

Obituaries

Ex-state Sen. Robert O. Ashbach of Arden Hills dies

By Robert Whereatt and Pat Pfeifer
Staff Writers

Robert O. Ashbach of Arden Hills, former Minnesota Senate minority leader, whose mastery of state finances amazed colleagues and confounded administrators, died Tuesday at age 74.

Ashbach underwent quadruple bypass surgery in June. During that surgery, doctors discovered an aortic aneurysm. It was repaired in a subsequent operation, but Ashbach began to hemorrhage Monday. He died at United Hospitals in St. Paul.

Services will be held at 1 p.m. Friday at Christ the King Lutheran Church in New Brighton. Visitation will be held from 4 to 9 p.m. today at the Adam-Bradshaw-Hauge Funeral Home, 1078 Rice St., St. Paul.

Ashbach, an Independent-Republican, served in the Minnesota House from 1962 to 1966 and in the Senate from 1967 to 1982. He was Senate minority leader from 1975 until he retired.

He was among a few legislators who tried against heavy opposition to lib-



Robert O. Ashbach

eralize Minnesota's restrictive abortion law in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He failed, but the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973 nullified the law.

As minority leader, Ashbach continually challenged budget figures and revenue projections put forth by both DFL and IR administrations.

"He had a better sense of what the economy was doing than the economists," recalled Gov. Rudy Perpich, who was governor, lieutenant governor and a state senator during Ashbach's career.

In 1978, DFLer Perpich agreed with one of Ashbach's revenue estimates, even though it differed from the figure that the governor's own finance commissioner had calculated. "I said that Ashbach was right," said Perpich.

Ultimately, Ashbach confirmed the governor's faith, said Perpich.

Sen. Duane Benson, the current Independent-Republican minority leader, served under Ashbach.

"I asked him once, 'Bob, how do you know so much about the budget?'" said Benson. "He said he would take the budget into the bathtub and study it.

"As far as a student of government, I don't know if we'll ever see anybody like him again. I suspect not," Benson said.

Sen. Roger Moe, the current majority

leader, said Ashbach was able to bring diverse personalities and philosophies together, forging compromises and agreement.

Gerald Ashbach, a son from Loveland, Colo., said his father considered that a strength. "I think what he was probably most proud of was his ability to bring people together," said the son. "He was a real problem-solver."

In 1982 he tried but failed to get his party's endorsement for governor.

Ashbach made his mark in the business world as a contractor and banker. He was president of Ashbach Construction Co. in Arden Hills until the mid-1970s, when he sold it to a brother.

His construction work began as a part-time job when Ashbach and his father began digging basements for homes in the Arden Hills and Roseville areas.

He attended the University of Minnesota School of Forestry, but left in the last quarter of his senior year to buy a power shovel and go into the construction business full time with

his father and brothers. The firm built part of the interstate highway system in the metropolitan area.

He was a founder and chairman of the Roseville State Bank. He was the primary stockholder until it was bought by Firststar in 1988.

In 1950, Ashbach became a member of the Arden Hills town board. He was mayor from 1952 to 1962, when he was elected to the Minnesota House.

He was president of the St. Paul Winter Carnival Association and in 1972 was King Boreas XXXVI.

Ashbach is survived by his wife, Marjorie; sons Gerald and Daniel of Arden Hills; a daughter, Kathryn Mosby, of New Brighton; a brother, Bernard, of Forest Lake; a sister, Jean Swanson of Shoreview; seven grandchildren, and a great-grandchild.

Memorials may be made to the North Suburban Community Foundation, Robert Ashbach Charitable Fund, which donates money to deal with drug abuse problems among young people.