



born to run

Growing up in Bethesda and Rockville,
Gov. Martin O'Malley

developed an affinity for the underdog
 that has fueled his passion for public service

By Carin Dessauer

Gov. Martin O'Malley's first taste of political success occurred in childhood. In 1976, O'Malley ran successfully against five other candidates for eighth-grade student body president at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Bethesda.

"This was the first time that I ran into the O'Malley political machine," recalls Tim Mullin of Chevy Chase, one of O'Malley's competitors. On the day of the election, Mullin arrived at school armed with posters, only to find the O'Malley family out in full force with "Vote O'Malley" signs and handing out lollipops with "Vote O'Malley" stickers on them.

"I am coming around the corner after I hung my signs and, lo and behold, there is my younger sister Libby, [then a first-grader], licking one of the [O'Malley] lollipops and passing others out to her

classmates," Mullin says.

Though only 45 now, the governor has accomplished much since that first election. He was an assistant state's attorney for the city of Baltimore for three years, a Baltimore City Council member for eight years, a twice-elected mayor of Baltimore, and is now in his second year as governor.

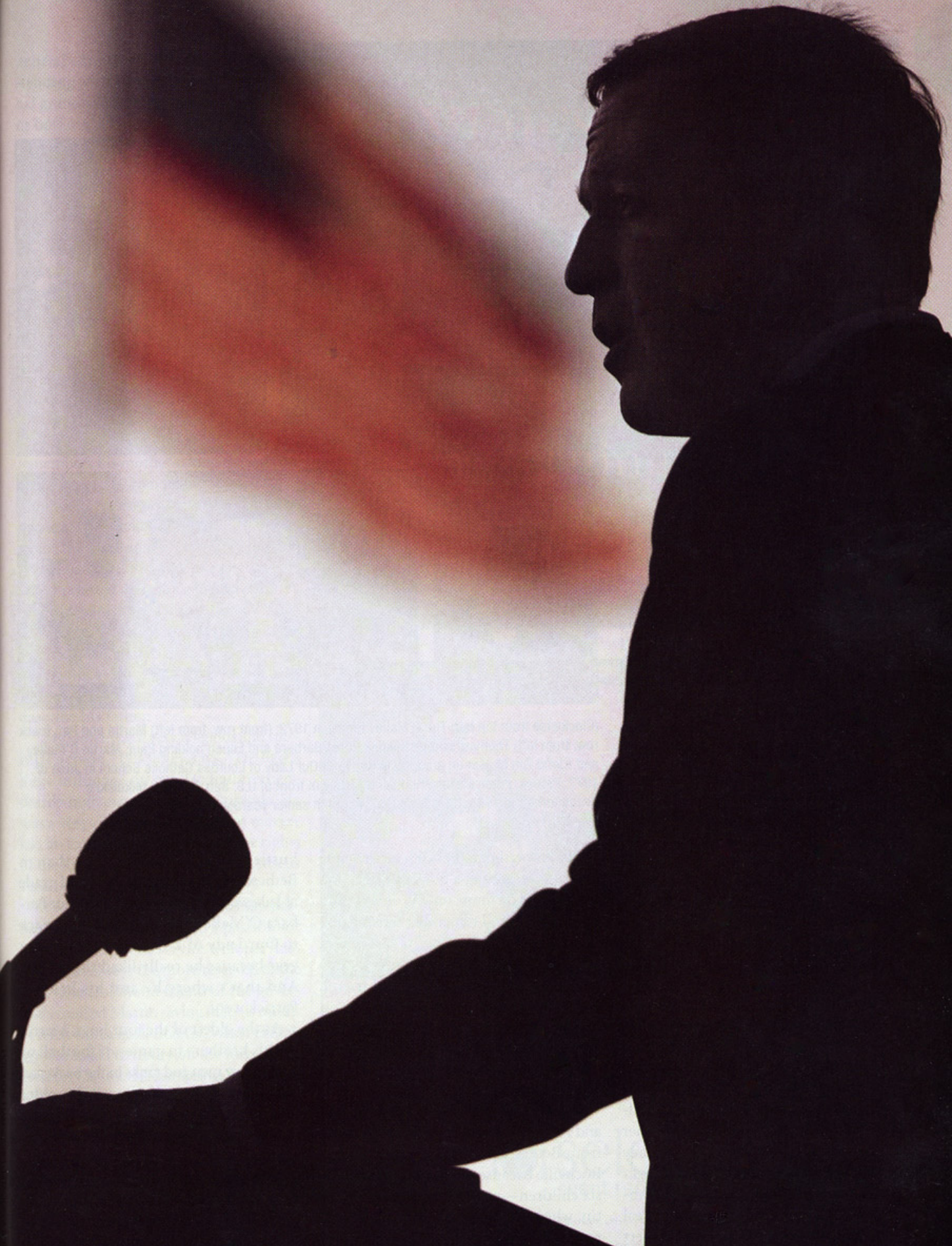
O'Malley's view of the world and his role in it were shaped as he grew up in Bethesda and Rockville. In this strong Irish Catholic household, the principles of faith and a commitment to assisting others were front and center alongside the history and music of his Irish rebel ancestors, which fueled his passion for the underdog.

