

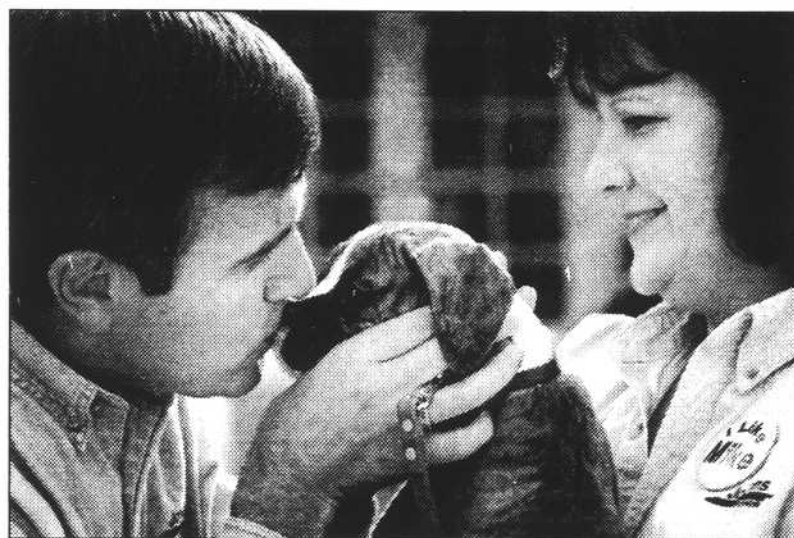
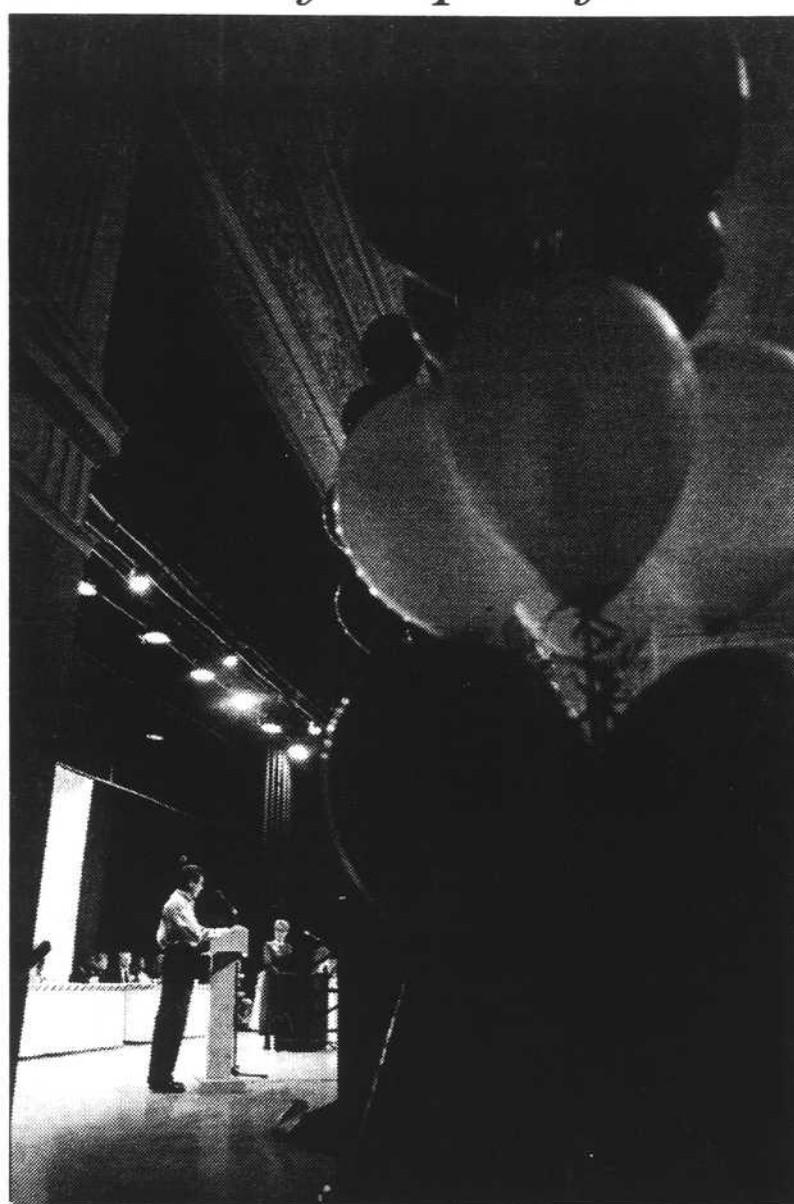
"(Johanns) never loses his sense of respect for the



PHOTOS BY MATT MILLER/DN
ABOVE: WHEN THEIR BUS pulled into an Albertson's parking lot in Bellevue, Johanns and supporters were mildly surprised — about 50 supporters and a decorated flatbed trailer greeted them.

