

# INSIDE PHILLY

## Butkovitz transforms Controllers Office

By Nathaniel Lee

When I entered the spacious office of City Controller Alan Butkovitz, I came armed with a list of questions. I didn't need them. The well dressed gentleman who greeted me had a calm exterior but it became all too clear early in the interview that he possessed an intense passion for his work. So much so that I had no need to rely upon pre-prepared questions, all I needed to do was sit back and let the City Controller speak about the city he loves and his service to its residents.

Butkovitz admits that he "was clearly not a very good student" in his early years. "My parents were divorced at an early age, we were on welfare during that time period and I was not a motivated student." Things began to change for the Controller when he joined the debating team at Overbrook High School where he met a young 28 year old African-American teacher, Chester Plumber who coached the debating team at the time. Plumber "became a surrogate father...as a result of that I started taking a greater interest in English," says Butkovitz.

Things began to improve for him academically at that point and he did well enough to enroll in Temple University where he "started to excel and did well enough" to eventually become a lawyer. Butkovitz was the first person in his family to graduate from college, in fact, he was probably the first person in his family to graduate from high school. Yet despite early struggles he rose to become a law maker in the House of Representatives which he served for 15 years before becoming the City's Controller.

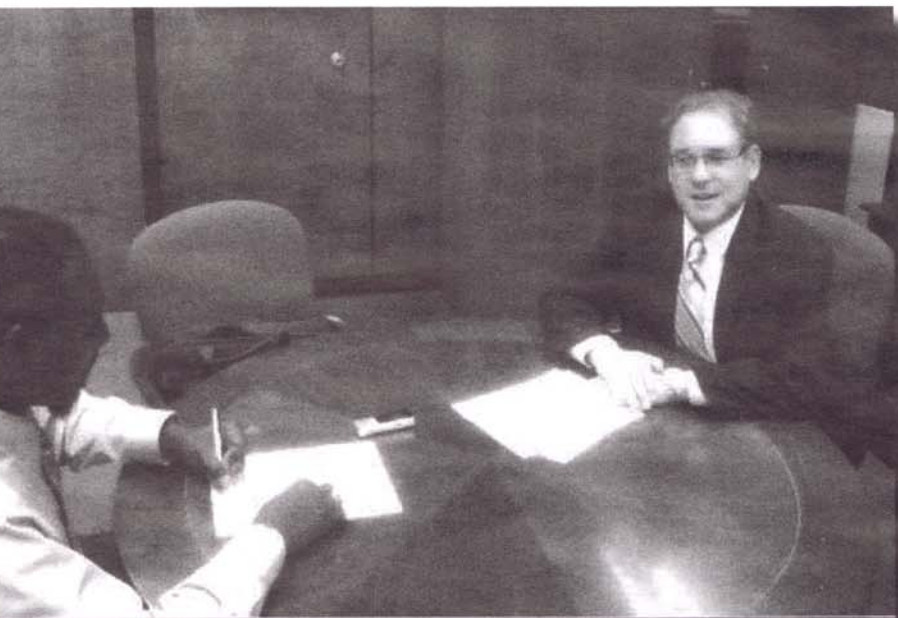
It was former Mayor Rizzo which became his motivation to enter politics. Mayor Frank Rizzo, never a favorite among African-American voters, was seeking a third term in office. Butkovitz's political career began with his efforts to stop Rizzo's bid for reelection. "I tried to break into politics back in the '70's, Rizzo was the Mayor," Reflects Butkovitz "he was a very divisive figure and I was involved in political organizing against him when he tried to go for a third term."

The road to politics was not an easy one and there would be several failed at-



Alan Butkovitz

tempt to gain political positions before he succeeded. "I ran for the State Legislature while I was still in law school and I lost the Democratic primary in 1976; in 1982 I was nominated by the Democrats against a Republican incumbent...and I lost that race." This caused him to second guess his political ambitions and abilities. However, when Legislator Matt Piesky retired in 1990, Butkovitz's fortune began to change and won the election to replace him. Yet it was Controllers office which then held his attention. "I was interested in the controller's office for a long time because it combined a number of things that I thought interesting."



Despite his early disdain for math as a youth, Butkovitz "essentially became a num-

bers person, I was able," he says, "to think in numbers. Election statistics, calculating money, those things became second nature to me..." It is "numbers" which he believes "are the way people understand what the truth is in the world. Language," Butkovitz explains, "gives you a chance to blow over things and it's easier to fool people with language but numbers, to me, is a description of what's real."

Butkovitz went on to transform the Controllers office and expand its services. From the way Philly picks up its trash to the way it responds to medical emergencies, the Controller analyzed how the city performed. By analyzing how other cities tackled spe-

formance audits."

In the four years Butkovitz has served as our City Controller, some 30 performance and special audits were conducted. "This office hardly did any of those before [he assumed the post]." Thanks to such performance audits, Butkovitz was able to make much needed recommendations on how the city could improve services in key areas such as how rescue teams respond to medical emergencies, repairing dangerous structural problems in several recreation centers which threatened the safety of our children and advise the city on how to transform the way in which it distribute contracts to minorities.

"Everything in this city," explained the Controller, "Everything that the government does is pretty much through money. All the money that gets spent in this city moves through this office." Butkovitz makes sure that the people are given quality, efficient service for the money spent. "We're able," he explains, "to bring in a new set of eyes...we can be in a constant process of making things better." With today's budget crisis, Lord knows we need it.

cific issues, Butkovitz was able to compare our metropolis to others and use comparative analysis to measure its effectiveness and efficiency. In this way he was able to suggest improvements and recommend better ways of operating that has already proven their success in other places.

Performance audits were another tool he used for helping to ensure that the residents were truly being served by the city's government and agencies. "The city claims that it does a lot of things that it doesn't do very well..." explained the Controller "it's always in their interest to puff and to promote to make it look as good as possible. But you can't rely on that as a true measurement of how its working...so that's why we do per-

