Obituaries

Jack Kleinbaum dies at 71, former legislator from St. Cloud

By Pat Pheifer
Staff Writer

Former state Sen. Jack I. Kleinbaum, DFL-St. Cloud, 71, died Wednesday at the St. Cloud Hospital. He had suffered from heart problems and other ailments for several years.

Kleinbaum, a Minneapolis native, began his political career as a St. Cloud city councilman in 1960.

Four years later, he ran for mayor but lost by 43 votes. Soon after, he decided to seek a place in the Minnesota House of Representatives and defeated former Rep. Bob Mahowald.

After two terms in the House, he was elected to the Minnesota Senate in 1972.

Although one newspaper article called Kleinbaum a "DFL maverick," family and associates described him yesterday as a man who felt uncomfortable with party designations or endorsements, but rather represented his constituents as he thought best, even if it meant cross-ing party lines.

"His favorite expression was, 'I need to do what my people want,'" said Al Loehr, St. Cloud mayor from 1970 to 1980 and who now is administrative assistant to Sen. Bob Schmitz, DFL-Jordan.

Sen. James Pehler, DFL-St. Cloud, who succeeded Kleinbaum in the Senate, echoed Loehr's sentiments: "Personally I always liked him because he carved or blazed his own trails and he looked at it from the district's viewpoint and what the people needed and stood up and fought for it."

Kleinbaum was the "grandfather" of the parimutuel horse racing bill in the Legislature and fought for it session after session, Loehr said. He also sponsored one of the first attempts to legalize a statewide lottery.

Kleinbaum moved to St. Cloud with his wife and family after working in the Seattle-Tacoma shipyards during World War II. He opened a clothing and sporting goods store in St. Cloud in 1947 and eventually expanded the Jack's of Minnesota chain to include stores in Anoka, Princeton, Monticello and Paynesville.

He was active in many community projects and service organizations and had a heart of gold, Pehler said yesterday.

"When people had a hard time or couldn't afford something ... Jack was always the first one to say 'Take it and when you can pay me back bring the money in,'" he said. "He kept a lot of kids in school because they had shoes and clothes from his store that their parents couldn't afford to buy."

Kleinbaum was involved with the American Red Cross; Sertoma, a service organization; Catholic Charities; and St. Cloud Opportunities Inc., a group that strives to bring new businesses into the community.

He retired after he sold his chain of stores in 1979 and decided not to run for reelection to the Senate at the end of 1980.

He is survived by his wife, Violet;

Jack I. Kleinbaum in 1972

sons John (Corky) of Minneapolis, Richard of St. Paul, Jeff of Princeton, Minn., and James of Eagan; nine grandchildren; and sisters Rose Grossman of St. Paul, Sarah Kraines of Hopkins and Ruth Bartnof of Canoga Park, Calif. Services will be held at 12:30 p.m. Sunday at the Christ Church Newman Center in St. Cloud. Visitation will be from 5 to 9 p.m. Saturday at the Williams Funeral Home in St. Cloud. Memorials to the American Red Cross or the Heart Fund are suggested.