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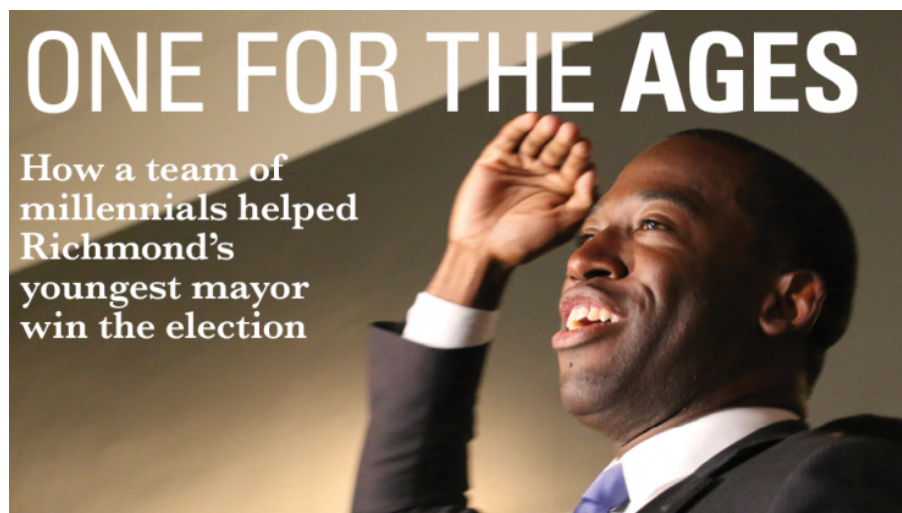
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THIS WEEK IN SPORTS

Photo by Eric Marquez

To the average person, the fate of the Levar Stoney mayoral campaign may have looked grim six months ago. In the beginning, only one in 10 people knew his name.

Despite his stacked resume – former Secretary of the Commonwealth and the youngest member of Governor Terry McAuliffe's administration in 2013 – 90 percent of Richmonders heard “Levar Stoney” and had one response:

“Who?”

Stoney, now the mayor-elect, was running in a eight-man race for the city's top leadership seat. Some of his opponents were formidable from the start — notably, former state delegate Joe Morrissey, former Venture Richmond executive Jack Berry, former city council president Michelle Mosby and former city councilman Jon Baliles.

Morrissey, Mosby, Berry and Baliles were well known throughout the community, and all ranked higher than Stoney in the first public opinion polls released in September.

“When you start off with one in 10 people knowing your name, on the pathway to victory it can become very discouraging,” Stoney said. “You have people telling you you're going to lose, which is why you have to work that much harder and stick to the plan.”

That first poll, however, found that 38 percent of likely voters were undecided. Despite the poor ranking, Stoney and his young, but experienced, campaign team were not discouraged.

They had a plan.



Baseball builds on winning culture

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The 2017 VCU baseball season begins Feb. 17 in Tallahassee, Florida where the Rams will begin a three-game weekend set against perennial College World Series contenders Florida State University. Stacked from top to bottom, this

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The campaign staff included manager Hannah Burke, 26, communications director Matt Corridoni, 27, and field director Kevin Zeithaml, 23. All had previously worked together on the short-lived presidential bid of Maryland's Democratic Governor Martin O'Malley.

Zeithaml said working on the O'Malley campaign prepared them well for this one; the team already knew first-hand what it felt like to have a lack of name recognition.

"We knew there was a way to get Levar's name out," Zeithaml said.

While the campaign team may have come in prepared, they still recognized a win would be no easy task. Zeithaml said his goal each week was to simply make more headway than the last.

"I was about slow progress," Zeithaml said. "You basically spend months and months banging your head against the wall and it's not until October that you begin seeing the cracks."

So why choose to take on such an endeavor?

For Burke, the decision came after spending eight months as deputy finance director on O'Malley's presidential run, and she decided a city election would be her next step.

"Cities are where your elected officials can make the biggest difference, both good and bad. They have the biggest impact on their citizens' life day in and day out than any federal and statewide office," Burke said.

Previously, Burke had worked with Stoney during McAuliffe's 2013 gubernatorial campaign, and she recounted his "remarkable" ability to remember every single name of the staff, volunteers and random activists along the way to McAuliffe taking office.



Rams take the Atlantic 10 by storm

February 6, 2017



Flyers bring Rams down to earth

February 6, 2017

FROM THE OPINION SECTION

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

LTE: Coach K

"Anyone who worked on the McAuliffe campaign will tell you that Levar Stoney was the guy that was making everything happen," Burke said.

Once Stoney brought Burke on, the team began formulating a three-step plan. Step one was to increase name recognition through accounts of Stoney's personal background.

The mayor-elect was the son of teenage parents and raised by his grandmother. He stood in the free and reduced lunch line throughout school and became a first generation high school and college graduate when he earned his diploma from James Madison University in 2004.

Burke said that while Stoney has an inspirational story, it's not an unusual one. Rather, it's one many Richmond citizens can relate to.

"We were having conversations about Levar while knocking on doors...We'd ask, 'Hey, do you know anything about him?' Let me introduce you to him," Burke said. "We were building a foundation."



Illustration by Carson McNamara

In the fall, when Richmonders began paying more attention to the mayoral candidates, the Stoney campaign team implemented their next step: television ads.

