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Obituaries

Richard Andersen dies at 84; served in the Legislature

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Richard Andersen said he was offended by a "grandiose" Minnesota zoo plan.

Richard Andersen, a pet-store owner and state representative who opposed construction of the Minnesota Zoo in the early 1970s because of growing costs, died of cancer Monday at his home in New Brighton. He was 84.

Andersen, who owned the Pet Center chain of five stores in suburban malls, had supported the creation of a state Zoo Board in the late 1960s. But by 1971, the fiscally conservative representative was offended by what he called a grandiose plan: The zoo proposal had doubled in cost, increased in acreage and added a monorail, which would cost visitors extra. Projected admission fees also had gone up.

"It is getting to the point where the average family will not be able to afford a trip to the zoo," he said.

"I would hate to see the [P.T.] Barnum saying about a sucker being born every minute apply to the Legislature" if it approved the bonding plan for \$37.5 million, he said in 1971. He supported the proposal after the bonding was whittled to \$4.3 million. The zoo opened in Apple Valley in 1978 on 500 acres, with construction costs of \$20 million.

Andersen was first elected in 1966 and was the first legislator from New Brighton, according to a 1987 centennial history of the city.

Andersen, who was endorsed by the GOP, served four terms but lost to a DFLer, Steven Novak, in 1974, when many Republican politicians felt the heat of the national Watergate scandal and the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

Andersen studied zoology at the University of Minnesota but, when he couldn't join the military

in World War II because of a medical condition, he quit school to work at what is now the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant.

After the war he opened his first pet store, the Bird and Pet Shop, in downtown Minneapolis, said his daughter Kitty Huberty of Tucson, Ariz. He soon added a leased pet department in the John W. Thomas and Co. department store, also in downtown Minneapolis.

He retired in the mid-1980s, and the Pet Center store name disappeared when the family business was sold in 1990.

Andersen was an accomplished breeder of species orchids, which are orchids that have been collected in the wild, said his daughter Patricia Hartmann of Hastings. A licensed private pilot, he collected samples on flights to Mexico, the Caribbean and South America.

Andersen was elected to the New Brighton Village Council in 1962 and reelected in 1964. He resigned in 1966 after his election to the Legislature.

His wife, Marie, died in January 2002. In addition to his two daughters, survivors include two more daughters, Joan Siegel of St. Louis Park and Judy Siegel of Eden Prairie; nine grandchildren; three great-grandchildren, and a sister, Phyllis Rogne of Cumberland, Wis.

Services were private. Relatives and friends may call from 1 to 6 p.m. today at 2600 Rice Creek Terrace, New Brighton.

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