

JAMES ULLAND DULUTH-AREA LAWMAKER TURNED INVESTMENT ADVISER

# 'A calm and steady force'

By CHRISTA LAWLER  
The Minnesota Star Tribune

DULUTH - In the late 1960s, James Ulland was a commercial tree farmer with 660 acres of tax-forfeited land he had acquired between French River and Alborn, in northern Minnesota. He had started with 10,000 trees and quickly expanded to 140,000 - with plans to add 60,000 red pine and white spruce seedlings in the spring.

This rated as a superlative: In the previous two years, Ulland had planted more trees in St. Louis County than any other private individual. He told a reporter from the Duluth News Tribune at the time that the red pines wouldn't hit maturity until he was 109 years old.

In 1968, Ulland's occupation was listed as economist/tree farmer when he was elected as a Republican to the Minnesota House and later to the Minnesota Senate from traditionally Democratic-leaning Duluth. He spent 15 years in state politics and was later appointed by Gov. Arne Carlson to be the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Commerce. In 1997, he founded Ulland Investment Advisors, a boutique Minneapolis firm where he spent the rest of his career.

Ulland died Nov. 29, a year after he was diagnosed with cancer, surrounded by fam-



Provided

James Ulland was a commercial tree farmer when he was elected to the Minnesota House.

ily, according to his obituary. He was 82. His connection to the environment would be a through-line in his life.

"It didn't matter whether it was politics or business or family and friends - he was very funny, very smart with a quick wit, and very active," said Ann Glumac, who is married to Ulland's brother Bill Ulland.

Former Gov. Arne Carlson remembered Ulland as bright with a good sense of humor and a delight to work alongside. He is remembered as a strong environmentalist with a message

about the hole in the ozone layer and its effects on humankind, Carlson said.

"He was the first [layperson] to grasp the early stages of what we now call climate change," Carlson said. "He began to realize over time that we had to develop policies that had a long-term impact and to recognize that the earth's climate was changing and it was harmful to man's ability to survive."

Mike Jaros, who served in the Minnesota House about the same time as Ulland and represented neighboring areas, said he always admired Ulland. They came from different parties, but DFLer Jaros said he enjoyed working with Ulland.

"He was a good environmentalist and human rights supporter," he said. "He was brilliant, very intelligent. He was more liberal than most Democrats."

Ulland made the surprise announcement that he was resigning from politics in late 1984. He had taken a job as senior vice president of First Bank System. He said at the time that he planned to continue to advocate for Republican policies for economic expansion. This also marked his move from northern Minnesota to the Twin

Cities.

Ulland was described as a "feisty partisan" who took frequent jabs at then-Gov. Rudy Perpich and Senate DFLers in a 1984 Minneapolis Star and Tribune story about his career change.

Carlson later appointed him commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Commerce at a time when Ulland wanted to get back into government policy, he said.

"He was good," Carlson said. "He works well with people, he likes people. He was a natural for the political arena. He never got hostile, but he was always in the thick of things. That's what democracy was about."

His wife, Kris Ulland, said the two had been part of a similar circle of family and mutual friends, and she doesn't remember ever not knowing him. Eventually their paths came back together during a July 4th party in northern Minnesota, and they married in 1994.

She remembered him as honest, kind, generous and smart. "We just clicked," she said.

In recent weeks, she has seen his reach, she said. She has gotten notes from people her husband directed toward Pennsylvania's Wharton school, where

he earned his MBA; alumni from Carleton College, where he did undergrad and whom he offered internships to; and people whose finances he helped arrange during major life changes.

He was a reader who always had a good quote handy, Kris Ulland said, and a competitive runner. He maintained close circles of friends, including a group at the Minneapolis Club. He was on the board of the Minnesota Orchestra and championed parks. He was health-conscious, adopting his wife's vegan diet and spinning on his Peloton. He had a regular spot at the head of the table at get-togethers, where he always made his friends laugh, she said.

"He died without regrets, without any kind of worry," Kris Ulland said. "He died with a clean conscience and [as] an honorable man. He was kind beyond measure and thoughtful. I think that's how he'd want to be remembered - a man who did as much good as he could and gave of himself wherever he was needed."

"He wasn't one of those people who becomes a hero or saint after death," she added. "This was actually Jim. He was genu-

inely like that."

Nat Beebe was hired out of Carleton College 18 years ago and is now president of Ulland Investment Advisors. Ulland remains listed on the company's website as CEO and chairman, and now there is also a tribute to the company's founder. Beebe described the chapters of Ulland's life - time with the U.S. Coast Guard, teaching economics at the University of Minnesota Duluth, tree farming, politics - as being straight out of a movie.

