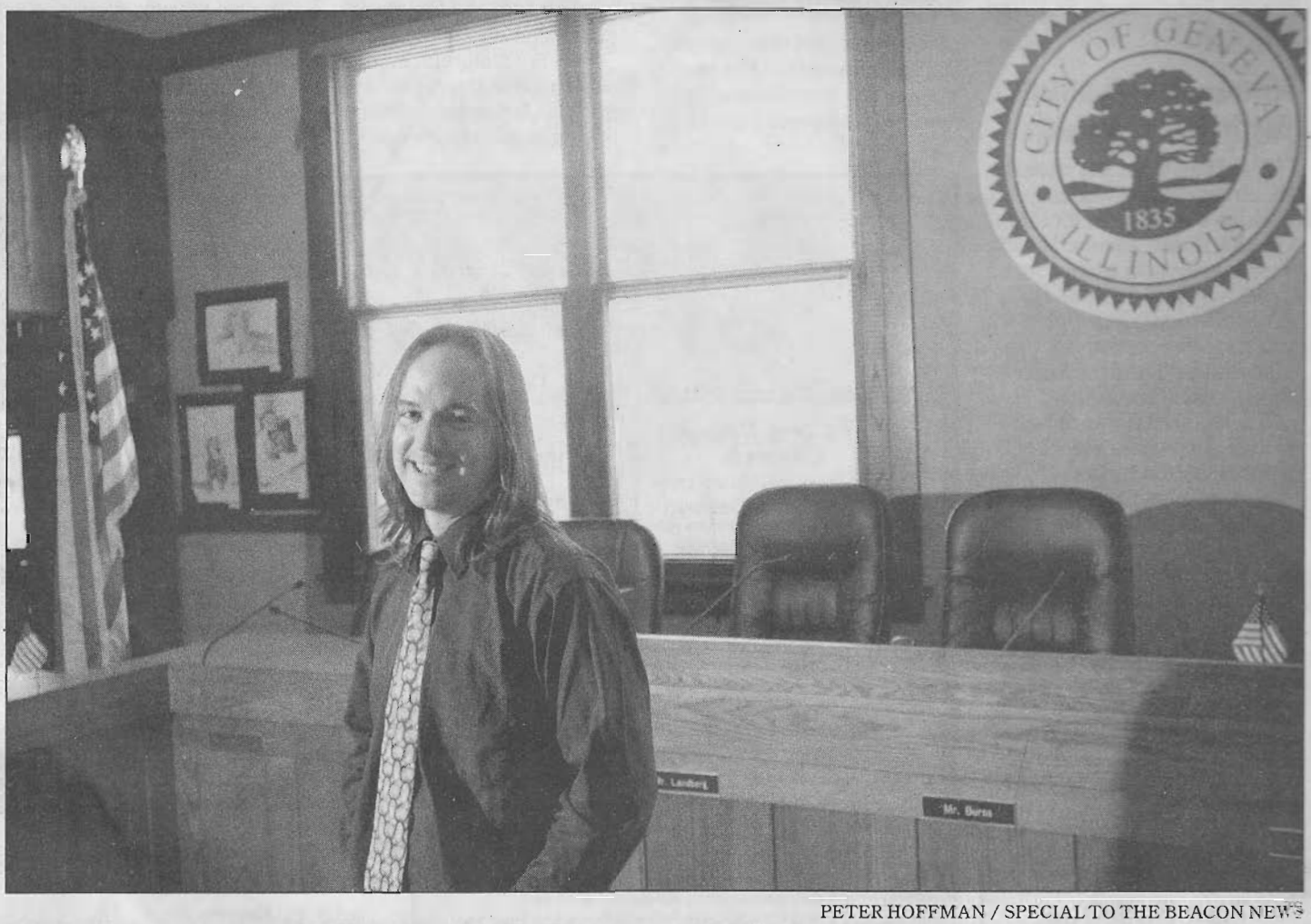


PETER HOFFMAN / SPECIAL TO THE BEACON NEWS

Peter Collins poses in Geneva City Hall, where his office is located. Collins is the IT person for the city and has been there for the past nine years, following a career as a rock musician.

A big year for the IT guy

Issues forced techies to the forefront in 2007

By Steve Lord
STAFF WRITER

GENEVA — The IT guy has long ago shed the nerd image and become the VIP of the office.

And in 2007, at least in the Fox Valley, the people who run Information Technology took it one step further and stepped out from behind the door to the server office, becoming a public face themselves.

No one personified that more than Pete Collins, IT guy for the city of Geneva. Whether lobbying for a fair law governing cable and Internet video, helping get a deal for free wireless Web service or turning on the city's webcasts of City Council meetings, Collins was certainly no quiet guy behind glasses and a pocket protector.

"I've got a cool job," he says. "And to me, part of the job is I'm supposed to stand up and fight for the city."

Collins did that in 2007, wearing a path between City Hall in Geneva and the Statehouse in Springfield to lobby for the public policy side of the Cable and Video Competition Law of 2007. The battle for more than six months between AT&T and individual municipalities and counties centered on who would license video, whether it was delivered through coaxial cable or fiber optic on the Internet.

In the end, AT&T got its desire to only get a state franchise, rather than have to negotiate franchises with individual counties and cities. That also applies to cable suppliers such as Comcast.

But work by Collins and many others representing large and small municipalities insured that cities still will get franchise fees, and will have control through the permitting process of what is built in public rights-of-way. It also attached customer standards that video deliverers must live up to.

While the bill was not perfect — Collins himself was not completely happy with the final outcome — it was the result of the expertise of Collins and people like him that helped make the bill something practical cities could work with.

The IT guys are more than fix-it technicians these days; they are policy advisers, too.

"You have to ask yourself, what is the role of IT in the city," Collins said. "We're looking out for what's best for the citizens."

Collins has been no shrinking violet in the area of delivery to the public of television and Internet services. He is president of the Illinois Municipal Broadband Communications Association, and has been involved in the information technology field for almost 20 years.

He speaks regularly at national broadband seminars and summits. This week, he is speaking at a wireless conference in Las Vegas.

While Collins has been in the forefront, promoting municipal broadband for a while, he admitted 2007 was an unusually busy year.

"There was a just a lot going on this year," he said.

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