

Hackel's likely win leaves door open, Interest stirs in sheriff's successor

If the past is any indication, Macomb County should have a new sheriff early next year.

Three-term Sheriff Mark Hackel, who has been the top vote-getter in the county in the past two general elections, is expected to easily defeat his Republican and Libertarian opponents for county executive on Nov. 2.

His victory would require the county Elections Commission to appoint Hackel's replacement -- and that's setting off fevered speculation about who will be the new sheriff.

Only one candidate, Sheriff's Department Sgt. Dave Willis, has raised his hand publicly.

"I've spent more than half of my life serving the public, and I think the next step should be sheriff," said Willis, 43, a self-proclaimed independent Democrat whose father and grandfather were in law enforcement.

Hackel criticized Willis for publicly campaigning for the job, saying, "It's premature for people to even talk about running because I haven't won the election yet.

"You never know what's going to happen," Hackel said. "It's still up to the voters."

The county Elections Commission is made up of Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith, Macomb County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh and Circuit Court Judge Mark Switalski, all Democrats. Their choice for sheriff would serve through 2012.

Political analysts expect a barrage of candidates to run for sheriff in the November 2012 general election.

Among those interested in the job, or believed to be, are: county Commissioner Phil DiMaria, Utica Police Chief Michael Reeves, Eastpointe Police Chief Michael Lauretto, state Sen. Alan Sanborn, former Shelby Township Supervisor Ralph (Skip) Macerone and Capt. Anthony Wickersham, the sheriff's chief of staff.

If elected, Hackel said he has a responsibility to endorse the person he wants to replace him.

"For me, it's not about politics," said Hackel, who has distanced himself from the inner circle of the county's Democratic Party because of its growing partisanship. "If and when that time comes, it is incumbent on anyone in leadership to find good future leaders."

In the general election, Hackel faces Republican Randell Shafer, a retired Army officer, and Libertarian candidate Erin Stahl, a former St. Clair Shores councilwoman.

Hackel ran unopposed in the Aug. 3 primaries.