

# John Biersdorf, well-liked on both sides of House aisle

● The farmer represented District 32A from 1971-1980, and invited DFlers and Republicans alike to fish with him.

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John Biersdorf used bright yellow smiley faces on T-shirts and campaign literature during his first run for office in 1971, a symbol that aptly described a demeanor that allowed the Republican state legislator to develop friends on both sides of the aisle.



**John Biersdorf**

"He was a very bright person and a personable man who got along with Democrats, Republicans and gov-ernors," said Democrat Harry Sieben, who served with Biersdorf in the state House of Representatives.

"He was a significant player and played a role in important decisions. He was a wonderful, cordial human being who made his mark on the Legislature."

From 1971 to 1980, Biersdorf represented District 32A, Dodge and Steele coun-

ties. He died from a heart-related ailment June 1 at Colonial Acres Health Care Center in Golden Valley. He was 83.

Biersdorf was born on a farm in Deerfield Township, near Owatonna, Minn. He graduated from Owatonna High School, then spent two years as a soldier during World War II in the 74th Ordnance Company in the 89th Division serving in Europe under Gen. George Patton.

After the war, he earned a degree in business from the University of Minnesota, then returned to run the family farm where he grew corn, soybeans and other crops for more than 40 years, said his daughter Lee Biersdorf of Minneapolis.

He also worked for Federated Insurance and was "an award-winning salesman," she said. Friends persuaded him to run for office. In St. Paul, Biersdorf was chairman of the Commerce, Economic Development and Housing committee, and served on the Governmental Operations, Environmental and Natural Re-

sources, Agriculture and Labor-Management Relations committees. He helped craft laws to buy and preserve wetlands. He won a key ruling in the mid-1970s when the courts ruled that citizens could not be terminated from their jobs for taking time off to serve in the Legislature, Sieben said.

"John believed strongly that the Legislature should remain a citizen-based Legislature and that the best public policy comes from those with other life experiences," Sieben said.

Biersdorf loved fishing and often invited friends and fellow legislators to drop a line with him on trips to Lake Mille Lacs, Cannon Lake or Lake of the Woods, or to join him on the fishing opener.

"He didn't care what party they were from," Lee said.

Biersdorf was a member of the board that oversaw operations of the one-room school house he attended through elementary school, and later a member of the Owatonna School Board.

He served on the Steele County Soil Conservation Board and was a trustee at Associated Church in Owatonna. He enjoyed playing cards at

the Owatonna Elks and VFW clubs, Lee said.

Biersdorf was an avid deer and grouse hunter and enjoyed playing golf at the Owatonna Country Club, where he was a member.

In addition to his daughter Lee, Biersdorf is survived by his wife of 61 years, Marilyn, of Minneapolis; two other daughters, Beth Biersdorf of Minneapolis and Mary Sumner of New Hope; two sons,

## ALSO NOTED

**Bernard Barker**, 92, one of the burglars whose 1972 break-in at the Watergate building in Washington led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, died Friday in Miami. He had lung cancer and heart problems.

In May 1973, Barker, a Cuban-born American, told the Senate Watergate committee that his aim in the Watergate break-in had been to find proof that the Democratic Party had received financial support from the government of Cuba and thus speed the "liberation" of Cuba. Barker pleaded guilty in

Jack of Wayzata and Dan of Edina; sister Donna Hay of Mitchellville, Iowa; and nine grandchildren.

A celebration of his life will be held from 1 to 3 p.m. today at the Thomson Dougherty Mansion, 2535 Park Av. S., Minneapolis. A second celebration will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. next Sunday at the Owatonna Arts Center, 435 Garden View Lane, Owatonna, Minn.

January 1973 to seven charges of conspiracy, burglary and wiretapping. He was sentenced to 18 months to six years, but only several months later his sentence was reduced to time served. He later worked for the city of Miami as a sanitation and building inspector.

In repeated interviews, Barker expressed no regrets, saying he believed he had been acting in the interests of national security. But in 1976, he did tell a reporter: "Washington's a place to keep away from. Cubans don't do very well up there."