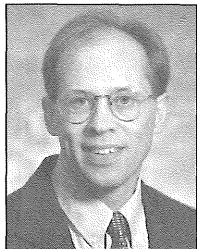


'Eye'ing the environment

Campaign to help clean up the Pig's Eye dump site prompted successful run for the House

By DAVID MAEDA

Looking into the future, Rep. Sheldon Johnson (DFL-St. Paul) envisions a quiet and serene park on the old St. Paul Pig's Eye dump



Rep. Sheldon Johnson

site, complete with walking trails and educational materials on how flood plains operate and what happens when a site becomes contaminated.

That anyone is even in a position to envision the potential rejuvenation of one of the state's

most contaminated areas is due in part to Johnson's involvement in seeing that cleanup began on the dump.

And his successful lobbying efforts during the 2000 session helped prompt his successful run for the Legislature and taught him a valuable lesson in the process.

"Maintaining a positive attitude is important in how effective you are," Johnson said.

The 300 acre Pig's Eye site is located approximately three miles southeast of downtown St. Paul. From 1956 to 1972 it served as an unofficial dumping ground for the city's garbage, junk, and other pollution. For the last 28 years tall grass has grown, covering all the leftover waste.

Johnson became involved in cleanup efforts in the early 1990s, volunteering to serve as a member of the Pig's Eye Park Task Force. After finding out the site had served as a dump, he went to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and began to examine files on the polluted area.

The files showed that the site was contaminated with heavy metals, PCBs, and other toxic materials.

"It was leaching into Battle Creek and into Pig's Eye Lake," Johnson said.

He and his neighbors were concerned that because the homes in the area have their own

wells, there was potential for the residents' drinking water to become contaminated.

"The MPCA needed some impetus to tackle this project," Johnson said. "With all the other projects the case had to be made (for the Pig's Eye site)."

He said that around 20 major environmental organizations became involved in "prodding" the MPCA to put the project near the top of the list of contaminated sites that needed cleaning up. For the past few years, Johnson worked with Sen. Randy Kelly (DFL-St. Paul) on legislation that would give priority to the Pig's Eye site.

Last session a law was passed allowing responsible parties at Superfund sites to apply for 15 percent to 20 percent of entire cleanup

costs resulting from contamination caused by individuals or businesses unable to pay for cleanup, or responsible parties that cannot be located. Before the law was changed, funding came as a reimbursement after the entire project was completed.

One of the first sites expected to benefit from the change is the Pig's Eye Dump.

For Johnson, the experience was very gratifying and convinced him he should run for the House seat vacated by former Rep. Steve Trimble (DFL-St. Paul).

A lifetime Minnesotan, Johnson was born on a small dairy farm in Braham. He has a bachelor's degree in social work from Bethel College and a master's degree in psychology from the University of St. Thomas.

Besides his involvement with several community organizations, ranging from the St. Paul District One Community Council to

the Harding High School PTSA, Johnson brings to the Legislature 14 years of experience working in the area of corrections. He currently supervises the work release program at the Ramsey County Workhouse.

Johnson said his experience working with troubled juveniles should help him add perspective as a member of the House Crime Prevention Committee.

"I've found I'm good at working with people and effective in helping people make a better future," he said.

As a freshman member Johnson knows he will spend a lot of time listening and learning. He said his community activism has taught him the necessity of working collaboratively and collectively with others in order to get things done.

Indeed it was a collective family effort that helped him win his election. His wife and two teenage daughters played an integral role in his campaign.

"They were excited and they helped out quite a bit — from door knocking to phone

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call work to cleaning the house — they did whatever needed to be done," he said.

DISTRICT 67B

1998 population (estimate): 32,120

Largest city: St. Paul

County: Ramsey

Location: southeastern St. Paul

Top concern: "To take a balanced approach; that in education funding our state dollars are satisfactory; that the health care needs in the community are met and particularly that all kids are insured; that our environmental policy is geared toward sustainability; and that our tax policy is fair to working families."

—Rep. Sheldon Johnson