

Bev Scalze Wildlife artist and environmental leader

Her love of nature showed — in her art and her legislation

By ANTHONY LONETREE • anthony.lonetree@startribune.com



Bev Scalze had a love for nature that shone through in her art and in her politics.

A wildlife artist, she won the 1991 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources trout stamp contest.

She launched a political life spanning nearly 40 years — first as a Little Canada City Council member and then a state lawmaker — after an

effort to stop a road project that threatened wetlands in Little Canada.

Scalze, who as a DFL state legislator co-authored the Legacy Amendment to help preserve clean water and protect the environment, died June 23 of cancer complications. She was 77.

Known by colleagues and family members for putting people ahead of partisan politics, Scalze typically went through three pairs of tennis shoes knocking on doors each campaign season.

“She was very passionate about it,” said her daughter, Gina Masterson. “She felt the only way you could understand your constituents is if you talked with them.”

Scalze relished conversations to such an extent that she’d leave the State Capitol in her free time to answer phones at the family’s heating and air conditioning business in White Bear Lake.

“Customers would get a kick out of it,” said her son, John Scalze. “They’d ask, ‘Aren’t you in session?’ She’d say, ‘This is where I go to be happy.’”

She still was taking calls at Hoffman Corner Heating & Air Conditioning a month before her death. Five years had gone by since she resigned a state Senate seat, but she was remembered fondly in floor speeches in the state House and Senate, with Republican Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka saying her character was a gift “she gave to us.”

Raised on a farm near Baudette, Minn., Scalze attacked 4-H projects with such fervor as a youth that the program in Lake of the Woods County sent a letter saying she was submitting too many entries in its contests.

She graduated from high school at age 16 and moved to the Twin Cities area to study art, her son said. She married Robert “Bob” Scalze, who died in 2018, and the couple made their home in Little Canada. There, Scalze started a 4-H program and girls’ tee ball league, among other pursuits, and eventually served as a City Council member, helping expand the suburb’s parks and trails.

Former state Rep. Mindy Greiling, DFL-Roseville, who first knew of Scalze as an artist, would check in at Little Canada City Hall to talk about priorities and noticed that when a tough issue came up, “all of the heads craned in her direction.”

Greiling recruited her to run for a state House seat. Scalze came up short in her first attempt but won in 2004. At the State Capitol, she pushed for environmental measures that were unpopular outstate, especially among representatives on the Iron Range, and “she just stood up to all of them with those big eyes of hers,” Greiling said. “Those northern legislators did not intimidate her. She was one of them.”

At the same time, her son said, Scalze was pro-business, pushing for highway improvements at the I-694 and I-35E junction in Vadnais Heights and for a new Rice Street bridge over Hwy. 36 in Little Canada.

Scalze’s philosophy, she told a House publication, was to do good by her grandchildren: “You do a lot of things for your kids, but you’d go to the wall for your grandkids,” she said.

In addition to her son and daughter, she is survived by five granddaughters. Services are set for Aug. 2 at Bradshaw Funeral Home in White Bear Lake.

Anthony Lonetree • 612-673-4109

Twitter: @StribLonetree

“You do a lot of things for your kids, but you’d go to the wall for your grandkids.” — Bev Scalze on her legislative philosophy