

Eclectic career opens vistas for Koppendrayer

St. Paul is only the latest stop for freshman Rep. LeRoy Koppendrayer.

Before he set up shop at the state Capitol, he drove a truck in an Iron Range taconite mine, managed a mail-order company near his home in Princeton, and consulted dairy farmers in far-flung locales such as Ecuador, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Indonesian island of Java.

It's been an itinerary that has taken the Independent-Republican to some unique vistas and opened his eyes to many more.

"I've seen the system from a lot of different sides and I think I have a broad perspective to offer the people of my district," he says.

Koppendrayer's first-term committee assignments — Commerce, Agriculture, and Governmental Operations — reflect his desire to serve the diverse interests of his district, which comprises mid-sized communities dotting the farmlands of Mille Lacs County and portions of three others in central Minnesota.

But it is education, particularly vocational education, that is his top legislative priority. He says schools have to evolve to keep pace and to prepare students so they can compete in the



LeRoy J. Koppendrayer

District 18A

Age: 49

Home: Princeton

Occupation: Farmer

District traits: 18A encompasses all of Mille Lacs County and portions of three others in east-central Minnesota. The district voted for Rudy Boschwitz over Paul Wellstone by a 50.4-to-49.6 percent margin in the 1990 U.S. senatorial race.

global economy.

"I'm starting to believe that education has to become focused, he says. "We have to get our children to begin to start thinking earlier about what they want to do when they're older. I realize it can be difficult for someone so young to decide, but it may be the only way to keep up with the rest of the world. We have to set up our schools to help them do that."

Koppendrayer says his experience working abroad as an agricultural consultant reinforced his belief that some dramatic changes are needed in Minnesota's schools. But it's also convinced him that lawmakers have to learn

to put aside their more parochial interests for the broader constituency they all serve.

He says educational reform should be much broader in scope than just equity funding.

"We have to look at reform which will give the students the tools they need to compete in the job market," he says.

"It's more than the cities competing with the rural areas. The kids of Minnesota are competing with all of the working people throughout the rest of the world. We've got to start thinking that it's Minnesota versus the world."



Three-year-old Westby Nelson of Minneapolis caught a glimpse of the Star of the North in the Capitol rotunda recently during a tour with his mother, Sonja.