"Jim was such a calm and steady force. Through good markets and bad, he always had this calming way of handling a crisis," Beebe said in an interview. "He had this instant ability to connect with people. He always had a way of looking with an optimistic view at the world."

Kris Ulland said the couple loved to hike together. James Ulland always carried a garbage bag to pick up trash along the route, whether it was in the woods or on a beach.

Ulland eventually stopped harvesting trees, but kept his land in northern Minnesota. Kris Ulland said they would occasionally visit the forest, filled with his favorite trees.

"They are big old trees now," she said.

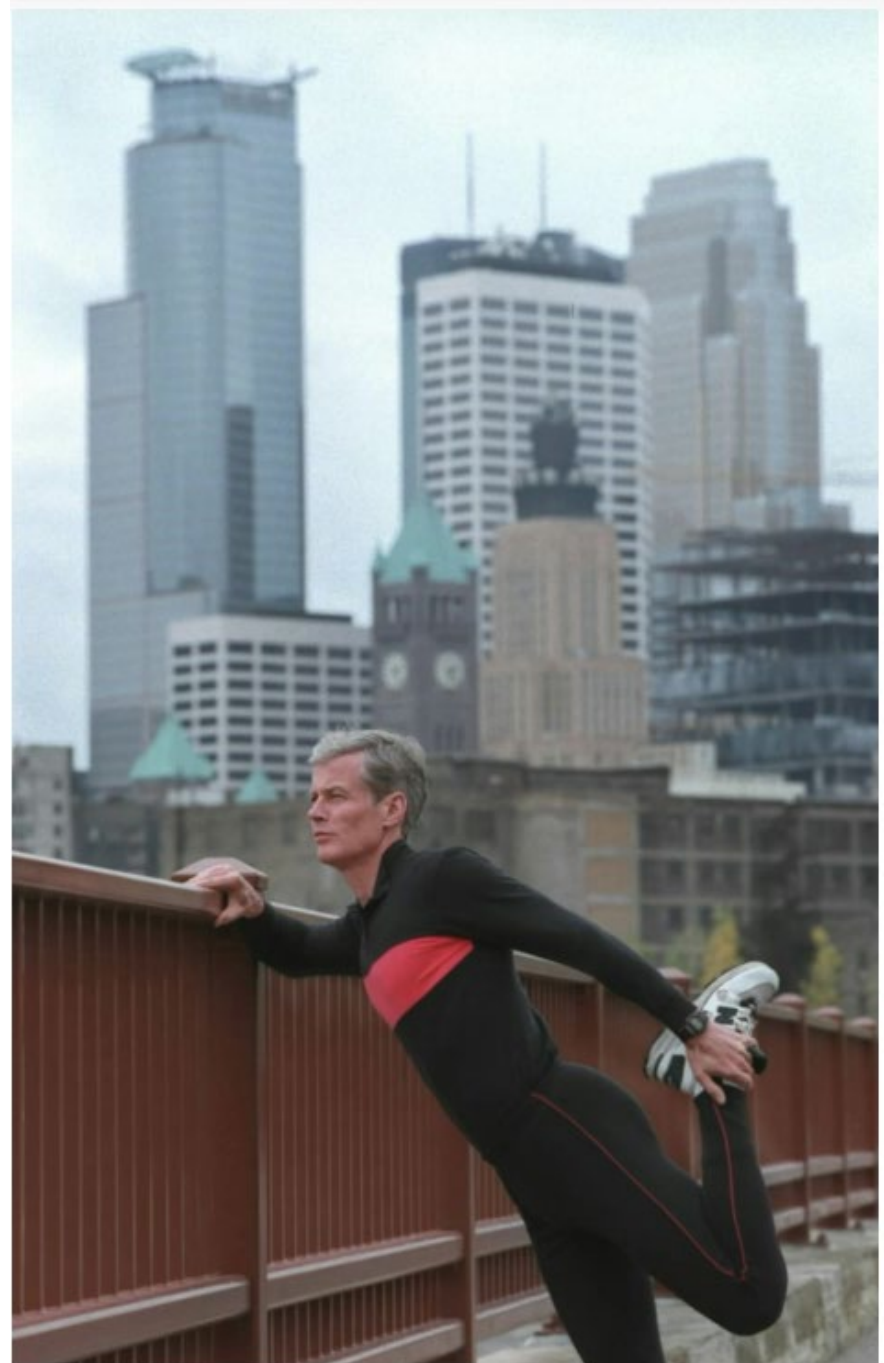
