

# CONNECTICUT

## Eddie Perez: Is He Sold On Himself?



STAN SIMPSON

Less than six months away from what could be a historic election, no serious candidates have entered the Hartford mayoral sweepstakes.

Eddie Perez, considered the unofficial front-runner, is expected to make his announcement in two weeks. Democratic town Chairman Robert Jackson, who was mulling a run, tells me he's "90 percent" sure he won't be making a bid, citing "family reasons." (Translation: Bo Jax's support was shaky.)

If you're looking for a sleeper, there's four-term Hartford state Rep. Kenneth Green. He's been approached by supporters to run and will make a decision when the legislative session ends in June.

Right now, Perez is The Anointed One — maybe even The Reluctant One.

I'm not convinced that deep in his gut the guy wants to be a candidate. Being compelled by allies who feel he has the goods — and complexion — to unite the city is one thing. Wanting to run because of a real passion for the job is another.

I asked Perez Friday whether he really, truly wants to be mayor. His answer was contradictory.

"I want to continue to serve the city," said Perez, president of Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance. "I think this would increase the responsibility, and I don't shy away from a big challenge. I could be mayor. I could be a great mayor."

Then he adds: "I'm looking for people to convince me to do it. If I felt there was someone I could be supportive behind, I would do that. I prefer to be part of a team, and if I didn't feel compelled to run because I was being called upon, and if it was someone else's time, that would be fine with me too. ... If someone surfaces and they're picking up momentum — if there were other people out there who could do it, I would be less enthused, let's put it that way."

Perez will run, but he's got a lot to think about. Could he handle a two-year pay cut to \$30,000? Could he raise money, which will be imperative if he shuns the Democratic party and goes the challenge route? Also, Perez needs to put together a slate that could win and be committed to his vision of instituting a "strong mayor" government.

Instead of the traditional two-year mayoral agenda, Perez would be championing a six-year plan. Convening a charter revision commission and pushing through a strong mayor system with a four-year term would be the top priority in his first term. Getting re-elected and executing systemic changes and promoting accountability will comprise the agenda for 2004-08.

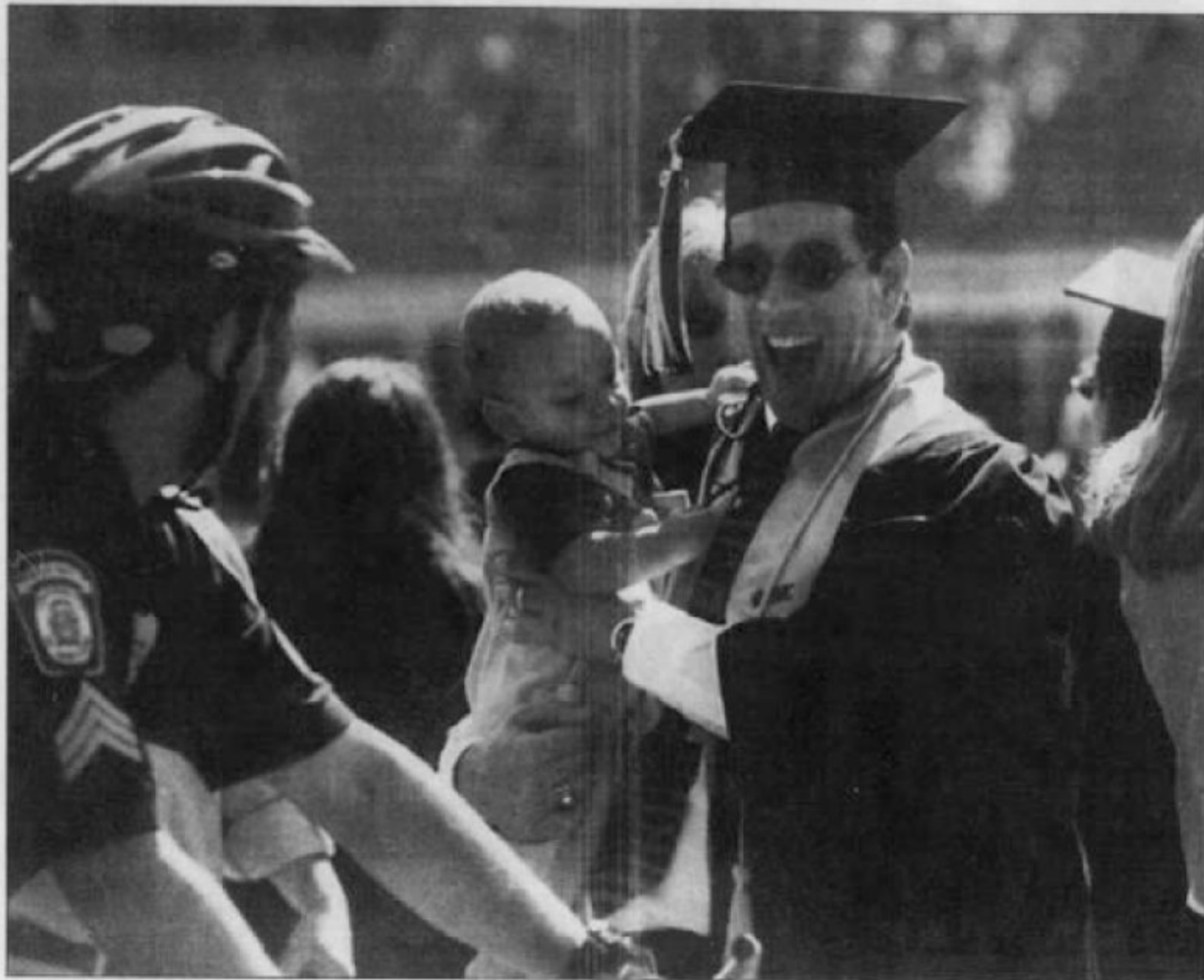
The city has never been riper for wholesale political changes. The stars are aligned for Perez — a former gang member, one of nine children, and the son of a welfare mother. His years in the community trenches as a coordinator, college administrator and nonprofit's CEO have earned him props in the multi-ethnic neighborhoods and with corporations.

