

# The Florida Times-Union

Jacksonville, FL, Copyright 1995

Sunday, July 9, 1995

130th Year — Number 190 — 19 Sections — 204 Pages

The score in Tallahassee was 22-19 Florida, with 26 seconds left. Gary threw a 45-yard pass and hit Lane Fenner in the end zone. But Fenner was called out of bounds. Florida won. In his law office, Gary has a framed photo of Fenner's reception. Fenner is clearly in bounds.

"It's tough to be famous for an incomplete pass," Gary laughs. His last two years at FSU were plagued by injuries, sabotaging his hopes to play professional ball.

At the same time, Steve was playing basketball for Princeton. This is where he met future pro basketball star and Sen. Bill Bradley, D-N.J., for whom Steve will hold a Jacksonville fund-raiser this fall. But unlike Gary, Steve spent more time on the bench than playing and was more intensely focused on his studies than on sports.

In 1974, after three years with a Jacksonville law firm, Steve was elected to the state House of Representatives. He retained his seat until 1985, when he stepped down to run for governor. His stint in the Legislature was marked by an exemplary grasp of budgetary issues and a track record of liberal votes.

"On social issues, I was a liberal," Steve says. "At the same time, I was very concerned with the size of government. I'm an egalitarian, a libertarian, a moralist and a freemarket economist." While he led the charge on two Save Our Rivers bills to clean up Florida waterways, some of his other positions were more controversial. He supported decriminalization of marijuana, opposed the death penalty and was pro-abortion rights.

In the gubernatorial race, his contender for the Democratic nomination, Jim Smith, hammered away at Pajcic relentlessly on these issues. When Pajcic won the nomination, Republican candidate Bob Martinez picked up Smith's line of attack on Pajcic.

Smith, who changed parties after the election and became Martinez chief of staff, is credited with playing a key role in Pajcic's defeat — both for his bitter

campaign and for not pulling his supporters behind Pajcic.

"There were some underhanded things that hurt my candidacy," said Smith, who went on to serve as Florida secretary of state and attorney general. "There were phone banks into black neighborhoods saying I was racist and a letter to the South Florida Jewish community saying I was anti-Semitic."

Pajcic responds, "I never saw the letters, and I never heard about the phone calls. I don't know that that ever occurred."

## Giving back

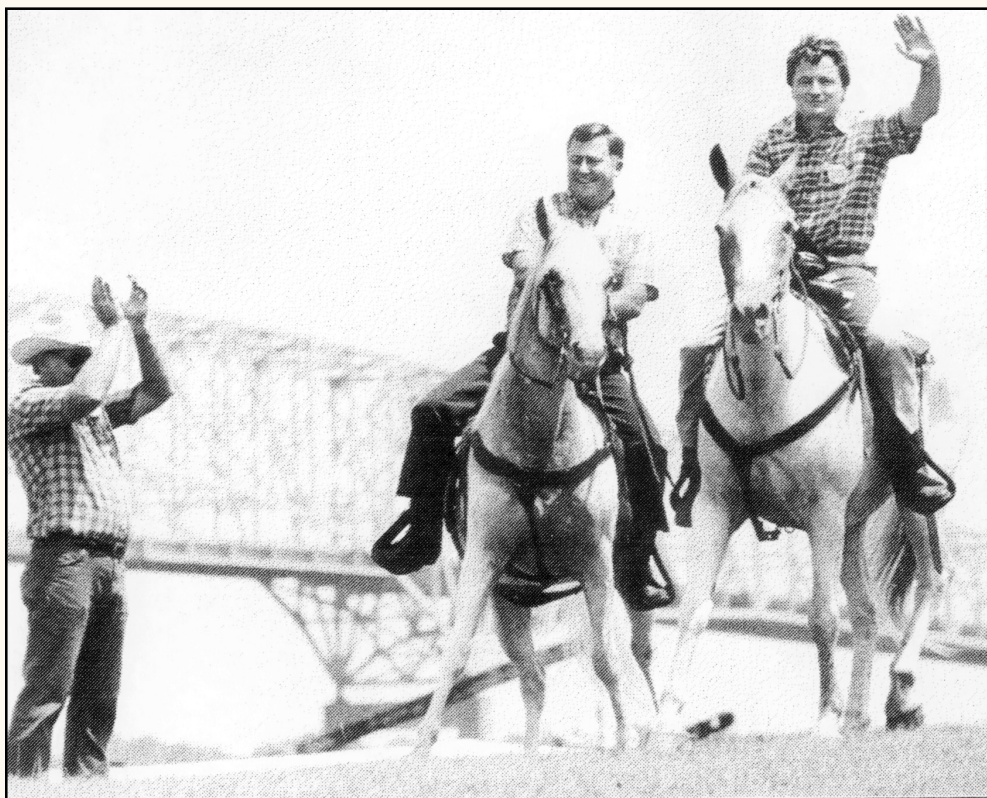
The Pajcics have plenty of fans who would like to see Steve run again or Gary take his first shot at office.

