## **Malmen Stumps for Otter, GOP**

By Janelle Brown

Butch Otter is riding high. Wearing a cowboy shirt embroidered with "Otter for Congress," Wrangler jeans and spitpolished boots, Idaho's lieutenant governor and Republican candidate for the 1st Congressional District strides through the crowd at the Western Idaho Fair, stopping every few minutes to shake hands with well-wishers or banter about politics, farm prices or the sweltering weather.

"If I was in Detroit, I'd probably go to the Ford Motor Co., but in Idaho, this is where it's at," says Otter, sweeping out his arm to

encompass the colorful scene.

On the other side of the fairgrounds, Otter's campaign manager, Jeff Malmen, paces back and forth in front of the Idaho Republican booth and talks on his cell phone about Otter's upcoming visit to Coeur d'Alene. Otter, riding a borrowed horse, will carry the state flag in a procession at the North Idaho Fair Rodeo. Malmen wants to make sure the horse is used to big crowds and won't be spooked. It's just one of a deluge of details he'll handle today - little things that alone might appear insignificant,

Jeff Malmen, campaign manager for Butch Otter, chats with party but taken together, shape a candidate and a campaign. workers at a Republican

"Outside of Boise, Idaho is still a rural state. People want to look the candidate in the eye and talk to him. That's very important," says Malmen, who studied social sciences at Boise State University from 1985-87 and was involved, not surprisingly, in student government and debate.

Malmen's job is to have Otter in a winning position by Election Day on Nov. 7. From campaign headquarters in downtown Boise, he charts strategy, marshals volunteers, builds coalitions, oversees fund-raisers and schedules his candidate throughout the vast 1st District, which includes 19 counties, two time zones and 582 miles from top to bottom.

Malmen thrives on it all. A veteran GOP campaigner, he has managed the successful bids of Gov. Dirk Kempthorne. Sen. Larry Craig and former Gov. Phil Batt, and also helped get Steve Symms elected to the U.S. Senate in 1986. He has served as executive director of the Idaho Republican Party, as Batt's chief of staff, Craig's field director, Symms' legislative correspondent, and as administrator of the Idaho Division of Financial Management.

"Jeff was a great help to me both in my campaign and as governor," says Batt. "He's intelligent and hardworking. He'll go a long way in the world."

Craig describes Malmen as a "self-starter" who understands how to motivate people. "He has always impressed me with a sharp political mind and attention to detail," Craig says.

Malmen shrugs off the accolades. "I have a healthy fear of failing. That helps drive me," he says. Though Otter appears poised

for an easy victory over Moscow City Council president Linda Pall for the seat held by retiring Rep. Helen Chenoweth-Hage, Malmen isn't taking anything for granted.

"If we buy that, we don't get the signs up, we don't get the information in people's hands. Perhaps most importantly, we forget to go vote," he says. "You always need to be in a position of building. It's difficult to correct a glide."

Besides, as Malmen knows firsthand, elections are never a done deal. At one point in Batt's bid for governor in 1994, he was

> 38 points behind in the polls, then went on to defeat Larry EchoHawk. "In some ways, it's easier that way," Malmen says. "You always know what the target is."

Malmen's days start early and end late. He keeps a notebook by his bed so if he wakes up in the night with an idea, he can write it down. A major task is figuring logistics and priorities for Otter's appearances around the state everything from a barbecue at Givens Hot Springs in Owyhee County to a fund-raiser in Wallace and a meeting with real estate agents in Caldwell. "Butch loves to

campaign, he loves to be in the middle of people," says Malmen. "He's a little bit of a character - but in the 1st District, they don't demand people be 100 percent politically correct or 100 percent polished. They like someone who is a little rough and

Party booth.

Like any good manager, Malmen plays to his candidate's strengths, keeping Otter on a tight schedule of people-to-people appearances around the district. "Jeff gives me discipline. He keeps me from making silly mistakes," says Otter. "He maintains a healthy schedule for me - it's probably not a schedule he'd like to keep, but he has no qualms about me doing it."

With some 5,000 volunteers and the campaign well on its way toward reaching its goal of raising \$1 million, Malmen is confident the campaign is on track. Still, he expects his days to be increasingly busy.

"You can sense when people start to pay attention, when they focus on what the election is about," says Malmen. "That should be happening soon."

He'll make last-minute changes in campaign strategy in the weeks ahead, depending on voter mood and the issues that surface. "The day before the election, you find out if you put everything together right," says Malmen. "But now is the time to make sure that happens."