

LOCAL

Richard Pellow, salvage and towing entrepreneur and a former state lawmaker, has died

During three terms in the Minnesota Legislature, the father of five drew votes and made friends across the political spectrum.

By Mila Koumpilova (<http://www.startribune.com/mila-koumpilova/275485961/>) Star Tribune

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Richard Pellow harnessed a passion for cars to build an insurance salvage, wrecker sales and towing empire in the Twin Cities, and is credited with ushering professional standards into those fields. During three terms in the Minnesota Legislature, the father of five drew votes and made friends across the political spectrum. He opened his office overlooking a salvage yard to former Gov. Arne Carlson's 1990 campaign, what Carlson's team called his "junk yard" headquarters.

He also generated controversy with a bid to eliminate a popular state roadside assistance program. Critics charged the move would benefit his family, while supporters argued it exemplified his belief that government should run with the fiscal discipline of a family business.

Pellow died Dec. 23 of complications from Alzheimer's disease. He was 88.

"His was a Horatio Algers story," said Scott Anderson, Pellow's former campaign manager. "He had the persona of a tough guy, but he had a huge heart."

Born in northeast Minneapolis, Pellow dropped out of high school and landed a job as a switchman on the Great Northern Railway. He joined the U.S. Navy Reserve and raced cars. In 1952, he married his high school sweetheart, Jean Schwaab, who became a steady partner in all his endeavors for 62 years until her death.

"They were both hardworking entrepreneurs who were not going to accept failure," said Pellow's eldest son, Ricky, of New Brighton. "He always had the pedal to the metal."

Pellow bought his first body shop in 1960. He later acquired a towing and salvage business, eventually becoming a major presence on the local repair, brokerage and towing scene. Pellow's children learned that the surest way to spend coveted time with him was to persuade him to take them to work. All but one followed him into the business, and his daughter Renee Gardas, of Columbus, grew one of his companies, now called Twin Cities Transport and Recovery, into a regional powerhouse.

Pellow won New Brighton's seat for the GOP in the Minnesota House in 1988. He served on and off through the 1990s.

Steve Sviggum, the former House minority leader, says Pellow relished the door-knocking that other politicians often find uncomfortable. When they campaigned together, Sviggum often had to nudge Pellow to wrap up lengthy conversations with voters and move on.

To the Capitol, Pellow brought a business perspective and a call for prudent budgeting. Anderson said some fellow lawmakers at first dismissed Pellow as a high school dropout, but he won over leaders from different walks of life. Carlson says he and Pellow, a financial contributor, talked cars and family, rarely politics, and Pellow never asked for anything in return. "Dick genuinely liked people and liked to help people," Carlson said.

Pellow faced intense criticism in his final term over a pair of bills opponents said would benefit him. They would have eliminated an inspection program to detect stolen parts in salvage cars and a state-run roadside assistance program. Pellow rejected the criticism,



Richard Pellow

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insisting the programs were simply ineffective or wasteful. But Anderson says he took the attacks on his integrity personally.

Pellow was instrumental in launching the Minnesota Auto Rebuilders Association and the Minnesota Professional Towing Association, advocating for higher standards.

He was also active in the community. Rep. Connie Bernardy, DFL-New Brighton, recalled teaming up with him on issues of youth development and mental health care access.

Survivors also include sons Randy, of St. Louis, Mo., and Rodney, of Nowthen, Minn.; daughter Rochelle Bottineau of Siren, Wis.; nine grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren. Services have been held.

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