

POLITICS

The family business

Chandler's Nora Ellen (city council), J.D. Mesnard (state legislature) form mom-son political duo

By Michelle Reese
TRIBUNE

Joining the world of politics was not something Chandler Representative Javan "J.D." Mesnard planned for years in advance.

Neither was it an idea floated by his mom, Chandler City Councilwoman Nora Ellen.

But the two surprised each other; and now they make up quite possibly the only mom-son/city-state political duo in Arizona.

Mesnard took the plunge first, serving on Arizona's House of Representatives since 2011. Ellen was elected in November to the Chandler City Council, a spot she earned without a run-off election.

Of course, Mesnard helped Ellen during the campaign, preparing her for what could come in the form of any personal attacks (which they dealt with), as well as giving advice on getting votes. He knew she already had at least one.

Because of where each lives, "I get to vote for her; but she does not get to vote for me. She's in the small part of Chandler that is not from my district," Mesnard said during a conference call from Colorado last week, where the two were together on vacation.

Mesnard said he has a "thick skin" when it comes to some of the uglier side of politics. But when it comes to mom, "my skin is thin," he said.

During that campaign, there were some comments made against Ellen by another



J.D. Mesnard shares a moment with his mom, Nora Ellen, at her installation onto the Chandler City Council. Mesnard represents Chandler in the Arizona House of Representatives. [Photo courtesy Nora Ellen]

candidate, the two said.

"She handled it well. I think it's easier for yourself than if it's somebody you love. You care about a family member. I just made sure she was aware her whole life would be on display, that she would be under the microscope, the public eye," Mesnard said. "The re-

ality is neither one of us has a lot of dirt. But at the same time, what I've learned in politics is you don't have to have any skeletons in the closet. They'll just throw them in there."

Ellen said she was encouraged to run by others in Chandler because of her volunteer

work on committees. Mesnard, too, put the idea before her, he said.

"I had pointed out to her earlier in the year (2012) that she should consider running for office because of her involvement on the neighborhood committee and the retail committee. There's only

so much you can do on a voluntary capacity and if you're going to take it to the next level, you have to run," he said.

Since being elected, Ellen said she's looked toward her son's example in how he works and handles situations.

"I learned you really have to

have a servant heart and listen to your constituents and go deeper into what's going on with issues. That's what I appreciate with him. He really sees the overall picture of an issue," she said.

Sometimes state and city governments clash, an issue the two saw a but this past Legislative session in regards to taxes, Mesnard said. Politics are not always left at the door when they get together for family gatherings, they said. But because they're both working to better Arizona, they accept what the other is doing.

"I'm glad she did (run). I think she's a great asset to this city. So far we haven't had a city-state, mother-son showdown, but I know if that arises, we'll be able to keep it civil," he said.

"We do talk about Arizona and we do process about what we can do to help our state. I like to talk to J.D. because he really understands complex issues, which is the best way for a policy maker to be. I ask him a lot of questions actually and I appreciate the way he thinks. He really looks out for Arizona and isn't just, 'I have to be this way because that's my party.' I think he helps a lot of people see an issue for all it is because he understands how everything fits together," she said.

Now what son can't respond to that?

"Ah, thanks mom," Mesnard replies.

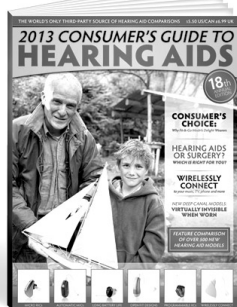
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