"You had to care, you had to have plans to help people," says his mother, Barbara O'Malley of Rockville, who, "after 33 years of staying home with children," went back to work full time in 1987 as a reception-

ist for then-freshman U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski. More than 20 years later, Barbara O'Malley still works full time for the Maryland senator.

O'Malley's grandfathers were New Deal Democrats: one, a city, county and district chairman in Fort Wayne, Ind.; the other, a ward leader in Pittsburgh, Pa. The governor's parents met in the early 1950s at Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, D.C. Barbara O'Malley (then Barbara Suelzer), having worked on the campaign of the Fort Wayne, Ind., congressman she helped to elect, had moved to D.C. to work in his congressional office.

After serving in World War II in the U.S. Army Air Forces as a bombardier, Thomas O'Malley, the governor's late father, earned undergraduate and law degrees from Georgetown University. He eventually became a criminal defense



lawyer, first in Washington and then in Rockville. Barbara O'Malley says she met her husband when he and a friend came to DNC headquarters to go through newspaper clips. The two were married for 51 years, until Thomas' death two years ago.

Until age 8, O'Malley lived on Sleaford Road off East-West Highway behind Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) High School. "Bethesda was a bit smaller and a bit slower than it is now," O'Malley says. The governor has fond memories of walking the few blocks to school at Lourdes and of being surrounded by great places to play and explore, including Lynbrook Park and the railroad tracks at the end of his street.

"Many evenings, my father and I would go for long walks," O'Malley reminisces as he sits in his Annapolis office. They would walk through the neighborhood, by the Hiser movie theater (where the Hyatt is now), past Gifford's ice cream (then located behind Claire Dratch) and by various sporting events at B-CC. "I had a great childhood in Bethesda and Rockville," O'Malley says. "It was a great place to live."

"We had a very Norman Rockwell-like childhood," says Eileen Schempp, the younger of the governor's two older sisters. Schempp, sister Bridget, Martin and younger brother Patrick took advantage of all the Bethesda area had to offer. "We got to play in the streets and roam the neighborhood."

Schempp, who lives in Rockville, says O'Malley, who is six years her junior, was a typical little brother, always wanting to get into his sisters' business. She recalls him as gregarious and energetic and eager to play sports and participate in the Cub Scouts. Schempp also describes O'Malley as smart, "very much attuned even from an early age," as well as "a history buff" like all the boys in the family.

Politics were a part of life in the O'Malley household. Schempp remembers her mother taking them to Hubert Humphrey headquarters and holding an election night party at home to celebrate Lyndon Johnson's win. The governor says his first real political memory is the day after Robert



(Clockwise from top left) The O'Malley family in 1972: (front row, from left) Martin and Pat; (back row, from left) Thomas, Bridget holding Peter, Barbara and Eileen holding Paul; Martin O'Malley and friend Tim Mullen on graduation day from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in June of 1977; Patrick, Peter, Martin and Paul O'Malley in front of U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski's headquarters in 1986; O'Malley's Gonzaga High senior yearbook photo.

Kennedy was shot in 1968. He recalls going downstairs, getting a bowl of cereal and looking for cartoons on TV, only to find news coverage. "I remember sensing that something was very wrong," O'Malley says.

When he was 7, O'Malley helped campaign for his father's law school friend, Republican James Gleason, who was on his way to becoming the first Montgomery County executive. O'Malley passed out campaign material and had his first experiences canvassing door to door.

In 1971, a year after twin brothers Paul and Peter were born, the O'Malleys moved from Bethesda to the Fallsmead area of Rockville because the family—now with six children—needed more space. Martin, who was 8 when the family moved, recalls realizing that there "was much less

hustle and bustle" in Rockville than in Bethesda. O'Malley attended third grade at Lakewood Elementary School, but Barbara O'Malley says he asked to go back to Our Lady of Lourdes the following year because he really liked the school. And that's where he and his brother Patrick went.

