



Forsythe spends winters in Arizona; remembers seat belt law with pride

By Nicole Wood

The clock is ticking on the 80th Legislative Session and former Rep. Mary Forsythe sends her condolences from Sun City, Ariz., to her old colleagues in St. Paul.

"I feel sorry for them," she said during a recent telephone interview. "They're probably working until two in the morning."

"That was one thing I got out of the Legislature — I don't even get jet lag when I go to Europe because I'm used to being up all night."

Forsythe, a Republican, served District 42B in Edina from 1972 to 1990. She was the first woman elected to the Legislature from her district and the first woman to chair the House Appropriations Committee.

"I always said [Edina] was the best town in the state," she said. "I had a lot of people who cared and a lot of well-educated people with an interest in politics."

Plus, she said, it was a town full of Republicans, so she fit right in.

"The most outstanding thing about Mary, other than her intellect, was that she had this wonderful voice," said friend and former Rep. Sidney Pauly, who served a district bordering Forsythe's in the 1980s. "She was a music major at St. Olaf and when she would talk in a normal voice, it would just boom out. It wasn't high and squeaky — it was a voice of authority."

In 1986, Forsythe sponsored the state's first mandatory seat belt law. It was the

toughest piece of legislation she ever sponsored, she said, and it is the bill of which she is most proud.

"I was damned from one part of the state to the next," she said. "It finally passed, but it was an awful lot of work. I still think it was the right thing to do."

Forsythe was just shy of her 70th birthday when she left the House. The breakdown of relationships between DFLers and Republicans that she observed toward the end of her 18 years in office was regrettable, she said.

"When we first came in, you could be friends with the opposition," she said.



Former Rep. Mary Forsythe poses outside the theater in her hometown, Edina, in 1990. Forsythe was the chief sponsor of Minnesota's first mandatory seat belt law.

"When I left, there was far more partisan politics involved, which wasn't pleasant for those of us who had been in office for a while."

Today, Forsythe and her husband, Robert, divide their time between Sun City and Longville, Minn., although she is quick to

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mention that she would never give up her Minnesota residency.

"We just come down here for the weather," she said. And they have a nice group of friends from college and Edina who also spend their winters in Arizona.

Forsythe said she'll be back in Minnesota for Mother's Day. She intends to spend her summer reading biographies and volunteering for the Longville Friends of the Library. She joked about her unique library fund-raising approach: Friends who make donations to the Longville library are welcome to stay in her Arizona guest room for free. 