

Barros wants to energize city's young professionals

By **Gintautas Dumcius** Jun. 6, 2013



John Barros

On the night of March 27, John Barros's cell phone would not stop buzzing with text messages. As he sat at a School Committee meeting around the corner from City Hall, word was quickly circulating that Mayor Thomas Menino would not be running for reelection.

Appointed to the seven-member committee three and a half years ago, Barros would join the crowd of well-wishers and elected officials the next day at Faneuil Hall when Menino formally announced his intention to bow out. And less than a month later, he would resign from the committee, one of his last steps toward launching a mayoral campaign.

His wife, Tchintcia, had urged him to consider a run. "When you begin to entertain those kinds of conversations, and you start listening and you start thinking about it, you start wondering, 'What if?' " Barros said in an interview with the *Reporter*. "And at some point I got really excited about continuing the work that Menino has done, making sure things like the Ferdinand Building [in Dudley Square] are completed, making sure we continue to move, to improve the schools and investing in neighborhoods, et cetera. And it became a real exciting proposition to be able to lead that forward. The passion kind of grew, the fire kind of grew, and I said to myself, 'Absolutely, I can be a great mayor for the city and I think I can win the race.' "

Barros, who grew up in Roxbury and now lives on Virginia Street in Dorchester, gained enough certified voter signatures for a place on the mayoral ballot, the Election Department determined last week.

Barros says he has a strong base to work with, geographically: Roxbury and the northern part of Dorchester. He said he plans to focus on education issues and retaining young professionals.

"We're losing young professionals in Boston," he said and, he added, he is uniquely positioned to talk about small businesses and the business community, because of his background as a co-founder of a restaurant aimed at helping the local economy, as the executive director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, where he oversaw the planning and building of playgrounds, parks and schools, and because of the time he has spent working at a global property and insurance firm.

"I think, given my corporate background and given the work that I've done, that I could potentially be a very attractive candidate in the business community as an executive," Barros said.

In 2001, he was one of the four founding members – Barros, two brothers and a cousin – of a small business: Restaurante Cesaria in the Bowdoin-Geneva neighborhood. "We opened up this restaurant with the idea of contributing to improving this neighborhood," he said over lunch at the Bowdoin Street eatery. "We didn't do it because we thought we were going to make a lot of money. In fact, we haven't made a lot of money. We haven't made any profit in any year."

Barros had previously volunteered at the Cape Verdean restaurant, coming in at night to help mop the floors or picking up fruit on a Saturday morning. He formally took his name off the corporate documents in 2011, although he had ratcheted back his involvement earlier than that, he said. "It's my family, so I'm part of the community of supporters for this business," he said.

As for his campaign, Barros said he wants to be the "candidate that says to business owners: 'I understand how difficult it is to run a business.' We have had to figure out how to pay bills, we have had delinquent taxes that we have had to get on plans for."

The restaurant is current on its existing taxes now, he said, because of payment plans with the Internal Revenue Service and the state Department of Revenue. The Internal Revenue Service had told them

they were delinquent on workers' compensation. The company had owed a total of \$23,500 to both agencies, that figure is now down to \$14,500, according to the campaign.

Barros, who is of Cape Verdean descent, is one of several candidates of color in the race. Asked if he expected to feel pressure to unite behind a single candidate of color, he said he has heard pushback from some who felt there should be more candidates of color in the race. "The other side of the camp, I have heard a little bit of: 'Well, for those people who are interested in having a person of color win, how many would have to win in order for that to happen?' " he said. But the conversation should be more complex than that, he added, and it should be a talk about "who is the best person to lead Boston?"

"No candidate of color or not color solely carrying the communities of color can win this," Barros said. "The numbers just don't bear out, right? And so I really think it's not just an identity politics kind of campaign; it really needs to be all of Boston. Now the question of whether Boston is ready to elect someone of color is a real question."

There's plenty of analysis on that issue out there, Barros noted. "We've got a long race to run," he said. "Boston will speak at the end."