

**Dan Knuth** Former Minnesota state representative

# Lawmaker helped to shape state environmental policies

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In his six years serving in the Legislature, Dan Knuth's expertise in hydrology and environmental issues proved to be the right background for the right moment.

In the mid-1980s, Knuth was key in shaping policies that helped clean up contaminated water in the east metro area, built a lasting funding source for protecting natural

resources and created a state agency to manage the safety of gasoline pipelines following a deadly explosion.

Knuth, who died Oct. 5 at age 75 of complications from Alzheimer's disease, was a "major player" in many of the Legislature's big decisions because of his professional background — but also because he was well-liked across the Capitol. Steve Novak, a fellow DFL lawmaker who served with Knuth, said the hydrologist-turned-professor-turned-legislator from New Brighton made friends and allies with his forthright approach to politics and policymaking.

"He almost always was able to accomplish his goals," Novak said. "And he did it in such a way that people wanted to work with him and be part of the whole thing."

Born in the small southeast Minnesota town of Mabel, Knuth was primarily raised by his mother; his father died when Knuth was 9 years old. Summer adventures — both as a camper and staff member — at Boy Scout camps helped build Knuth's interest in the outdoors, in civic service and in exploring the world beyond his hometown.

After earning the rank of Eagle Scout, a bachelor's degree from what was then Mankato State University and a Ph.D. in physical geography and geology from Indiana University, Knuth worked as a hydrologist for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and a geography professor at Macalester College. Later, Knuth worked in public affairs at 3M and as a lobbyist on issues related to criminal justice

reform, transit and biking.

Daughter Kate Knuth, who followed her father into service in the Legislature, said he was also an active, encouraging parent who, along with his wife, Joann, modeled how to balance family with busy careers and public service. He would show up to track meets in a business suit, direct from work. He balanced campaign door-knocking — a favorite activity, even when he wasn't the one running for office — with a busy volunteer schedule.

Kate Knuth said her father got into public service because he enjoyed meeting people, learning what was on their minds, and figuring out how to help them.

"His hobbies were not like woodworking or biking," she said. "His hobby was Scouts, and serving on the planning commission. His hobby was doing civic work."

In the Legislature, Knuth authored legislation that created the state's Office of Pipeline Safety following a deadly pipeline explosion in Mounds View in 1986 — not far from where the Knuth family lived. He also helped ensure that water contaminated by the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant in New Brighton would be treated.

As a Scout leader, Knuth led young people on adventures as far away as Alaska and Iceland. He also served in volunteer leadership roles with the Scouts' Northern Star Council. John Andrews, CEO of the council, said Knuth excelled as a mentor and leader for both the young people and the adults he encountered in scouting, as he did in his political life.

"He helped people to think more deeply about why we're here, and ... make a difference, leave a legacy," Andrews said.

Knuth is survived by his wife, Joann, of New Brighton; daughter Kate Knuth, of Minneapolis; son John Knuth, of Altadena, Calif.; and two grandchildren. A memorial service will be held in the future, when groups can safely gather.

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["His hobby was civic work."] — daughter Kate Knuth