

Obituaries

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John Ainley, former legislator and newspaper owner, dies

Park Rapids Republican ran for governor in 1982

By **Kavita Kumar**
Star Tribune Staff Writer

John Ainley, a former state legislator, newspaperman and media specialist, died Tuesday at United Hospital in St. Paul. He was 61.

He had a history of heart problems and died of complications from surgery to remove a small lung tumor.

Ainley was a two-term state representative from Park Rapids from 1979 to 1983.

During his tenure he was a Republican caucus leader known for his fiscal conservatism and belief in limited government.

"He was unflappable, took everything in stride, and was consistent," said Duane Benson, former Senate minority leader. "That's kind of a rare quality in the Legislature."

Ainley challenged Gov. Al Quie in 1982 for the party's gubernatorial nomination, saying Quie had failed to re-

duce spending and govern with the fiscal policy Ainley said the voters wanted. But Ainley withdrew from the race.

Ainley, the son of the Bemidji Pioneer's former editor, John Ainley Sr., led a life of twists and turns.

With the help of his father, he bought the Park Rapids Enterprise and increased its circulation in the seven years he owned it.

But a drinking problem led him on a downward spiral until, as he said, he hit "rock bottom" in 1973.

He got treatment and turned his life around, finishing his degree in mass communications and helping start

the Bemidji Advertiser.

At the urging of his friends, he ran for the Legislature in 1978 and won. He stopped after two terms and the short-lived bid for governor.

In 1988 he was the director of Vice President George

Bush's GOP presidential campaign in Minnesota, but he had to quit because of a heart attack.

He also was a spokesman for the Senate Republican caucus in the mid-1990s, before starting a media relations company that later merged with another. He moved to Marco Island, Fla., earlier this year.

"He was the most decent man I ever had the chance to meet," said his business partner, D.J. Leary. "He was a man of enormous caring and concern and compassion for everybody. He had a capacity that was too big for his physical heart, and it just gave out."

Survivors include his wife, Cindy Eberhardt-Ainley; son Jack of Fullerton, Calif.; daughters Jin of Brooklyn Park, Sunny of Minneapolis and Nam Provost of Eau Claire, Wis.; sister Jan Wickstrom of St. Louis, and seven grandchildren.

Services will be held at 6 p.m. Monday at Mississippi Dunes, 10351 Grey Cloud Trail, Cottage Grove.

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John Ainley served in the state House from 1979-83 and was known for his fiscal conservatism.