Perez, 43, would be the first Puerto Rican mayor in a city where Latinos are now the majority. He's never held an elected office and he's not a polished public speaker. Actually, that may be a positive to an electorate distrustful of politicians.

Judy's Democratic convention won't focus so much on who'll be the mayor. The real battle will be over how much influence The Anointed One is given in selecting the council that works with him.

Stan Simpson's column appears on Mondays and Wednesdays.

## A WALK IN THE SUN FOR GRADUATES



**GABRIEL JOSE CARRERA**, 36, of Hartford, above, holds his 7-month-old son, Sebastian Gabriel Carrera, and greets a passing bicycle patrolman shortly before graduating cum laude with a bachelor of arts degree at the University of Hartford on Sunday. Carrera said he used to be a member of the Latin Riders gang and a heroin user on the streets of Hartford, but was given a second chance through the Youth Challenge program, which helped him turn his life around. He received his degree in politics and government Sunday. Carrera said the people who were in the gang with him are either dead, in jail, or afflicted with AIDS.

RIK HARTFORD / THE HARTFORD COURANT



**MARCY MANWARE**, right, of Hamden turns away from the wind whipped up by the helicopter she hired to fly her, her daughter Jessica, center, and Janelle Susi, a family friend, from Quinnipiac University in Hamden Sunday afternoon. Jessica graduated from Quinnipiac while her twin sister, Kristen, was graduating from Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic. The only way Marcy Manware could see both daughters graduate was to hire the helicopter and make a quick getaway from Quinnipiac.

JOHN WOIKE / THE HARTFORD COURANT



**HOLDING HIS DIPLOMA** high for all his classmates, friends and relatives to see, Seth Poole exults as he leaves the stage during Trinity College's commencement ceremonies Sunday. The Hartford college graduated more than 500 students Sunday.

BRAD CLIFT / THE HARTFORD COURANT

## Trinity, St. Joseph, U Of H Hold Rites

By **ROBERT A. FRAHM**,  
**DANIELA ALTIMARI**  
And **MATT BURGARD**  
Courant Staff Writers

Even before U.S. Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman urged them to consider lives of public service, many of Sunday's graduates at Trinity College already had signed a pledge of civic responsibility.

Trinity is believed to be the first college in Connecticut at which graduating seniors took a voluntary pledge to "take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider."

"It's a good thing for seniors to think about," said senior class President Marisa Eddy, a 22-year-old anthropology major from Los Angeles who led a group promoting the graduation pledge.

Trinity was one of three Hartford-area colleges awarding undergraduate degrees Sunday. Ceremonies also took place at St. Joseph College and the University of Hartford.

Trinity is among an estimated 70 or 80 schools across the nation this year that have circulated the voluntary pledge — an idea that began at Humboldt State University in California 14 years ago.

The pledge, signed by 271 of Trinity's 493 graduates, was part of a theme of civic engagement that marked the commencement. The ceremony included tributes to departing Trinity President Evan S. Dobbelle, who, during his six-year tenure, prodded students to engage in community service, especially in the Hartford neighborhoods surrounding the campus.

Lieberman called on the graduates "to think for a moment beyond your place in the job market to your place in the larger American and global communities and to think about the value of citizenship and service in a free society."