parents, to serve others. I've fulfilled that obligation, and I can be more selfish now."

But not too selfish to establish, with his brother, a million-dollar scholarship fund at Paxon High School — a fund intended to ensure that young scholars in need find the same financial help the Pajcics did 30 years ago.

And not too selfish to sponsor and coach teen basketball teams. Each of the 60 players on their teams is rewarded with a piece of clothing for each class in school in which they improve. Those who improve in all six classes get a new pair of basketball shoes.

This year, the Pajcics bought new shoes for 10 players. "When you're in politics, you influence a lot of people to a small



— file

**In 1986, gubernatorial candidate Steve Pajcic (right) celebrated his 40th birthday in Metropolitan Park with lieutenant gubernatorial candidate Frank Mann.**

Now that his children are nearly grown, Gary says he might consider a bid for state attorney, if longtime friend and sitting State Attorney Harry Shorstein steps down. Steve, on the other hand, has had his fill of running for office.

"I'm more cynical now about how much difference I could make," Steve says. "Plus, part of why I ran was a sense of obligation, instilled in us by our

degree," says Steve. "When you're out of politics, you can influence a few people to a much greater degree."

Indeed, you won't hear the Pajcics comparing life to a box of chocolates.

"You talk about power," says Steve, reflecting on one allure of politics. "The thing you have the most power over is what you do with your own life. That's the most important thing."

## Pajcic Secret: Smarts, hearts Brothers are partners in work, pursuit of better world

By: Martin Wisckol  
Staff writer

Once upon a time, there were two brothers who went from rags to riches. They ran barefoot on the cinders at track events, one winning the state juniors title for the 50-yard dash. The other would go on to be the starting quarterback at Florida State University and win a national back of the week award.

They challenged two future basketball pros to a game of hoops and won. One went on to the Legislature, then was nearly elected governor. This year, the two led the successful campaign of a long-shot black candidate for Jacksonville sheriff.

The brothers Pajcic are two of the most successful lawyers in town, with grueling schedules and clients from throughout the country. But they've found time to start six talent-filled basketball teams in a poor, black neighborhood. The brothers complain of the money it costs them to fulfill a promise of shopping sprees for players who improve their grades.

The complaint is in jest, of course. The money's a drop in the bucket compared to the million-dollar college scholarship fund they set up at the Westside high school where they graduated.

If Forrest Gump trooped through life with a brother, this could be their story, right down to the corned sweetness.

"In fifth or sixth grade, I asked Steve if he had a best friend," says brother Gary. "He said no and asked if I had a best friend. I said no. So, we decided to be best friends."

Geez, Louise.

But unlike Forrest Gump, the Pajcic brothers are not the recipients of dumb luck. They work hard and always have.

And they are smart. Steve graduated magna cum laude from Princeton and cum laude from Harvard Law School. Gary hasn't lost a trial in 10 years.

Best of all, unlike Forrest Gump, Steve and Gary Pajcic aren't some Hollywood hallucination. They are real, and they live in Jacksonville, their hometown playground for politics, law and pursuit of a better world.

## A landmark campaign

"Whether or not our community is progressed enough to be able to elect a black, I don't know." Those words on Feb. 2, 1994, from Sheriff Jim McMillan launched the landmark campaign that made Nat Glover Jacksonville's first black sheriff.

Steve and Gary Pajcic, lifelong advocates of racial equality, were disturbed by the statement.

