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B-N business community fueled Brady's campaign

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[Buy this photo](#) Ed Brady, left, talks with his brother, state Sen. Bill Brady, as polls closed on Feb. 2 at the Doubletree Hotel and Conference Center in Bloomington. (The Pantagraph/LORI ANN COOK-NEISLER)

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BLOOMINGTON — If Bill Brady becomes the next governor of Illinois, he may have his peers in the Twin City business community to thank.

Bloomington-Normal residents, about 1 percent of the state's population, account for about 27 percent of all individual-contribution dollars from Illinoisans to Brady's campaign in the year before the Feb. 2 primary.

A good chunk of that money came from prominent members of the local business community, some of whom are eager for a downstate governor and think Brady understands them because of his years running his real estate firm and owning a home-building company with his brothers.

But if the Bloomington state senator holds his narrow lead for the Republican nomination, election experts and his own campaign say he'll have to broaden that support to get visible north of Interstate 80.

Among Brady's Top 10 local donors last year is Ed Rust, chairman and CEO of Bloomington-based State Farm Insurance Cos. He donated \$2,500 to the campaign, and he wasn't alone.

There were \$636,279 in individual contributions to Brady's campaign in 2009-10, state records show, and at least \$21,050 came from local State Farm executives and other employees.

Those employees were acting as private citizens, said State Farm spokesman Bob Lapinski. The company does not endorse candidates or make political contributions, but it "does encourage agents and employees to get involved in the democratic process in any way they see fit," he said.

There are currently no state limits on campaign contributions. Campaign finance reform passed last year will limit donations to \$5,000 for individuals, \$10,000 from businesses and unions, and \$50,000 for political action committees — but not until after the general election.

Brady's other local business contributors include the McLean County Chamber of Commerce's PAC (\$500) and a local businessman who flew Brady around the state on his six-seat plane.

Bob and Julie Dobski, who operate the McDonald's restaurants in town and know Brady's family, gave Brady \$5,000; their company gave him another \$5,250. Bob Dobski said Brady shares his belief that Illinois' current corporate taxes and fees are driving away businesses.

"If Illinois ever wants to become something other than a laughingstock, somebody like Bill has to get in there and pull this state together," said Dobski, who also chairs the chamber's PAC.

The next campaign

Brady's early support from his peers and family is common, said Ron Michaelson, who led the state Board of Elections for 27 years and now teaches at the University of Illinois-Springfield. That strong base of cash was key to establishing Brady as a credible candidate to others, he said.

"He's now got to establish stronger support and visibility in the six-county area (around Chicago) where a lot of the money is and where all of the votes are, quite frankly," Michaelson said.

Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn, meanwhile, raised at least \$2.49 million in individual contributions in 2009-10 — including just \$1,750 from Twin City residents, records show.

"A challenger who's running against an incumbent has to raise enough money to be heard — he doesn't have to raise as much as the incumbent," Michaelson said.

In the months ahead, Brady will be having some "higher-dollar" fundraisers, primarily in the Chicago area, and lower-dollar events downstate, said campaign manager Dan Egler.

Brady's not alone

Another local candidate, Adam Kinzinger of Manteno, also tapped his former hometown — from former employers to close family — in his GOP primary victory for the 11th Congressional District.

Kinzinger, an Air Force reservist and former McLean County Board member, raised at least \$54,200 in individual contributions from Twin City residents in 2009-10 — about 17 percent of all individual

contributions during that time, federal election records show.

Top B-N Donors

Republican candidate for governor Bill Brady's Top 10 Twin City donors in 2009-10:

Eric Burwell...**\$23,000**

Owner, Burwell Oil Co.

Greg Shepard...**\$15,000**

Investor

Richard Percy Sr....**\$10,000**

Owner, Clemens and Associates Inc.

George Parker Kemp...**\$8,000**

Retired

Leo Hermes...**\$5,750**

Owner, Starcrest Cleaners

R.J. Just Inc....**\$5,250**

McDonald's operator

Bob and Julie Dobski...**\$5,000**

McDonald's operator

Jerald Bratberg...**\$3,000**

Physician, McLean Co. Orthopedics

Ed Rust Jr....**\$2,500**

CEO, State Farm Insurance Cos.

Robert Braastad...**\$2,150**

Physician, Illinois Heart & Lung

SOURCE: Illinois State Board of Elections filings

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