

Juhnke paves the way to west-central prosperity

When it comes to the world of farming, Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar) has done everything but farm. He grew up in the agricultural community of Wells, Minn., and



Rep. Al Juhnke

remembers the first time he drove a tractor at age eight. He studied soil science at the University of Minnesota. Later, he sold fertilizer and agricultural chemicals for the ConAgra Company. Today, he serves on the House Agriculture Committee. "I'm a frustrated farmer," Juhnke said. "I've always been involved in agriculture. I just wasn't born on a farm."

At the Legislature, however, he has quickly become associated with a separate cause: "I'm 'Mr. Road,'" he said. That's because he's working to have a stretch of Highway 23 between Willmar and St. Cloud expanded from a two-lane to a four-lane road to improve the travel route to the Twin Cities and facilitate the area's growth. "Willmar is one of the fastest-growing areas in Minnesota," Juhnke said. "This is one of my front-burner issues. Overall funding in west-central Minnesota has been behind for about 60 years."

Juhnke also identifies with small-business people. With a background in real estate, he runs a business conducting appraisals on farms and commercial properties from his office, which is in a building he owns in

downtown Willmar. "I understand what small businesses go through with the rules and regulations and personnel," he said. "Rural Minnesota is basically small business. Overall, the climate is good, but there's always room for improvement." Ideally, he said, that means maintaining a balance between free enterprise and regulation. "Government shouldn't be too intrusive or make it too hard to do business."

Juhnke said others may not be aware of another growing problem some rural communities face — that of juvenile crime. "It's three or four times what it was not long ago. We need to find out why." Juhnke said he thinks one explanation is a "too-lenient" judicial system. "I've seen kids get in trouble and then not see a judge for six or eight months. Then, they get slapped on the wrist. Kids used to have more fear of being caught and punished," he said.

Juhnke's position in the Legislature isn't his first encounter with elective politics. He has served as a Dovre Township precinct chair and executive board member for Kandiyohi County.

As a newcomer to the Legislature, he's struck by how issues are thoroughly debated. "It's a very slow, deliberative process, which is good. It's part of our democracy. But I think people tend to think everything gets shoved through," he said.

When Juhnke isn't occupied with legislative acts, he may be found just acting. He's a

long-term member of the Barn Theatre in Willmar. "I'm hoping to get back to it this summer. Willmar is great for community theater."

Or, he may be found at home participating in another favorite activity: music. "I like all kinds of music. I play guitar and trombone," he said. "I'm also into your basic '70s rock and roll." Both avocations may be inherited: Juhnke's father was a vocal music instructor and his mother teaches art and plays the organ in church. Juhnke's home, which he shares with his wife, Claire, a commercial artist, and children, Zachary, 13, and Shannon, 9, is north of Willmar in Dovre Township.

"My dad always told me I had the ability to lead," Juhnke said. "He told me to be careful and keep moving in the right direction. I've always kept that in mind."

— Celeste Riley

District 15A

1996 population: 34,926

Largest city: Willmar

County: Kandiyohi

Location: west-central Minnesota

Top concern: "Economic development. That encompasses everything — education, roads, airports, housing. That's the concern in my area as well as throughout greater Minnesota."

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Less than a block from the State Capitol, at 117 University Avenue, stands a red brick structure called the Ford Building.

It once housed the Minnesota Law Library and is now home to Minnesota's Bookstore, where one can purchase a set of *Minnesota Statutes* for \$185 or a bread board in the shape of a loon for just \$18.95. In the 1930s, the building was a "place where families went to view and buy the car of multitudes, the Ford," according to the Department of Administration's World Wide Web site. Emblazoned across the top of the building, which faces University Avenue, was

Do you know?

the familiar Ford script still found on the company's logo.

The bookstore was established in 1957 to provide State of Minnesota agencies with a centralized service for the sale and



The Ford Building circa 1930.

distribution of agency-produced publications. It receives no funding from the Legislature.

After Ford pulled out and before the bookstore moved in, the building is said to have housed a bar in the basement and served as a dog pound as well.

Today, the only dogs are found on the shelf — prairie dogs, that is — in the text, *And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher, Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest Since 1855*, by Linda Mack Schloff.

View other available bookstore selections on the Internet at (<http://156.99.245.30/index1.htm>), or call 297-3000 for more information.

Photo courtesy Minnesota Department of Administration