Black community leaders, meanwhile, found the white candidates lacking. One of these leaders, the Rev. John Newman, was helping Glover gauge his chances. Then, at a Times-Union round table discussion, Steve Pajcic said, "We're going to elect the best qualified person, regardless of race."



— Will Dickey/staff

**Brothers Gary (left in photo above) and Steve Pajcic graduated from Paxon High.**

After the session, Newman cornered Pajcic and challenged him to back up his statement.

"I knew we needed a progressive and respected [white] community leader to pull this off," Newman says of Glover's campaign. "Steve Pajcic is one of the brightest and most visionary people in Jacksonville. Steve Pajcic understand that African-Americans have not always had equal access to the American dream, and he's always worked to change that."

# Pajcic brothers' 'unselfishness stands out,' Glover says



**The Pajcics, partners on Nat Glover's campaign for sheriff, were at his acceptance speech.**

— M. Jack Luedke/staff

The Pajcics were on board, Gary as campaign manager and Steve as an adviser, by the time Glover declared his candidacy.

As well as instant credibility, the Pajcics brought political savvy and contacts to the campaign. They also recruited enough wealthy business people to ensure a healthy war chest and considerable television exposure.

While the Pajcics are reliable fund-raisers for state and national Democratic candidates, they rarely get so involved with local races. In 1972, they rallied behind Leander Shaw, the first black candidate for circuit judge in North Florida.

Shaw speaks of Steve's integrity and political insight. But Steve's late night forays into the Northside to help Shaw silk-screen campaign T-shirts also made a big impression.

"That was a pretty rough area, not the place you'd expect to see a young, white lawyer," said Shaw, who in 1990 became the Florida Supreme Court's first black chief justice. Shaw's 1972 bid failed. It was a time when one of his white challenger's campaign slogans was "looks like a judge" — a time before Jacksonville was ready for a black judge. But in Glover's race this year, the Pajcics gave the city the chance to prove times have changed.

"The whole notion of running for sheriff might not have moved forward without their involvement," Glover says. "The unselfishness stands out. They weren't trying to get anything from me. There were no conditions — they didn't ask me to give anybody a job or anything like that. They are unselfish and have the best interest of the community in mind."

"They spent a year of their lives committed to getting me elected. [But] the most significant thing that developed was the personal relationship with them. I feel close to them, like they're my brothers."

## Ambulance chasers

The law offices of Pajcic & Pajcic take up much of the 31st floor of the Independent Life building downtown. Although they don't advertise, the Pajcics are the busiest personal injury attorneys in the city, with about 500 cases at a given time. The offices are friendly and bustling, with five attorneys and a support staff of 30.

On his way to the main conference room, Steve Pajcic sticks his head in the office of attorney Bob Link. Link has a seat belt in his hands and is snapping it against his hip. After a couple of tries, pops open. Pajcic and Link laugh but are nervous about whether the seat belt will open if they use the demonstration in a settlement mediation. Their client is suing General Motors and its seat-belt maker, claiming the belt came undone in an accident. The client is a quadriplegic because of the accident.

"We're proud of what we do, and we're proud of how the system works when it works right," Steve says. "First, you get a sense of satisfaction from helping people during a

time of need. No. 2, we think we're doing something to improve fairness and safety in the society."

Ambulance chasers on a mission of goodwill for the world? Not entirely. Their commissions start at 25 percent and go up from there. In 1992, they won an \$8.5 million award for a client, Kenneth Norwood, who was brain damaged after falling at the construction site where he was working. This year, they won a \$4.9 million award in a Chicago construction accident. Currently, they are suing the Duval County School Board on behalf of the parents of Jeff Mitchell, who was fatally shot outside Terry Parker High School.

Yet, they are convincing when they say the most important part of their job is to be ethical, the second most important part is to do quality work, and third is to have fun.

"Fourth is to make money," Gary says. "We think if we do the first three, the fourth will come. And fortunately, it has."

Indeed, if making money was at the top of their list, you might expect them to parlay their extensive political contacts into lucrative lobbying contracts. But their firm has never done political work.

The Pajcics credit their work ethic, moral standards, and interest in politics to their

parents, who raised five kids in a blue-collar Westside home. Their father, a carpenter with a fifth-grade education, worked two jobs and still found time to raise money for their high school. The football field at Paxon is named in their father's honor.

