

New members . . .

Entenza focuses on 'education, education, education'

Involvement in neighborhood politics provided the springboard for Rep. Matt Entenza's (DFL-St. Paul) legislative candidacy.



Rep. Matt Entenza

Entenza, who is originally from Worthington, Minn., attended Augustana College in Sioux Falls, S.D., then Macalester College in St. Paul. After several years of graduate work at Oxford University and teaching high school in England, he returned to his old St. Paul neighborhood.

His affection for the neighborhood and the birth of his three children strengthened his resolve to work on grassroots issues. He worked as a volunteer and served on the board of the Mississippi Market Co-op in St. Paul.

While serving on the Merriam Park Community Council, he became involved in many issues, including those of planning, city budget, zoning, environment, and economic development.

He says political experience at the local level — on a community council or school board — is good preparation for the Legislature.

"You see what people's daily lives are like and what people need and what they don't need," he said. "You get a more practical view."

And in addition to experience with local politics, Entenza is also no stranger to state politics — particularly when it come to issues involving health care. He is married to Lois Quam, who has been a key player in the shaping of state health care policy for several years.

Entenza succeeds former Rep. Kathleen Vellenga, who most recently chaired the K-

12 Education Finance Division and was one of the most respected members of the Legislature.

Entenza considers himself lucky as a first-term legislator to be appointed to that committee. He vows to carry on Vellenga's legislative priorities: "education, education, and education."

"Education funding and fairer education financing were the key issues for me," Entenza said. "That wasn't the only issue but that's really the issue I talked about consistently through the whole campaign."

"I'd like to see that [the schools] are funded fairly, so that kids from poorer communities get the same education as children who live in wealthier communities."

He is also concerned about the soaring cost of St. Paul schools, which translates into burdensome property taxes for homeowners in his district.

His St. Paul constituents are well-educated and well-informed, said Entenza. Half of them are renters, many living in the apartments along Grand Avenue. The district includes three colleges: Macalester, Concordia, and the University of St. Thomas.

In addition to the many college students, the district also has many senior citizens, he said.

"It's a district that will support a candidate who's trying to look at the bigger picture," he said, adding that most support the effort to look after the "overall health of the metropolitan area."

Entenza backs the thrust of proposals offered by Rep. Myron Orfield (DFL-Mpls) that would allow the inner cities to share some of the wealth of the more affluent suburbs.

"In the scheme of things, my district is doing relatively well," Entenza said. "But if

the east side of St. Paul or Minneapolis is not doing well, that ultimately affects us."

Before his election to the House, Entenza worked in the Minnesota Attorney General's Office from 1990 to 1993 prosecuting fraudulent telemarketers who were "ripping off" vulnerable citizens. That experience provides a solid footing for his current position as chair of the Consumer Affairs Subcommittee of the House Commerce, Tourism, and Consumer Affairs Committee.

"It was a great white hat job. It was loads of fun because they were all people who couldn't believe they were being sued," Entenza recalls. The con artists he went after — many posing as fund raisers for charitable causes — "felt really invincible."

He recalled "a fake minister out of Texas" who set himself up as the trustee for families with children who needed organ transplants. "He stole almost a million bucks," Entenza said. The man was sued and several families got their money back. Unfortunately, about 50 other families around the country never saw their money again.

— Mordecai Specktor

District 64A

Population: 32,735
Distribution: 100 percent urban
County: Ramsey
Largest city: St. Paul
Location: urban Metro
Unemployment rate: 3.90 percent
Residents living below poverty level: 9.15 percent
1992 presidential election results:
 Bush/Quayle 21.17 percent
 Clinton/Gore 62.54 percent
 Perot/Stockdale 14.56 percent
 Other: 1.73 percent

It seemed like a good idea back in the 1970s to put breath-alcohol testing devices in bars. Patrons could drop in a coin, blow in the tube, and find out if they were too sloshed to drive themselves home.

But instead of deterring inebriates from getting behind the wheel of a car, the machines turned into a drinking game. According to University of Minnesota Law School professor Steve Simon, drinkers had contests



to see who could register the highest reading on the devices, which typically display a white, yellow, and orange light to reflect blood-alcohol concentration levels.

Simon, who chairs the Legislature's DWI

Task Force, told members of the House Judiciary Finance Committee recently that bar owners realized that they had better remove the devices or face a lawsuit.

The 1991 Legislature barred people from successfully suing a bar that has a breath-alcohol testing device for any liability resulting from such a test provided a variety of conditions are met.