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Profile of a political fund-raiser

By Jerome Watson

When Mary Baim, 33, an official of Ald. William S. Singer's mayoral campaign, decided to get active in politics a few years ago, her father got very upset — for a good and sufficient reason.

Her father, now retired, is Louis (Curley) Fishman, whom she describes affectionately as a onetime bookie and 1st Ward precinct captain who once owned a honky-tonk restaurant on S. State St. and a string of race horses.

"He saw politics as a dirty world," she said, as a business in which people were always cutting deals. "He raised us to believe that what we were seeing around us was not the way to live, and that we should view it as you would the theater."

TO HER FATHER'S restaurant, which had known some elegance before it declined, had come famous show world figures; legendary pols such as Hinky-Dink Kenna and Bathhouse John; former county Clerk Edward J. Barrett, a family friend. She grew up on stories of vote fraud in the 1st Ward, of vice raids that failed because somebody had been tipped off.

So Mary Baim learned about machine poli-

tics, 1st Ward style, in a very personal way. Later, because her father had lost \$3 million "in bad oil and uranium investments" and suffered other financial dips, she worked her way through college as a legal secretary, became a real estate management executive, and married a lawyer, Jay Baim, who died of leukemia.

But her husband had been active in Democratic politics, and she had picked up the interest, so she got involved in the old 44th Ward organization. "I became treasurer; but in six months, I realized we (organization members) had no say, no power, so I quit."

THEN ALONG came a young lawyer named Singer, declaring himself a candidate for alderman in the old 44th Ward. Ms. Baim went to a series of coffees to hear the candidate (she couldn't canvass, a skiing accident having left her somewhat smashed up). Then she worked a precinct for an independent Constitutional Convention candidate. In the meantime, though, she had become a top executive for a mortgage firm.

But Mary Baim had heard the call, and politics took an increasing chunk of her time. She "conned my way" into becoming an area chairperson for legislative candidate Bruce Douglas in 1970. During that battle,

she met Singer aide Mac Hansbrough, who lured her into the Singer entourage.

When Singer ran for re-election in 1971 in the 43d Ward, Ms. Baim became financial boss, raising more than \$30,000 by "just never giving up; getting on the phone and talking; making people feel guilty; pushing, pushing, pushing." The campaign ended without debts.

AFTER ANOTHER independent legislative campaign, Ms. Baim ran a \$2-for-Dan fund-raising operation for gubernatorial candidate Dan Walker (who later appointed her to the Illinois Arts Council). And early this year, she joined Singer full time as his fund-raising chief (she says about \$300,000 of a needed \$1.5 million has been raised).

She is cooking up a whole series of fund-raising schemes, including some designed to appeal to budget-pinched people. She thinks Singer's early start will make it almost impossible for other independents, blacks included, to mount winning campaigns.

If Singer does win, Ms. Baim will be one of the background reasons; and perhaps her father will find that his objections to a life in politics for daughter Mary were groundless after all.