"We knew we needed to put together the resources to get me an extended period of time on broadcast and cable television. We knew that everything else we did would amplify that," Stoney



I now pronounce
you, Church and
State



Putting Trump's
executive order in
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COMICS

said.

Once the city of Richmond knew his name and what he stood for, the final step was to convince people why they should vote Stoney for mayor.

“We started telling people what things we would do for them, and translating that to why they should vote for him,” Burke said.

With their combined experienced at a national campaign level, Stoney and his staff knew there was plenty of room for movement in the campaign’s final weeks — but nothing could have predicted the bizarre slew of events that riddled the last two weeks prefacing the election.

On Oct. 28, the Richmond Times-Dispatch published an article recounting one of Morrissey’s former legal clients alleging Morrissey, then-frontrunner of the mayoral race, had pressured her for sex and nude photos after agreeing to a reduced retainer fee.

Five days later, the Democratic Party of Virginia took legal action against Morrissey on Nov. 2 after his campaign sent out a “misleading” mailer. The same day, city councilman Jon Baliles withdrew his candidacy in an attempt to not split the vote and risk Morrissey winning the mayoral seat.

“While there are other candidates who can ably fill the mayor’s job duties, there is one who simply cannot,” Baliles stated in the announcement he was withdrawing from the mayoral race. “Regrettably, that candidate’s selfishness and stunts only grow with the approach of Election Day. I can no longer risk splitting votes with other candidates if it means electing someone who so plainly cares only about himself.”

On Nov. 5, Baliles announced his formal endorsement for



Stoney, his former rival.

“My endorsement of Levar Stoney for mayor comes down to my belief that he best represents the next generation of leadership for our city that will work collaboratively with others to make the best decisions,” Baliles said in a statement.

Stoney said Baliles’ endorsement was the biggest of the election, and maybe he was right. By October, roughly a third of voters were still undecided, according to a ChamberRVA poll. While they may have been unsure who they would vote for, seeing who Baliles planned to vote for pushed many of them in Stoney’s direction.

“They thought if I can’t choose a candidate, but this guy who I respect has, then maybe that’s the direction I should go in too,” Burke said.

Burke added that at the time, there was plentiful negative buzz going around from the presidential election. More than a dozen women had come forward accusing President-elect Donald Trump of sexual assault, and tension was steadily increasing as Nov. 8 quickly approached.

In contrast, Burke said the Baliles endorsement was a positive story.

“It was a proactive decision, it wasn’t a scandal induced decision,” Burke said. “I think that sort of gave a burst of momentum at the end.”

Meanwhile, the Times-Dispatch story caused the Morrissey campaign to regroup and restrategize their next step, but the Stoney campaign remained on course.

Burke said while her team will never be able to quantify the exact impact of the “October surprises” on Stoney’s win, she



said she thinks by election day people had decided they didn't want more drama in the headlines.



Stoney said his team was aware from day one that voters were looking for an alternative to Morrissey and by sticking to their three-step plan, the campaign allowed themselves to be presented as that alternative.

“What happened to my opponent may have surprised the entire electorate, it may have surprised us, but we would not have been able to capitalize on that campaign’s mishap if we didn’t stick to our plan,” Stoney said.

While these events certainly didn’t hurt Stoney’s campaign, the team was confident of a win despite changes to their opponents’ course.

Stoney said he and his team spoke on the issues that a new generations of Richmonders really care about, from a new approach to public education to changing the culture of City Hall.

“We talked about how it took someone who wasn’t under the establishment of Richmond, of someone who came from the outside, who would bring a new approach,” Stoney said.

To Burke, Stoney lives in the future and is not tied down to the political and financial establishments of the city’s past. At the end of the day, voters wanted something to vote for.

“They wanted something that inspires them, they want something they believe in,” Burke said.

While a young campaign team and candidate certainly didn’t hurt Stoney’s chances for a win, Burke believes it was their staff’s non-stop energy and commitment that earned them a victory.

“Energy was the key. If you don’t have that drive, that hunger, that energy, it’s very very hard to get everything done that you need to,” Burke said.

Stoney announced his transition team on Nov. 23 that will prepare for his inauguration on Dec. 31. The transition team consists of more than 40 leaders representing all aspects of the Richmond community.

Despite the big team helping prepare him for the mayoral seat Stoney said his “first order as mayor” will be to marry two of his friends on Jan. 1, 2017.

“I think people believed in our message. They saw we were something different and offered something new,” Stoney said.

ONLINE EDITOR



Maura Mazurowski

Maura is a senior pursuing degrees in cinema and mass communications. This is her second year at the CT; prior to joining transferring to VCU, Maura was the news editor for two years at Virginia Tech’s student newspaper, the Collegiate Times. Maura has contributed

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BALILES

CARSON MCNAMARA

ELECTION 2016

LEVAR STONEY

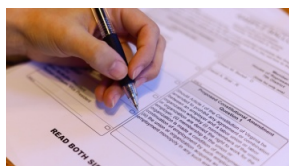
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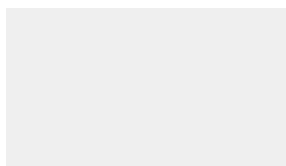
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