Dobbelle, who is leaving to become president of the University of Hawaii, received an honorary doctorate, as did Lieberman and six others: Ted Turner, founder of CNN and Turner Broadcasting System Inc.; Robert A. Daly, Los Angeles Dodgers chief executive officer and former Warner Brothers executive; U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, D-Hawaii; Claudia Jean Kennedy, the first woman to become a lieutenant general in the U.S. Army; theologian and scholar Martin E. Marty; and Nobel Prize-winning chemist Mario J. Molina.

**UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD**  
"Keep throwing that Frisbee. Keep blowing the bubbles. Keep cranking up the stereo. Enjoy your life," Lt. Gov. Jodi Reil exhorted a festive group of graduates at the University of Hartford.

The 1,340 graduates whooped and cheered as bubbles drifted over their heads on a cloudless morning on the university's lawn.

Reil received an honorary degree, as did two pioneers of the theater: Michael P. Price, executive director of Goodspeed Musicals, and playwright Maria Irene Fornes.

Fornes invoked the memory of her grandmother, a teacher in Havana, and her father, who rejected formal education but nonetheless became an avid reader. "I send my gratitude to them," said the playwright, whose latest work, "Letters from Cuba," reflects her Cuban heritage.

"Although they told me to be a rebel, they did teach me how to be disciplined."

**ST. JOSEPH COLLEGE**  
When Rosemary Cardwell graduated from St. Joseph College 50 years ago, it was pretty rare for a nurse to

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## Author Kinsella Urges Graduates To Laugh At Life

By **ANDREW JULIEN** And **INDRANEEL SUR**  
Courant Staff Writers  
With Wire Reports

From Windham to Danbury, from Hamden to Storrs, a flawless May sky offered a stunning backdrop for thousands of graduates across the state to snare their newly minted degrees, as well as all the hugs and kisses that come with the territory.

At Eastern Connecticut State University in Windham, the author W.P. Kinsella urged graduates to find the humor in whatever situations they happen upon as they tumble through life. Kinsella is the author of "Shoeless Joe," the novel that became the beloved baseball film "Field of Dreams."

Warning graduates that the pointy-haired boss in

the comic strip "Dilbert" is the rule, not the exception, Kinsella said that humor has always been an important tool for any group that feels alienated or isolated.

"The way that minorities survive is by making fun of the people who oppress them," Kinsella said. He underscored his point by regaling the crowd with tales of his Uncle Cal, a free spirit who always had something amusing to say. "Soony," he recalled Cal saying, "I can't understand why they lock service station restrooms. Are they afraid someone's going to break in and clean them?"

The university awarded nearly 800 undergraduate and 85 master's degrees during the commencement ceremony, which was preceded by the school's tradition of graduates tossing pennies into a foun-

tain and making a wish for the future.

"We are in a state of want, waiting and anticipation," said the class speaker Holly Lynn Mundes, who found wisdom in the simple truths muttered by Winnie the Pooh to share with her classmates.

**University of Connecticut graduate and professional schools**

In Storrs, for many of the more than 1,000 University of Connecticut graduate and professional school students, commencement exercises Sunday afternoon capped off months, if not years, of juggling their academic careers while raising and caring for family members.

Yalonda D. Hart, of Middletown, brought her 6-

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## Central's President 'Doing Fine' After Stroke

By **KIMBERLY W. MOY**  
Courant Staff Writer

**NEW BRITAIN** — Central Connecticut State University President Richard L. Judd was home recovering from a stroke Sunday and expects to return to work and attend graduation ceremonies later this week.

Judd, 63, said Sunday that he was "doing fine" and "feeling OK" after suffering the stroke Friday and hopes to be back in his office by mid-week.

"It was a little scary, but you get medical care quick enough, you put your hope in God," he said Sunday afternoon from his New Britain home.

Judd awoke early Friday suffering from nausea, sweating and a loss of balance, and was taken by ambulance to New Britain General Hospital around 3 a.m.

Judd was discharged from the hospital Saturday afternoon, his daughter, Sarah, said. He has been put on blood thinning medication, accord-



JUDD

ing to university officials. Judd suffered "no lingering effects" from the stroke, according to a message Nicholas Pettinico Jr., Central's vice president of institutional advancement, e-mailed to the university's academic and ad-

ministrative department heads.

Judd had heart-valve replacement surgery about three years ago, but has since been reported to be in good health. "His heart is great. He has no buildup or ... hardening of the arteries," Pettinico said.

Judd, who bicycles every morning and plays racquetball "every other day," said his doctors told him the stroke could be related to his heart-valve replacement.

His doctors have put no restrictions on Judd, but he will probably

not keep a full schedule this week, Pettinico said. Pearl Bartlett, vice president for academic affairs, is in charge while Judd is away.

Judd said he plans to attend Thursday's commencement for graduate students and Saturday's ceremony for undergraduates.

"I'm going to be there, Blue Devil and all," Judd said Sunday.

The City column by Helen Ubinas will return May 28.