Their mother always has followed politics closely, and the two sons brag about how well-read she is. Both parents emphasized education and, in sharp contrast to many of

Link and Steve Pajcic are rehearsing their mediation presentation for Gary. After they finish, Steve asks Link to try the seat belt once more. It pops open. Steve winks playfully at a visitor. They will use it.

## Athlete scholars

If you look hard enough, you'll find somebody to say bad things about virtually anybody. The Pajcics are no exception. But before that part of the story, it might be useful to explain the differences between the two brothers.

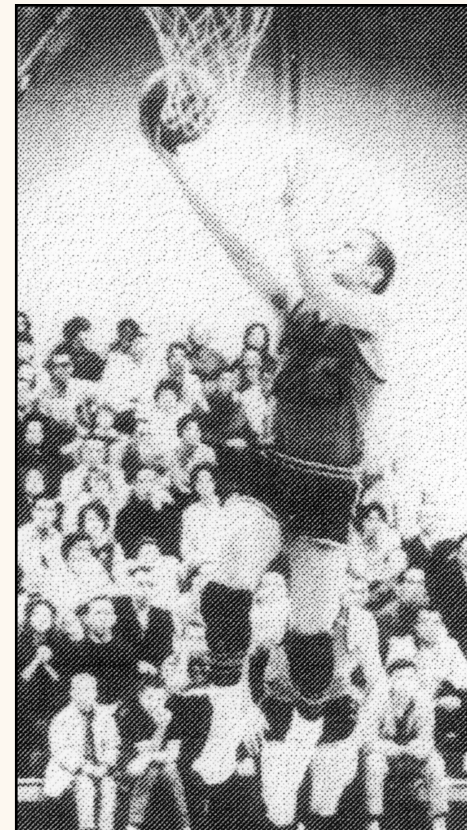
At first glance, Steve, 48, and Gary, 47, might be twins — especially if Steve has skipped his contact lenses for his wire rim glasses. They are both married to their first wives. Steve has two kids, Gary has five.

Steve is shorter, more self-absorbed, less patient.

"They're both extremely bright, but Steve borders on genius," says Glover, echoing the sentiment of others who know them well.

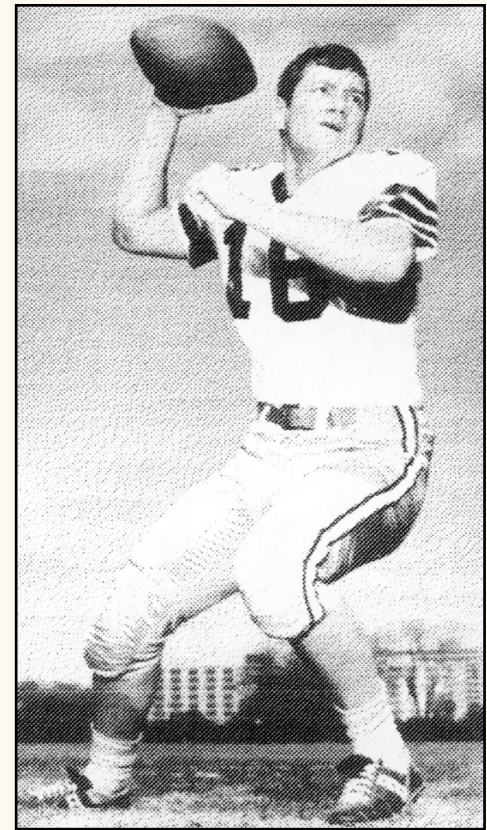
"Gary possesses more interpersonal skills, which allow him to look you in the eye and tell you tough things in a way that you can walk away not feeling so bad. Steve is more matter of fact."

While both were three-sport stars in high school, Gary was the better athlete. In his sophomore year at Florida State, he was starting quarterback. Despite his talent, Gary may be best known for an incomplete pass against a Florida team quarterbacked by Steve Spurrier in 1966.



— file

**After playing basketball for Paxon High School, Steve Pajcic went on to join Princetons team. More interested in his studies, Pajcic spent most of time on the bench.**



— file

**Gary Pajcic, a starting quarterback at Florida State University, may be best known for an incomplete pass in 1966. However, a photo in his office shows that the play was good.**