

Redistricting casualty

New boundaries prompt McGuire to step aside after 14 years at the State Capitol

By LISA HILTON

Rep. Mary Jo McGuire (DFL-Falcon Heights) attributes her entrance into state politics to hard work, a good campaign, and a little bit of fate.

Although she was encouraged by members of the DFL caucus to challenge a well-liked Republican incumbent, “no one really expected me to win,” McGuire says.

Then, on the day she decided she would take up the challenge, the incumbent died, changing the political atmosphere. Although it was still a tough race between McGuire and her Republican challenger, McGuire won the chance to represent the people of District 54A,

seek re-election eight days after new district maps were released March 19.

Although she is sad to leave, McGuire said knowing that people in her district could be represented by Hausman and Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville) made the decision to step down easier.

“I know I’m leaving the district in good hands,” McGuire said.

McGuire expressed frustration that the courts combined the districts of female members of the House when drawing the maps.

“It wasn’t a complete surprise, but it’s unfortunate to be losing another woman,” she said. “As an institution, we should be increasing the number of women.”

Of 134 members of the House, only 34 are female, and the state should work to better reflect the state’s population, she said.

Born and raised in Falcon Heights, McGuire still lives in her childhood home. Her knowledge and involvement in the community has made her job in the Legislature easier, she said.

McGuire was active in student government while attending the College

at St. Catherine in St. Paul where she earned a degree in business administration before going on to Hamline University School of Law. There she earned a law degree and also worked towards a master’s degree in public administration, which she later finished at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government.

During her time in office, McGuire has fought for child-care issues, education (particularly early childhood), violence prevention, data practices issues, and stopping underage drinking and drug use.

McGuire counts an anti-stalking bill that became law as one of her successes. Minnesota was one of the first states to treat stalking seriously, she said.

Another bill that requires beer kegs to be registered in an effort to reduce underage drinking became law this session after nine years of work.

Hausman said McGuire will be remembered for her work on education, early childhood, and family issues.

“If there is a legacy we will long appreciate, it is Mary Jo’s work on education generally, certainly for the University of Minnesota, but especially early childhood education,” she said.

Rep. Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior) is chair of the House Family and Early Childhood Education Finance committee. McGuire now serves as that committee’s DFL lead.

Although they often disagreed on issues, Sykora said she has enjoyed serving with McGuire. “She’s a fun person to be with. We don’t always see eye to eye on everything, but that is to be expected.”

When she’s not in the public arena, McGuire can sometimes be found on the ice arena.

Growing up a block away from an ice rink, McGuire enjoys ice skating and playing hockey, and she is training to become a referee for girl’s hockey. On Sunday nights, she often joins a group of legislators and friends for a game.

She will also continue to teach at her alma mater, commonly known as St. Kate’s, where she teaches classes in the Weekend College Program.

McGuire said she won’t miss her frustration with partisan politics getting in the way of change but she will miss the friends she has made at the State Capitol over the years.

Though she’s not ruling out public office, she also says she plans to concentrate on working for the issues she cares about.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Mary Jo McGuire, left, and Rep. Alice Hausman share a light moment during a March 27 news conference where McGuire announced her retirement from the House. The court-drawn redistricting plan paired the friends in the same district.

which includes Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Roseville, and St. Anthony.

“Fate brought me to the opportunity,” McGuire said.

Now 14 years later, it seems fate is calling again.

Like 35 other representatives, newly redrawn district lines left McGuire paired with another incumbent. The new political map combined her district with that of her colleague, neighbor in the chamber, and friend, Rep. Alice Hausman (DFL-St. Paul).

McGuire announced her decision to not

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Mary Jo McGuire

DFL

District 54A — Falcon Heights

Terms: 7

Career notes: McGuire has worked on early childhood and family education initiatives, serving as the DFL lead on the committee governing funding for those issues. She also worked for a keg registration measure that became law this session, an effort to curtail underage drinking.