

A Republican 'Reject' Who Helps Demos Win

By Vera Glaser

Washington

Believe it or not, the young wizard who helped score a string of sensational Democratic victories — capped by the recent upsets in Michigan and Ohio — is a Republican "reject."

Tall, sandy haired, 33-year-old John Marttila was frozen out of the GOP in 1970 by the Nixon White House for the sin of trying to win votes in the ghettos.

Marttila headed for Boston set up a Democratic consulting firm, and in three short years has made Marttila Payne, Kiley & Thorne the hottest political combine in the country.

Back in 1969, shortly after Marttila graduated from Wayne State University in Detroit with a degree in political science, he was recruited by then assistant GOP chairman Elly Peterson.

Together they set up neighborhood "action centers" in ten states to help with community problems and broaden the Republican Party's base.

Mrs. Peterson thought

President Nixon was enthusiastic about her program, but she was blocked at every turn by his palace guard.

After a lifetime of Republican Party service, she left, as one headquarters official put it "with her spirit broken," but with praise from some of the Capital's most hardnosed reporters. Many regarded her as qualified for the national chairmanship.

The White House boycotted her farewell reception.

"We were trying to get minorities into the party," Marttila recalled, "but it became a charade when the Nixon Administration took over. I couldn't live with myself.

"Leaving was a painful personal decision because Elly Peterson is one of the most decent human beings I have ever known."

Marttila's consulting firm has since taken on high-risk campaigns that would scare the pants off most politicians. Their track record: 16 Democratic wins against three losses.

Marttila's three partners — advertising specialist

Daniel B. Payne, political director Thomas R. Kiley, and direct mail expert David H. Thorne — are in their 20s.

The total staff of 16 is close-knit and hard-working, even spending free time together at tennis or poker.

Among the firm's remarkable upsets have been the 1970 elections of Representatives (Father) John Drinan and Boston Mayor Kevin White, the 1972 victories of 29-year-old Delaware Senator Joseph Biden and Massachusetts Representative John Moakley, and last month's stunning victory of Representative Richard VanderVeen in the former Ford district, which had been Republican for 25 years.

Former Republican colleagues tag Marttila "brilliant," "low key," "humorous," "genuine," "a super-guy and a very caring individual." Michigan GOP chairman William F. McLaughlin, who worked with him on the Peterson program, says:

"I just wish John were still on our side."