

Top dog status takes time: professor

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

Big mistake
That's what Aurora mayoral candidate Nigel Kean called his brash 1994 bid for mayor without any political experience under his belt.

"One of the dumbest things I ever did," chuckled Mr. Kean, who is now taking on Mayor Tim Jones for the town's top job after serving as a councillor for the past six years.

"I think I've learned my lesson. I've sat back and listened. You've got to serve your time."

Mr. Kean may have seen the light, but other York Region political neophytes are determined to skip climbing the ranks in favour of instant top dog status.

Martha Hall Findlay, former federal Newmarket-Aurora candidate, is the first declared leadership contender for the federal Liberal party even though she has never spent time as an MP nor even a backbencher let alone a cabinet minister.

"We have such an opportunity right now. I think a lot of people are saying we need new faces," she said.

Meanwhile, Vaughan's Gino Ruffolo has declared he'll try to unseat Mayor Michael Di Biase in November's municipal elections.

Kleinburg resident Robert Craig and Georgina resident Peter Juras are mulling over similar bids.

Such leadership wannabes face an uphill battle, York University political

science professor Robert Drummond said.

"They have less of a chance of success unless there's something that marks them off as a particularly accomplished person in some other realm," said Mr. Drummond, the university's dean of arts.

Even Pierre Trudeau became leader fairly quickly, but he did put in time as an MP.

It's not impossible to win the leadership of a federal party without winning an election, but Mr. Drummond has his doubts.

"It would be naive to presume never having served in any political office you could serve as leader. Not impossible, but naive," he said.

"I'm trying to think, are there any people who have come full blown out on to the public stage without anybody knowing about them? I have a hard time thinking of any."

But Ms. Hall Findlay dismisses Mr. Drummond's concerns.

While never elected, she pointed out she ran for office, narrowly losing to then-Conservative candidate Belinda Stronach in the 2004 election.

When Ms. Stronach later crossed the floor, Ms. Hall Findlay stepped aside as the Newmarket-Aurora's Liberal candidate to allow Ms. Stronach to assume the candidacy.

That aside, Ms. Hall Findlay believes it may be to her benefit not to be shackled with the baggage of being a career politician.

"There are some people who have been politicians since their teenage years. I think you see a lot of politics breeds politics."

As warring Liberals try to untangle themselves from a decade of Jean Chretien loyalists versus Paul Martin supporters, Ms. Hall Findlay said it's time for the party to choose a leader not associated with either camp.

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