As the oldest of the four boys, Martin led his brothers in games of football or green army men and tanks in the backyard. Peter, one of the twins, recalls his older brother encouraging them to build forts in the woods. "He was always very creative and had a great imagination," Peter says.

The O'Malley house was filled with political buttons and paraphernalia, including framed photographs of President John Kennedy and one of presi-

dential candidate Franklin Roosevelt standing with Martin O'Malley's maternal grandfather during a campaign stop in Indiana. The dinner table conversation often focused on the family's interest in history and on local, national and international politics.

Peter O'Malley says his father, after serving in World War II and seeing the mushroom cloud rise over Hiroshima, developed a "good perspective" on life. "He truly appreciated what was important in life and what was not," Peter says. "Our father believed that we are all responsible for trying to contribute to the betterment of society...and to not be shy about participating."


Peter, now chief of staff for Baltimore County Executive James T. Smith Jr., remembers his mother taking the kids on day trips to the Maryland State House, Monticello, Baltimore Harbor and Mount Vernon. On weekends, with their father along, they explored Gettysburg and other area battlefields. Martin recalls how his father pointed out the historical pictures of the signers of the Declaration of Independence during a trip with brother Patrick to the state Capitol in Annapolis.

Usually articulate, the governor was first at a loss for words when asked to describe his father.

"My father was a very religious and spiritual person," O'Malley says. "He had a huge influence on me. He had tremendously high expectations for his kids. He was a very complex guy. He was a maverick, an iconoclast, a defender of the rights of the little guy...like the character Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*."

O'Malley's childhood friends say Barbara O'Malley, who shared a passion for her faith and public service with her husband, was always the more reserved of the two. One childhood friend of the governor's recalled Martin saying that his mother ruled with a quiet iron fist. When O'Malley was asked to testify on the foreclosure issue on Capitol Hill last spring, he e-mailed his mother that he was coming, in case she could break away from her Senate office to see him. In the self-effacing manner that her children became accustomed to over the years, Barbara O'Malley messaged her son not to acknowledge her if he saw her at the hearing. "I told him, 'If you see me over there, don't notice me.'"

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COURTESY GOV. O'MALLEY

The governor with his wife and children: (top row, from left) Grace O'Malley, Tara O'Malley; (bottom row, from left) Jack O'Malley, Martin O'Malley, Catherine "Katie" Curran O'Malley, William O'Malley

'Men for Others'

On one of the final days of his freshman year at Gonzaga College High School in Washington, D.C., O'Malley had taken the Metro's Red Line to what was then its last stop at Dupont Circle and was waiting to take a bus back to Montgomery County. Michael Enright, a classmate from Bethesda, was sitting at the same bus stop.

The two boys, who had not spoken all year, both were engrossed in their reading when, Enright says, a homeless man came "staggering" toward O'Malley, who was eating a bag of Goldfish Crackers. "Martin holds out the bag as if to say, 'Do you want some?' and the homeless man puts his hand right into [it]," Enright recalls. "That was the icebreaker." The two boys struck up a conversation and quickly became close friends.

Enright, who is O'Malley's chief of staff, was the oldest boy in his Irish Catholic family of seven children. He recalls liking O'Malley's passion for current events and history and was impressed with his friend's knowledge of politics at such a young age. Referring to the fact that O'Malley had already campaigned, Enright says, "Here was a guy who had actually walked the walk."

High school friends recall O'Malley as

curious, funny and willing to work hard, pointing, as an example, to his drive to play high school football. Having grown between his sophomore and junior years, O'Malley decided to try out for football, but since he hadn't played before, he started out on the junior varsity team. Gonzaga classmate Michael Drayne says O'Malley's approach to football—"taking it on as a project"—illustrates his work ethic and the intensity with which he handles challenges.

"Even though he was new at football, he was very much a leader on the team," says Danny Costello,

Gonzaga's junior varsity football coach at the time. O'Malley was a member of the varsity team in his senior year, and though he wasn't a starter, he played regularly as a receiver and cornerback. "He would lead the team in cheers and he was very funny," Costello says.

Earlier this year, when Gonzaga's basketball team beat Theodore Roosevelt High School in the City Title Game, O'Malley was leading the student section in cheers at Verizon Center.

