

were damaged or destroyed. The 137-foot steeple atop Christ Chapel at St. Peter's Gustavus Adolphus College crumpled to the ground, and most trees were uprooted on the quaint campus that sits on a wooded hill.

"But the good news," said Rep. Ruth Johnson (DFL-St. Peter), "is the cross atop the steeple is fine, and the stained glass window was not broken."

Further good news was that most of Gustavus' 2,350 students were on spring break when the storm swept through.

Johnson categorized the mood of the town as "shocked fortitude."

"I was in East Berlin in the '60s before some of the areas of the town that were bombed out in World War II were cleaned up, and it looks a lot like that," she said.

But, she said, a command center set up in the basement of 116-year-old Nicollet County Courthouse — one of 13 buildings in the town listed on the National Register of Historic Places — was operating effectively.

"Our local city officials have been running a command center like clockwork," she said. "There has been good patrolling of the city and the work of cleaning up is going well. I've seen badges on people who are helping from all over the state."

A team from the Minnesota Historical Society toured St. Peter and concluded damaged historical buildings still have structural integrity. There is optimism they can be restored.

Johnson said just days after the storm most of the debris had been cleared.


"Things looked better, but with all the trees and debris cleared out of there you could see more clearly how much damage had been done to the houses and businesses," she said.

Johnson also said she hopes the April 6 two-way television hearing, "will help expedite the process of getting help to our region."

Rep. Loren Solberg (DFL-Bovey), chair of the Ways and Means Committee, said legislators want to hear about the extent of the damage and the specific needs of the affected communities.

"We know we won't have a complete picture, but it's important for committee members to hear about the situation as we proceed with a bill," he said.

Links for the hearing will be established in South Central Technical College in North Mankato and at Worthington Community College.

The Minnesota Public Safety Department's Division of Emergency Management has set up a toll-free number for people willing to volunteer or make donations. The number is 1-800-657-3504. 



Otis stays in public service mode, calls House 'a great place to be'

By Matt Wetzel

Former Rep. Todd Otis always had a passion for public service.

It was why he joined the Peace Corps, why he ran for the Legislature and served for six terms, why he made three unsuccessful runs for statewide offices, and why he now works as a public affairs consultant helping people deal with public issues.

Otis served in the House from 1979 to 1990, and his career of public service was almost inevitable. His father, James C. Otis, was an associate justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court from 1961 to 1982, his brother was in the Peace Corps in Thailand, and his grandfather was on the St. Paul City Council.

"I was raised in a family that was very public service-oriented. I grew up with a lot of political discussion and also a feeling of community service," Otis said.

Politics and public service were always discussed at the dinner table while Otis was growing up. Those discussions and President John F. Kennedy's call to the nation's youth for service in the 1960s inspired Otis to join the Peace Corps in 1967 after he graduated from Harvard University.

He was assigned to Senegal, a country in Africa, and worked in a small town called Linguere, where he taught English and helped with community development. He likened his service in the Peace Corps to his service some 10 years later in the Legislature.

"I was so impressed with my colleagues in the Legislature and my co-workers in the Peace Corps. They were bright, public-spirited, very concerned. It was the diversity and shared experience," he said.

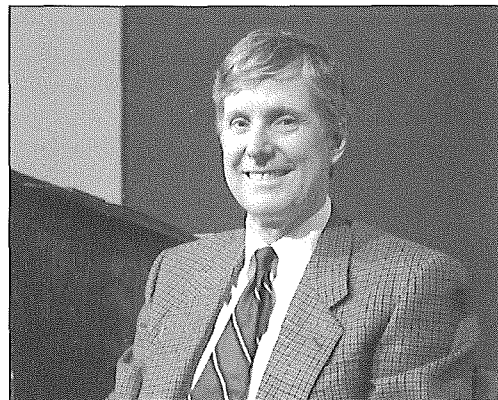
After he returned from Africa in 1969, Otis went to Columbia University in New York to obtain a master's degree in journalism. He returned to Minnesota in 1970 to work in community relations for Dayton Hudson Corp. and later for First Bank.

He married his present wife Jane, in 1977, then went to work as a lobbyist for the National Federation of Industrial Business. In 1978, Gov. Arne Carlson, then a Republican legislator from Otis' district in south Minneapolis decided to run for state auditor. Otis sought the DFL endorsement for that House seat, received it, and won the election.

"I was elected at a time when we had an energy crisis going, and we were in touch with those issues," he said. His chief concerns were energy, education, and economic development.

Otis, who now lives in St. Louis Park with his wife and two children, was born and grew up in the Macalester-Groveland area of St. Paul, graduating from St. Paul Academy.

Since leaving the House, Otis has mounted runs for U.S. Senate, governor, and state auditor. He also has served as state chairman of the DFL. He said he does not see himself running for statewide office again.



Former Rep. Todd Otis' career has taken him from a village in Africa to the Minnesota Capitol.

He started his consulting business in 1994, and then in the summer of 1995, he met the nightmare that every parent fears. His 22-year-old son, Philip, was working as a volunteer conservationist at Mt. Rainier National Park in Washington that summer. In August, while trying to rescue an injured climber, Philip slipped and fell off a cliff and was killed.

"It changes your life forever. You never get around it, but you try to integrate it into your life and you do accept it," he said.

His minister urged him to take something positive out of the horrible situation, and Otis did that. Philip was a passionate environmentalist, and one aspect of Otis' business is working on environmental issues. Otis said he thinks of his son when doing that work.

"His whole spirit, his big signature was his smile. If you don't believe in some form of God, or that we're connected to each other, I don't know how you can cope with this kind of reality. It's one of the most important things in my reality," he said.