

State 'family' loses a member

Luther remembered for her focus, determination, and smile

By DAVID MAEDA

Rep. Darlene Luther (DFL-Brooklyn Park), who served for five terms in the House, died Jan. 30 from the effects of stomach cancer.

She is survived by her husband, U.S. Rep. Bill Luther (D-Minn.), and two children Alex and Alicia. Her family was with her when she passed away in their Brooklyn Park home.



Rep. Darlene Luther

In a written statement Congressman Luther said, "Darlene was a beautiful person in every sense of the word. Her unpretentious and friendly nature was a joy to all who knew her. She was generous beyond belief, and she truly loved her family, friends, and constituents. We had 34 terrific years together and the most enjoyable campaign we ever had was when she first won her seat, especially when she received more votes than her husband. Alex, Alicia, and I will truly miss her."

Gov. Jesse Ventura has ordered state flags be flown at half-staff in Luther's honor.

Sen. Linda Scheid (DFL-Brooklyn Park) a friend of the Luther's for 28 years, and a neighbor for the past 22, said Darlene was a determined person who loved being a state representative.

"She liked our community so much. She liked working for ordinary people so much," Scheid said. "One of her strongest suits was introducing legislation to solve problems for people in the community. She did more of that than a lot of us do. She was an advocate for people who didn't have a voice anywhere else."

Luther, 54, served on the House Civil Law, Capital Investment and Redistricting committees. She held a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of St. Thomas.

She was a recipient of a liver transplant in February 1998 after being stricken with hepatitis.

Among Luther's legislative accomplishments was a measure in 2000 that funded an educational mobile unit that encourages organ donation. The \$135,000 appropriation for the measure was vetoed by Ventura but the Legislature later overrode the veto.

She also sponsored bills to help developmentally disabled people live independently. Her son, Alex, has Down Syndrome.

Scheid said that Luther's tenacity was another of her strengths as a legislator.

"She did not give up. When Dar made up her mind to do something she was determined and focused. Those are great qualities if you're going to be successful at the Legislature. She'd hang in there until they adjourned."

Luther was also a cook who liked to share with others.

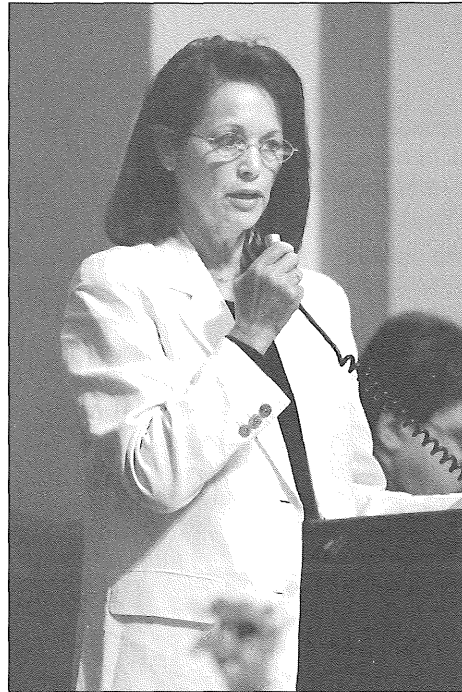


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Darlene Luther speaks on the House floor during the 2001 session.

Scheid said that one Thanksgiving in the mid-1990s when she had her elderly step-mother living with her, she arrived at home to find that Luther had left a full turkey meal on her doorstep.

"She loved to fix food for people," Scheid said. "Food was one way she expressed her

concern and love for people."

House members stood in silence at the beginning of the Jan. 31 floor session to honor Luther, whom Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center) described as a dedicated and compassionate person who was a "very precious human being."

"She was a remarkable friend and state representative," Hilstrom said.

House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) said Luther would be greatly missed by her colleagues.

"She was probably one of the more well-

liked members of the Legislature — her smile, her outreach to people. She was very personable."

He said that despite the inherent partisanship in a sometimes "volatile" atmosphere members of the House feel like they belong to a close extended family.

"When we lose a member it hurts everybody. We are a family, though we may have our differences and disagreements," he said. "(She was an) absolutely wonderful person who seemed to always have a smile on her face. I will miss her a lot."

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