

# TED KENNEDY JR., KEEPING IT LOCAL

*Ted Jr. follows his own path in race for state Senate seat*

**By Lisa Reisman**  
lisareisman27@gmail.com

In the weeks following his April 8 announcement that he was throwing his hat into the ring to represent the 12th District of the state Senate, Ted Kennedy Jr. met with each of the first selectmen in the six towns of the district.

"I see my role as a collaborative one," said Ted Jr., as he is known, in an interview earlier this month.

"I think we need to get Hartford to pay more attention to small towns and I wanted to hear from their leaders which issues were important to them."

It was the reaction of First Selectman Fillmore McPherson of Madison that signaled the resistance that Ted Jr. might encounter in the months ahead. While describing the 52-year-old as a "very engaging and friendly young man" in a telephone interview, the straight-talking McPherson issued a terse "no comment" when asked if he could envision the two working together.

Maybe the last name, with all its dazzle and glare, prompted the

non-answer. Or the oft-repeated suspicion that the Kennedy scion is planning to use his experience in the state Senate as a mere "stepping stone to higher office," as his opponent Bruce Wilson implied in a press release last week.

If that's the case — if he views the position as a sort of two-year internship before going on to the seat in Congress dictated by his family coat of arms — he's not letting on.

Quite the contrary. The first-time candidate seemingly pulsates with energy and optimism at the prospect of working on the state level.



Bonnie Fitch, of Northford, wears a vintage Kennedy campaign hat as she is greeted by Ted Kennedy Jr. at the annual SARAH gala at Woodwinds in Branford recently.

MELANIE STENGEL  
— NEW HAVEN  
REGISTER

TED JR. » PAGE 3

# Ted Jr.

FROM PAGE 1

"Connecticut is a small state with a long history of avoiding toxic rhetoric and partisan gridlock," the Wesleyan graduate and 25-year-old Branford resident said. "The benefit is that we're able to decide issues that members of Congress can't agree on, like initiatives in health care. Which means we're that much more likely to get things done."

As for his storied name: "I think people will judge me based on the person I am," said the father of two and husband of Kiki Kennedy, a Yale psychiatrist. As if to underscore this point, he staged the interview at a no-frills, nondescript business park and granted it to a local reporter after having turned down a host of national news services, staying true to his stated intention to keep his campaign homegrown and free from outside interests.

About the only trace of formality, in fact, was his pinstriped suit; he would act as honorary co-chair, along with his wife, at a dinner to benefit the SARAH Foundation, an organization for people with intellectual and other disabilities, directly after the interview.

That Ted Jr. would lend his name and support to causes like the SARAH Foundation — as well as childhood literacy, the recognition of excellence in nurses, and the rights of disabled veterans, among others — seems only natural. After all, the trademark shock of hair, the boyish charm, the keen intel-

ligence and, not least, the civic duty imbued in his family fabric, seem tailor-made for those roles.

Still, the newly-nominated Democratic candidate for the 12th District seat, it appears, is no typical Kennedy. According to Mark Gallucci, executive director of the Center for Disability Rights, the loss of his leg to bone cancer at the age of 12 "caused Ted to become a stronger person and a more sensitive one," enlightening him to the needs of others and altering the generational call to public service from political figure into champion for the disabled.

"I remember people gawking at me because I had no hair because of the chemotherapy and I remember seeing the families of other kids who were sick like me struggling to make ends meet," said Ted Jr. "That was when I resolved to myself that I would do something with my life to help those who were left behind and forgotten."

Hence, his work at the Yale School of Medicine in the early 1990s, directing the New Haven Lead Safe Home Project which provided medical aid to children afflicted with lead poisoning and the intellectual deficits it caused. Sharing an office with him during that time, Dottie Needham, a retired pediatric nurse, recalled being "struck by the seriousness of a young man not yet settled, yet seemingly dedicated to making lives better for others."

Jennifer Jackson, president and CEO of the Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA), where Ted Jr. worked following his 1997 graduation from UConn Law

School and a stint at the New Haven law firm Wiggin & Dana, had a similar take. "At CHA, he was a leader who really cared about finding ways that hospitals could improve care and create better access for their patients," she said in an email.

What distinguishes the Epstein Becker & Green health care attorney, self-proclaimed soccer dad, and regular at the Goodspeed Opera House is not just that he's withstood the pressure to run for public office until, as he told the Huffington Post in 2009, the day comes that "my children will not want to hang out with me anymore."

It's also his understated approach. "I certainly have some ideas," he said, "but I've got a lot to learn which is why I want to talk to as many people as possible, to hear their points of view, their concerns."

Not to mention that his own ideas, it seems, have formed not from the suggestions of a political handler but, organically, from his life and experience. The man who spent 13 years commuting on Metro-North from Branford to the Manhattan-based Marwood Group, a company that offers objective advice to corporations on trends in health care, believes the state should invest in straightening the rails to enable a one-hour train ride between New Haven and New York.

"Think about it," he said, leaning forward in his chair, his eyes alight with enthusiasm. "It would attract innovative companies and dramatically increase activity in New Haven and property values on the Shoreline."

From his work advising hospitals and health-related organizations, he believes that people should not be forced into nursing homes because of financial constraints but have the option to age in place in their own homes; "that kind of policy is not only good for the individual but for the taxpayer," he said.

Above all, he believes in equal rights and opportunities for all. "People don't want hand-outs," he said at the SARAH Foundation benefit, in thanking employers for giving jobs to those with intellectual disabilities. "When you offer someone a job, you offer them their freedom because you offer them their independence and self-determination and self-esteem."

All of which might not be convincing enough for those skeptical of a Kennedy running for state office. But it seems a risk that Ted Kennedy Jr. seems willing—even eager—to embrace.

Kennedy ran unopposed for the Democratic nomination in the race for the seat long held by retiring state Sen. Ed Meyer, D-Guilford. He will face Republican Bruce Wilson Jr. in the race. Wilson, a member of the Madison Board of Education, announced his candidacy nearly two weeks ago.

The 12th District includes Branford, Durham, Guilford, Killingworth, Madison and North Branford.

*Editor's note: A profile on Bruce Wilson, the GOP candidate for state senator in the 12th District is planned to run soon.*