

Obituaries

Rep. Ben Omann dies of cancer

By Robert Whereatt
Staff Writer

State Rep. Ben Omann of St. Joseph, Minn., who was elected to a third term on Nov. 4, died of cancer Wednesday in St. Cloud Hospital. He was 67.

Omamm, an Independent-Republican, had been fighting the disease for two years. He was active in his reelection campaign almost to election day, even though he had no opponent.

Omamm owned an insurance agency with offices in St. Joseph and Sartell and farmed near St. Stephen.

He served briefly in the Minnesota Senate. He won a special election to fill a vacant seat in February 1980, only to lose in the 1980 election. In 1982 he won his seat in the House.

"I think the Legislature is going to miss him," House Speaker David Jennings said yesterday. "He was one of the few guys who people listened to on the House floor."

Omamm was a political conservative who rarely inserted himself in debates. When he did, he attracted notice.

Last session he arose on the House floor during a heated discussion on a proposal to raise the state's drinking age to 21. Almost all expected the father of 11 children to support the

measure. The din of extraneous conversations in the House chamber subsided as Omamm, in simple but eloquent words, told members that the most difficult task of parents is to inculcate in their children a sense of responsibility, then trust and release them to the world. He opposed the age-increase bill, he said. Omamm's colleagues responded to the moving speech with applause.

On another occasion he defended Rep. Randy Staten, the Minneapolis DFLer who faced expulsion by his colleagues from the House after he was convicted of passing bad checks.

"I do believe his opposition (to expulsion) made a difference," said Jennings, who presided over the House that day.

Rep. William Schreiber, IR-Brooklyn Park, who will be minority leader for the 1987 session, said Omamm had an abiding faith in people. "He believed if you told people all the facts that they would always make the right decision," he said.

By law, Gov. Rudy Perpich has five days to issue a call for a special election. It must take place within 28 days after that. If a primary is required to narrow the field to two candidates, it must be held no later than 14 days before the special election. A spokesman for the governor said Perpich is expected to call the election in time for the winning candidate to take office Jan. 6, the open-



Rep. Ben Omamm

ing of the 1987 session.

Visitation for Omamm will be at St. Stephen's Parish Hall in St. Stephen from 3 to 9 p.m. Friday and from 9 to 10:30 a.m. Saturday. The funeral will be held in St. Stephen's Catholic Church at 11 a.m. Saturday. The family requests that memorials be given to the Ben Omamm Memorial Fund, Rt. 1, St. Joseph, Minn. 56374.