



**Jerome Hughes** Former state Senate president, early-ed pioneer

# Public service and civic duty defined Minnesota senator

By LIZ SAWYER • liz.sawyer@startribune.com

Longtime educator and DFL leader Jerome Hughes placed a high priority on his Catholic faith and civic activism — traits he wished to pass down to his six children. So it wasn't uncommon for Hughes to gather the entire family around the dinner table and individually inquire: "What did you do for the good of society today?"

He was looking for a more substantive response than "I didn't fight with my siblings."

Hughes spent nearly a decade teaching high school English and social studies in the Twin Cities metro area before making the leap to politics. After enlisting his family to help with the campaign effort, he was elected to the Minnesota Senate in 1966 where he served for 26 years, the final 10 as Senate president.

Hughes, who defined his career as a passionate advocate for early education, died June 26 after a battle with colon cancer. He was 85.

"He was a humble servant," said Hughes' oldest child, Bernadine Leach. "Not the kind of guy who got a lot of headlines, but he got a lot of programs passed that are still in effect today — and will outlast [us]."

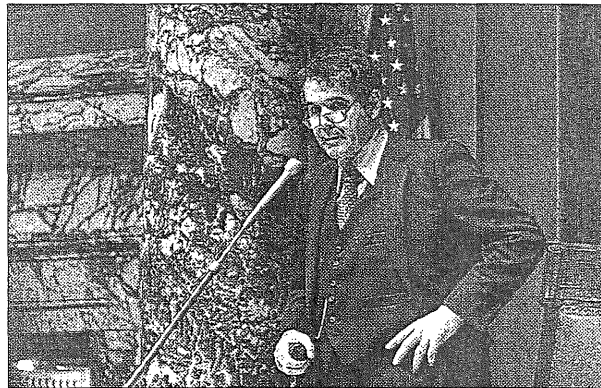
Hughes was born to Irish immigrant parents in St. Paul on Oct. 1, 1929, the same month the stock market crashed, sending the United States into the Great Depression. Growing up poor and on government assistance left a lasting impression on Hughes, who would later pioneer the state's first early childhood and family education programs that also served low-income families.

The Catholic Youth Center was where he met his wife, Audrey, during their sophomore year of high school. Both became teachers at Shakopee High School, where Hughes developed the nickname "Chaucer" because he was so enthusiastic about teaching "The Canterbury Tales."

Margaret Ann Born had Hughes for sophomore English in 1952, where she fondly remembers him making the class memorize the prologue to "Canterbury Tales" in Middle English — something she can still recite more than 60 years later.

"He was a gentle intellect," said Born, who credits Hughes with her love of the classics. "He wasn't the 'jump on the desk' kind of guy, but he kept a good decorum in the classroom."

Family members say Hughes was immensely proud of



Hughes family photo

As president of the state Senate, Jerry Hughes presided over the upper chamber. He represented Maplewood for 26 years.

his Irish heritage and celebrated St. Patrick's Day with an unmatched vigor. He had perfected his own version of the Irish jig over the years, which he frequently demonstrated at the State Capitol and on other special occasions.

In addition to his lighthearted humor, son John K. Hughes said his father possessed one of the most brilliant minds he'd ever seen. Hughes was a gifted conversationalist who was respected as much on the Senate floor as he was in his living room.

Education was an expectation for his children, who all followed in his footsteps and received advanced degrees. But Hughes also went out of his way to reassure young people everywhere he met that "the world is run by C students," and there's always a place for them no matter where their talents lie.

"My dad saw every child as having a great potential impact in the world," said John Hughes, who was named after his father's role model, former President John F. Kennedy.

"He was a true public servant," said daughter Rosemarie Wilhelmy.

He is survived by his sister, Maxine Schmidt; six children, Bernadine, Timothy, Kathleen, Rosemarie, Margaret and John; 16 grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. Services have been held.

Liz Sawyer • 612-673-4648