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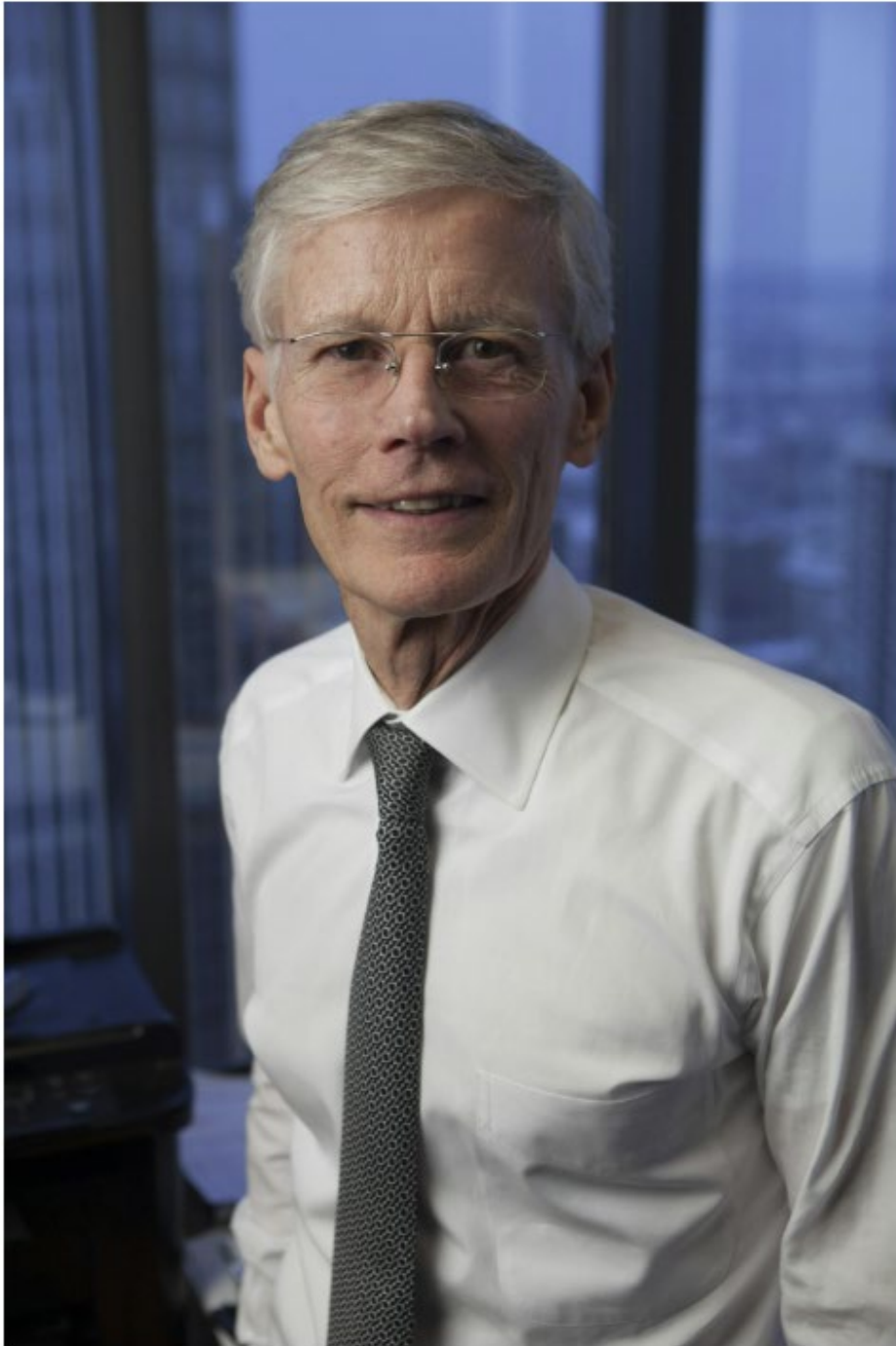
In 1977, Sen. James Ulland, a Duluth Republican, presented a partisan joke gift to Gov. Wendell Anderson, who had been appointed to the U.S. Senate in 1977: a "Wendell Anderson time capsule" supposedly containing a "record of all that Anderson achieved in six years as governor." (Steve Schluter/The Minnesota Star Tribune)



A photo from 1985 shows Jim Ulland throwing a baled pine tree onto a truck bound for a Christmas tree wholesaler. (Associated Press)



In 1995, Commerce Commissioner Jim Ulland was a businessman and a competitive runner. (The Minnesota Star Tribune)



James Ulland founded Ulland Investment Advisors. He died Nov. 29, 2024. (Submitted photo)