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Richard Rosenbaum, (left) signs his book, "No Room for Democracy: The Triumph of Ego Over Common Sense," for a fan at an event held Thursday at RIT.

## Richard Rosenbaum: On life and politics

BY ELIZABETH STULL

Rochester attorney and Republican power broker Richard Rosenbaum is making the rounds, being profiled by news media from WXXI to the New York Times to The American Spectator, concerning his new political memoir "No Room for Democracy: The Triumph of Ego Over Common Sense," published this month by RIT Press.

It is difficult to imagine the friendly, grandfatherly figure, bald and stoop-shouldered in a pastel suit and comfort-leather suede shoes, running the Republican Party with an iron fist. But he writes proudly of his unflinching, good-natured dominance over party leaders great and small in his latest book. Rosenbaum carried a big stick, and he wasn't afraid to use it.

"I can tell a person off and make 'em laugh," Rosenbaum recently told *The Daily Record*.

His uncanny ability to turn a situation on its head is perhaps the hallmark of his career.

Growing up in Oswego, he was the only Jewish kid in his class and bald after a med-

ical condition in early childhood.

"It made me compassionate," he said.

Later, his baldness also helped him stand out in smoke-filled political meetings. Perhaps it also motivated him to become a boxer at Hobart College and a lawyer, at Cornell Law School.

He dove into trial work, first at the former Nixon Hargrave (now Nixon Peabody LLP), then in his own practice. But he believes in trying new things.

"I'm a great believer in changing, moving around," he said. "Every lawyer gets an attack of politics like a child gets an attack of the measles."

During his long career, he has run for governor several times, was elected to the state court in Monroe County and became a major force in national politics.

Being a trial attorney made him a better politician and vice versa, Rosenbaum said.

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# Rosenbaum on life and politics

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"Politics is a blood sport and it's not always totally honest," he admitted.

One year, when the Republican-led county Legislature was raising taxes and the Democrats promised to lower them, Rosenbaum created buttons with the campaign slogan, "Keep Cutting Costs."

As chairman of the Monroe County Republican Party in 1968, Rosenbaum decided to take back the Rochester City Council from the Democrats, and he did. His strategy was to prioritize the city election over other races and to run a popular Republican candidate for mayor.

The coup, which he planned and predicted, brought him to the attention of then-Gov. Nelson B. Rockefeller, who picked Rosenbaum for the state party chairmanship. Rockefeller became a close friend and mentor, bringing Rosenbaum into the national political arena. Rosenbaum, in turn, helped

Rockefeller become vice president under President Gerald Ford.

The national Republican party has moved away from Rosenbaum, who now describes himself as one of the last "Rockefeller Republicans," fiscally conservative and socially liberal.

But, he's still a Republican, and a longtime friend of Dick Cheney, the first vice president to have an office next door to the president's, instead of "across the alley," according to Rosenbaum.

"The vice president is simply stand-by equipment," he said. "If they think they're anything more, it's a threat to the president."

The veteran politico said he disapproves of giving a vice president too much power. He criticized this year's presidential candidates for naming running mates before the official nominations. Democratic candidate Barack

Obama chose a running mate with substantive foreign policy experience while Republican candidate John McCain picked someone to burnish his political image, Rosenbaum opined.

He said he also disapproves of the proliferation of primaries, television's impact on campaign fundraising and financially-independent candidates.

"When I was running the show, when I was chairman of the party, you didn't raise your own money. You came to the party. And that's where 'No Room for Democracy' tends to come in. The chairman is more or less a dictator. You have to have a very strong leader, that's why they called me the 'Iron Chancellor,'" Rosenbaum said. "If you've got a good party leader you'll have better, stronger campaigns."

To Rosenbaum, party dictatorships make for a more democratic government. Things will change when people demand change, he said.

Now back at his old law firm as senior

counsel, Rosenbaum appears to enjoy his new role as a budding author.

His 10th-floor office at Nixon Peabody LLP is not particularly large, but enjoys a broad city view. A top bookshelf is dedicated to Rosenbaum's elephant collection, and the walls are hung with photos of him kabitzing with Republican presidents Ford, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush — and in the ring with American heavyweight boxing champion Floyd Patterson. A credenza is blanketed with framed family photos.

Would he change anything about his career?

Only to have more time with his family, Rosenbaum said. "That's the price I paid for being involved with politics."

This year Rosenbaum celebrates his 50th wedding anniversary. He and his wife, Judith, have four children and 13 grandchildren and his 98-year-old mother lives nearby.

"I'm 77, but I don't feel it," Rosenbaum said. "I'm still sparkin'."