RIGHT: MIKE JOHANN'S SPEAKS at a forum in Omaha at the last stop before heading back to Lincoln. Johanns and his Democratic opponent, Bill Hoppner, had an opportunity to give brief statements about their stances on issues such as Initiative 413.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A BOXER PUPPY GETS a kiss from gubernatorial candidate Mike Johanns at the Arbor Lodge in Nebraska City. Johanns' wife, Stephanie, right, accompanies him to every campaign event she can while still working full time.



Johanns' quiet intensity wins supporters' praise

By **BRIAN CARLSON**
Staff writer

Minutes before this year's final governor's debate in Kearney, a few dozen of Mike Johanns' supporters gathered in a small outdoor amphitheater to await their candidate's arrival.

A few yards away, a stereo was blaring the song from the Michael Jordan Gatorade commercials: "I wanna be, I wanna be, I wanna be like Mike ... if I could be like Mike. ..."

When Johanns arrived, the crowd burst into cheers. The Lincoln mayor and Republican nominee for governor, who looked a little embarrassed by the song, shook a few hands and then proceeded to address the group.

"Well, are you ready for a debate?" he asked his audience, raising his voice only slightly from its normal monotone and making a halfhearted thrust of his right arm into the air.

That's about as animated as anyone will see Johanns. Candidate Johanns, like Mayor Johanns, is no firebrand.

"He is a true introvert, and I think that surprises some people," his wife, Stephanie, said.

Those who know Johanns and have worked with him — supporters and opponents — mostly describe him as a nice guy, an intelligent public servant who immerses himself in the issues and includes many people in the decision-making process.

They also say that, while he pos-

sesses a quiet intensity, Johanns is mostly reserved.

"He is pretty low-key," said Mary Johnson, a former aide to Johanns. "Maybe somebody's image of a politician is of someone a lot more flamboyant and extroverted.

"But with Mike, you see the true person. He never, ever loses his cool, and he never loses his sense of respect for the people he's working with."

Johanns said his intensity is both a strength and a weakness.

"I'm enormously intense, and that's probably not going to change much," he said.

"I try never to demand more of others than I demand of myself, but sometimes that's a lot."

Change of mind

But the same Johanns qualities praised by supporters — his calm personality and his willingness to listen to other viewpoints and sometimes change his mind — are interpreted by political opponents as weak leadership skills, indecisiveness or political opportunism.

"I actually like Mike," said state Sen. Don Wesely, a candidate for mayor of Lincoln. "I think he's a very nice

guy. But I don't think he has been as strong a leader as we need at this point in Lincoln."

Wesely, a Democrat, said Johanns' inclusive style often leads to "a painfully slow process," as with ongoing city development projects.

At times, Wesely said, Johanns solicits diverse opinions to create the illusion of inclusiveness, even when he has already chosen a course.

"I think there's a facade — an image — that he wants to bring everyone into the process," he said. "But there are a lot of people who feel left out of the process."

Wesely noted that Johanns is a former Democrat who in 1984 ran for the chairmanship of the Nebraska Democratic Party. In the

late 1980s, Johanns switched party affiliations.

Johanns' opponent, Democrat Bill Hoppner, has consistently attacked Johanns for his stance on Initiative 413, a ballot measure that would place a constitutional limit on the growth of state and local taxation and spending.

Johanns, who supported the measure during the GOP primary campaign and signed the petition putting it on the ballot, later changed his mind.

Election '98	
Name:	Mike Johanns
Party:	Republican
Age:	48
Occupation:	Mayor of Lincoln.
Hometown:	Born and raised in Osage, Iowa.
Education:	Graduated with a bachelor of arts degree from St. Mary's College in Winona, Minn., in 1971. Earned law degree from Creighton University in Omaha in 1974.

JON FRANK/DN

Hoppner said the decision was politically motivated. Johanns supported the measure during the primary campaign to appeal to fiscal conservatives, Hoppner charged, then decided to oppose it during the general election campaign to broaden his appeal.

But Johanns said he changed his mind when he learned the amendment's language would not allow the state to return excess revenues through property tax cuts.

"I have no difficulty with the spending discipline contained in 413," he said. "(Hoppner) opposed it because he's against spending discipline."

But Wesely said Johanns' change of mind was "just pure politics."

"His flip-flop on that was one of the most blatant I've ever seen."

Downtown crown

Among Johanns' most impressive accomplishments in his eight years as mayor, supporters say, is his commitment to business development.

Polly McMullen, president of the Downtown Lincoln Association, said

the man affectionately known as "Mayor Mike" had helped revitalize the downtown area.

When Johanns became mayor in 1991, she said, downtown buildings had a high vacancy rate. Business leaders used to joke about how much plywood they would need to board up unused offices, she said.

But at Johanns' instigation, the city planted "seed money" in the downtown area. Projects such as parking garages helped attract businesses to downtown Lincoln, McMullen said.

"He has been such a champion for downtown Lincoln," she said. "We're really enjoying the fruit today of some risks he took in his first term."

Brad Korell, chairman of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, agreed that Johanns' policies had encouraged business development.

Johanns displayed strong leadership during his first term in overseeing the merger of the city's economic development department with the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, a change that proved successful, Korell