

Publication: Star Tribune; Date: Aug 23, 2011; Section: Twin Cities + Region; Page: B6

NEWS OBITUARIES

John Clawson stood up for others

● Legislator and pastor fought for the underprivileged — when he wasn't making a mean tuna casserole.

By PAUL LEVY
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John Clawson's daughters would go to the State Capitol having no idea what their father did there. But after meeting folks such as the governor, "we knew our daddy was important," daughter Jennifer Burdick recalled Monday.

Clawson, 66, a five-term state representative who was assistant commissioner of the state Department of Human Resources and director of the Minnesota State Council on Disability under Gov. Rudy Perpich, died suddenly last week in his Minneapolis home.

Clawson was a champion of the poor, the elderly and the underprivileged. He served as director of governmental relations for Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota and, from 2000 to 2006, was president/CEO of Lutheran Social Services of South-



Clawson

ern California. He returned to Minnesota to serve as director of the House of Charity and the Senior Recovery Program.

"We always called him the white sheep of the family," recalled his brother Rich Clawson. "He was the stable one, the sane one, the oldest of five brothers. We were all Boy Scouts, but he led the way."

Clawson's mother, Lila Clawson, was a journalist and a delegate to the 1980 Democratic National Convention in New York. She instilled "wonderful values" into her sons, said John's wife, Annette Roth, but it would be difficult to label John Clawson a politician.

He liked making jam, meatloaf and egg salad, his wife recalled. Daughter Amanda Hall raved about his "fa-

mous tuna casserole." When he wasn't in the kitchen, "he never missed a teacher's conference, a concert or a school function," said Burdick.

But Clawson wanted to share the lessons he learned with those outside his immediate family. His father, who fixed machinery and moved the family often — to Ely, Crookston, Kansas City, Shakopee and, finally, to Bloomington — battled alcoholism, Roth said. After studying history and theology at Augsburg College, Clawson studied at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul.

He was chaplain at Hazelden near Center City, Minn., then served as pastor at First Lutheran in Harris, Minn., and Calvary Lutheran in Stanchfield, Minn. From 1974 to 1984 he served in the Minnesota House, where he led the reform of the state's civil commitment laws and the creation of the state's Appellate Court.

He and Roth, who were married 12 years, met while working as election judges.

"He wanted to understand how elections worked," she said. "When he dealt with the homeless, he wanted to understand why [someone] was homeless, so he could better address the issue."

Clawson was working on a book — a history of Minnesota's U.S. senators, Burdick said. He hoped to visit the grave of each senator.

"He'd drag my sister and me across Minnesota to random cemeteries to take pictures," Burdick said. "He put his heart into it, like everything else."

"I'm proud to be his daughter," she said. "He gave me faith."

Clawson is survived by his wife, Annette; his two daughters, Jennifer Burdick and Amanda Hall; four brothers, Philip, Rich, David and Steven, and two granddaughters. A memorial service will be held Tuesday at 11 a.m., at Mount Olive Lutheran Church, 3045 Chicago Av. S., Minneapolis.

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