.

"I couldn't say I was going to do something and then have someone stand up at a candidates meeting to ask me how and not give them a good answer."

The candidates meetings were tough, he admits. "I'm basically very shy person and it was difficult for me to get up in front of all those people to comment things and criticize." He shakes his head. "It really wasn't me there.

He's a private man. He doesn't like big parties. As mayor he plans to be selective about the invitations he receives.

"You've got to budget your time if you want to get things accomplished," he says. "Besides, I'm not really the socializing type."

He enjoys being at home with his wife and children, working around the house. He panelled the large recreation room in his basement and laid the wooden floor. He did everything, in fact, except the wiring.

"It took me two winters," he says. "Basically it was easy, just hard work physically. But once I start something I want to finish it."

He enjoys browsing through bookstores and collecting old books. He also collects lithographs. "Art has so many artists and themes. You're better to settle on one artist or one theme, to be selective, rather than to try and cover everything."

Most of his social life is spent visiting his family, one brother is a doctor in Willowdale, another is working on his masters degree, the third is studying law at the University of Windsor; his parents live in Toronto now. And visiting Michele's family. She has seven brothers and sisters living in Toronto.

The Dobkins keep a religious home, attend synagogue services regularly. He is a member of B'nai B'rith in Toronto.

"And there's just not much time for anything else."

He wants to keep his medical practice, at a much reduced level. If that isn't possible he plans to

give it up entirely.

He has already taken a three year leave of absence from his position as Peel County coroner. He was appointed coroner in 1972 and conducted 169 investigations and six inquests in a little over a year's time.

"The inquests helped me," he says. "You're sitting there like a judge and have to listen to every word from every witness. If I hadn't had the experience with inquests I would have been apprehensive about conducting council meetings.

Dobkin knows he is going to find politics frustrating. "You have to sit down and discuss all your moves and intentions, to debate everything and sometimes debates get so picky.

"Doctors are used to making individual decisions all the time. And very rarely does any one question any of those decisions."

But don't infer from this that Dobkin is already fed up with politics. He intends to stay involved.

"Do I have plans past this term of office? Publicly, no." He chuckles. "Privately, I don't want to say.

"I may never run again, although I'm interested in provincial politics. But politics is more than just skill. It's a matter of luck, of being in the right place at the right time."

He swivels around in his chair. "I'm here right now."

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