Costello, now Gonzaga's vice president of advancement, says the area around the school, which is located off of North Capitol Street just blocks from Union Station, was economically depressed when O'Malley was there. Costello recalls the contrast of seeing the Capitol in one direction and housing projects and homeless people in the other. The students were expected to work on projects aimed at helping the disadvantaged.

At Gonzaga, O'Malley cemented the values taught at home. "All the children were shaped by faith," says Barbara O'Malley, who had three nuns and two priests in her family. "There is a choice of good and evil in the world, and you darn well better do good." Besides getting a Catholic school education, going to church each

Sunday was a given. To this day, the governor attends church regularly.

The motto of the Jesuit high school was and is "Men for Others." The governor explains it: "Your life on this planet and your time here is very short and you have an obligation and a duty to God that created you to make this world a better place, to be a man for others."

Irish's Own

O'Malley grew up in a household that was as proud of its Irish heritage as it was of being Catholic. His sister, Eileen Schempp, says their mother, who has a German background, "embraced being Irish" even more than her Irish husband did.

When O'Malley was in elementary school, his mother brought home records by Irish artists such as the Clancy Brothers. As a teenager, he became fascinated with his Irish roots and started borrowing books from the library on Irish history. He eventually taught himself to play the tin whistle, a musical instrument with long ties to Irish music.

O'Malley also started listening to and playing Irish music with Costello, the football coach, who was also Gonzaga's media coordinator. The music was "an outward expression of our interest in our Irish heritage," Costello says. They were particularly fascinated by Celtic folk songs and rebel music that evoked centuries of oppression in Ireland.

During his junior year, O'Malley went on a school trip to Ireland. His roommate on the trip, Dennis Kilcullen of Kensington, recalls how his classmate had the confidence at age 16 to go into local Irish pubs and play his tin whistle and guitar. O'Malley has been to Ireland several times since, and was there this June to receive an honorary degree in public service from the National University of Ireland, Galway. He took his mother and one of his four children, William, and they visited distant relatives while vacationing for a week.

At Gonzaga, O'Malley, Costello and some of Costello's friends, who were also in their mid-20s, started a band called "Shannon Tide." Barbara O'Malley, who

was not aware of the extent of her son's musical talent, says, "The first time I walked in when the band was playing and he [Martin] was singing, I almost fell over. But I knew he could do it." The band started playing regular gigs at Irish pubs throughout the area, and Barbara recalls Shannon Tide playing at Flanagan's, on the corner of Old Georgetown Road and Woodmont Avenue in Bethesda.

The band became so popular that it even went on the road for a few gigs in Irish bars in Baltimore, Delaware and Chicago. Costello recalls that if they had to stay over on a Saturday, O'Malley made sure he attended Mass somewhere.

O'Malley also acted in some plays at Gonzaga and was a newscaster on the school's closed-circuit channel. He served as a "home room" president on the student council, but was defeated in his run for council president in his senior year.

Underdog

Having tasted his first political victory in the seventh grade, O'Malley was not deterred by the defeat in high school. In fact, he has always thrived on being the underdog or working for one. While waiting to appear on WTOP radio's *Ask The Governor* program earlier this year, O'Malley became animated as he spoke about taking his youngest son, Jack, to see the movie *Underdog*, based on a TV cartoon character from the 1960s, a program the governor used to watch. Without hesitation, O'Malley listed some of the characters in the movie as if they were figures in literary history.

O'Malley's own career choice was partially inspired by Colorado Sen. Gary Hart's underdog candidacy in the 1984 presidential race. O'Malley, while a freshman at Catholic University in Washington, worked as a volunteer and then as a paid staff member at Hart's campaign headquarters on Capitol Hill.

In late 1983, in advance of the Iowa caucuses, O'Malley was dispatched to the state. There, he worked the phones, organized volunteers and played the guitar and sang at fundraisers. "It was remarkable how much people liked him wherever he was working," Hart recalls. When O'Malley turned 21, Hart bought his staffer his first "legal beer."

O'Malley went on to work in several states—while still enrolled in college—



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and then as a floor leader at the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco in the summer of 1984.

"It was a time in [O'Malley's] life that everything came together: a love of politics, a sense of mission, the performance aspect...having to persuade people," says Drayne of Silver Spring, the Gonzaga friend who first got O'Malley interested in working on the Hart campaign.

Drayne says O'Malley was inspired by Hart's role as the underdog. "He would not have had one-tenth of the fun" if he had been in the Walter Mondale campaign, Drayne says. "It was like fighting for Northern Ireland under the thumb of Great Britain.... Being the underdog, fighting for some noble cause against great odds [is the] position that he likes to be in."

