

New members . . .

Clark picks up baton, advances father's civic desire

By Jim Thielman

After James T. Clark's father passed away, Clark found a copy of a letter that eventually inspired him to consider public office. The letter was written by Clark's father to then-president



Rep. James T. Clark

Ronald Reagan.

"My father was proud of his World War II service and his work as a member of the Rotary, and he wrote to President Reagan how he was a great believer in the democratic process and

a great waver of the American flag," Clark (R-Springfield) recalled. "My father wanted to know how he could continue to contribute to his country now that he was retired.

"I don't know if President Reagan responded, or what course my father would have taken."

Clark's father passed away shortly after the letter was written.

But in a sense, Clark picked up the baton. Before reading the letter, Clark's vision as a public servant was uncertain. However, Clark soon began to work on political campaigns to get involved in the political process.

"Before I read my father's letter, public office was never a goal or an aspiration of mine," Clark said.

When the late Rep. Barb Vickerman died of cancer last December, Clark was approached by state Republicans, and his collision with a political career began.

He won the party's endorsement to face DFLer Bonnie McKnight in a special election. Clark then won overwhelmingly at the polls Jan. 20 by a 3,864 to 1,874 margin.

Representing a Minnesota district in the House was something the marketing major from Scarsdale, N.Y., never imagined. He earned his undergraduate degree at Iona Col-

lege in New Rochelle, N.Y., a suburb known as home to television's Rob and Laura Petrie on "The Dick Van Dyke" show. He later graduated cum laude from Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing, Mich. But his political baseline was set years before he became an honors law student and assistant editor of the law review at Cooley.

"When I was a senior in high school, I watched Ronald Reagan's acceptance speech," Clark said, "and I think that crystallized my political philosophy. It sparked my interest in politics."

Clark worked on political campaigns for former President George Bush and U.S. Sen. Rod Grams, but he hadn't considered a campaign of his own until party members beckoned. After talking with his wife, Cara, the decision was made.

"I have an eight-month-old daughter, and we wanted to be sure that I would be able to have enough time to be a good father and husband," he said.

Along with being a good parent, he emphasized he wants to keep the channels of communication open to his "neighbors," whom he emphasized are not simply "constituents."

"Springfield is a small town of 2,300 people," Clark said. "About 60 of them were here for the swearing-in ceremony. In a town of that size, they're not your constituents but your friends and neighbors, and I know already they will certainly pick up the phone."

Clark says it was partially his desire to know his neighbors that brought the couple to Minnesota. His wife is an Iowa native, with relatives in Minnesota.

"Minnesota is an ideal environment to raise a family," Clark said. "New York is a nice place to visit."

Clark said the main complaint he hears from his friends and neighbors is "over-regulating and mandating" by the government.

"The one thing I want is permanent tax reduction," he said. "That will be what we're here to work on. What the government has done is overtaxed citizens. We have a \$1.3 billion surplus in this state, and this is not the government's money. It's the citizen's money. It's my neighbors' money. Getting their money back to them is the one issue I will continue to work on."

Clark will serve on the House Health and Human Services Committee and its finance division, the House Regulated Industries and Energy Committee, and the House General Legislation, Veterans Affairs and Elections Committee.

"It's been hectic," he said. "I've only been here a couple days and there's no training period. But there have been other representatives who have taken me under their wing."

And there are always thoughts of his father. Secured on Clark's key ring is a thin piece of metal that identified a military man in World War II.

"Something I always carry around with me is my father's dog tag," Clark said. "I was rubbing it the other day as I was walking toward the Capitol. It was a very satisfying feeling to me. I know my father would be very proud of what I'm trying to do here."

District 23A

1995 population: 33,661

Largest city: Redwood Falls

Counties: Brown, Redwood

Location: southwestern Minnesota

Top concern: "We are blessed to have a \$1.3 billion surplus. My top priority is to return this money to the taxpayers in the form of a permanent tax reduction. This money is not the government's money. It is your neighbors' money and my neighbors' money. It needs to be returned to them."

— Rep. James T. Clark

Constitutional Officers

Governor

Arne H. Carlson

130 State Capitol

75 Constitution Ave.

St. Paul 55155 296-3391

Lieutenant Governor

Joanne E. Benson

130 State Capitol

75 Constitution Ave.

St. Paul 55155 296-3391

Attorney General

Hubert H. Humphrey III

102 State Capitol

75 Constitution Ave.

St. Paul 55155 296-6196

Secretary of State

Joan Anderson Growe

180 State Office Building

100 Constitution Ave.

St. Paul 55155 296-9208

State Auditor

Judith H. Dutcher

Suite 400

525 Park St.

St. Paul 55103 296-2551

State Treasurer

Michael A. McGrath

303 Administration Building

50 Sherburne Ave.

St. Paul 55155 296-7091