After graduating from Catholic University in 1985, O'Malley went on to law school at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. It was there that he developed an affinity for Charm City.

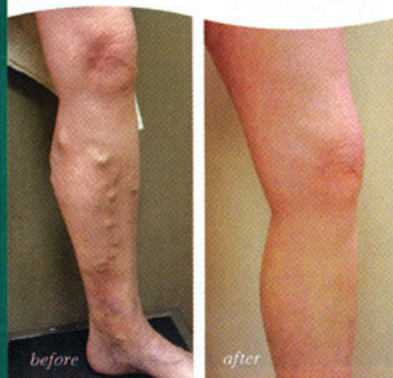
In 1990, just 27 years old and working as an assistant state's attorney for the city of Baltimore, O'Malley decided to challenge incumbent state Sen. John Pica Jr. in the Democratic primary. "We spent \$35,000 and knocked on 6,000 doors," recalls Peter O'Malley, the governor's younger brother, who, at 21, ran the campaign. Martin O'Malley lost the primary by just 44 votes.

In the middle of the state Senate campaign, O'Malley married Catherine "Katie" Curran, who is now an associate judge of the District Court of Maryland, Baltimore City. The two had briefly met in 1986, when O'Malley was working on Barbara Mikulski's first Senate campaign and Curran was helping her father, J. Joseph Curran Jr., in his successful bid to be Maryland's attorney general. But it was not until 1988 that the two started dating after O'Malley, through a friend, invited Curran, then a law clerk and night school law student, to attend a performance by his second band,

O'Malley's March. Their first date was the next night to hear Irish singer Mary Black.

In 1991, O'Malley was elected to the Baltimore City Council. In 1999, three-term Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke decided not to seek a fourth term and O'Malley entered a crowded mayoral race. He was considered a long shot as the leading white candidate in a mostly African-American city, running against two established African-American candidates. "He could not live with himself if he did not try," Peter explains. O'Malley won 53 percent of the primary vote, paving the way for a one-sided win in the general election. He was easily re-elected in 2004. O'Malley entered the Democratic primary race to take on Republican Gov. Robert Ehrlich in 2006. The primary race was competitive until O'Malley's opponent, Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan, dropped out of the race several months before the primary. O'Malley won the general election contest with 52 percent of the vote.

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Music Man

After he graduated from Gonzaga in 1981, Martin O'Malley continued to perform with the band he started playing with there, "Shannon Tide." Eventually O'Malley started another band, "O'Malley's March." The group played regularly until O'Malley, while mayor of Baltimore, announced that he was running for governor.

"I don't think most people realize both of the M's in [O'Malley's] life: Montgomery [County] and music," says Eliot Pfanstiehl, president and CEO of the Music Center at Strathmore. "Both things warm up his character."

Aides to the governor say he's always singing or humming "in the halls." The governor's wife, Judge Catherine "Katie" Curran O'Malley, says her husband is always listening to music and likes to play the guitar when he has the time.

O'Malley has gotten on stage a few times since becoming governor. In August, while attending the Democratic National Convention in Denver, the governor played his guitar and sang a few songs at a local Irish bar.



sible contender for higher office even before he was elected governor. In 2002, during his first term as mayor, O'Malley was featured on the cover of *Esquire* magazine. A year before he ran for governor, O'Malley was named as one of the "five best big-city mayors" by *Time* magazine.

There has been talk, among Bay State and national political operatives and observers, of the governor as a future vice presidential or presidential candidate. Hart says it is too soon to speculate, but he believes O'Malley has a gift. "He is born into what he is doing and he has all of the natural talents for it," Hart says.

J. Joseph Curran Jr., O'Malley's father-in-law, has said he expected to baby-sit in the White House by 2012. In fact, when O'Malley turned 2, his parents got him a birthday cake that said "Martin for President 2004."

In other words, there may be more campaign lollipops in the future. **B**

Carin Dessauer is a writer in Potomac.

Campaign Lollipops

Over the years, O'Malley's critics have labeled him as overly ambitious. But in 2006, just before being elected governor, he told the *The Washington Post* that "people always overestimate my ambition and

underestimate my conviction." Says Doug Wilson, who was Gary Hart's deputy campaign manager in 1984: "If [O'Malley] believes in something, he will fall on his sword" for the effort.

O'Malley had been mentioned as a pos-

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