

after, to decrease the education property tax levy.

Farmers also would get a break. Class rates on their land valued up to \$115,000 would decrease from .4 percent to 0.33 percent. The rest of the property that doesn't exceed 320 acres would go from .9 percent to 0.78 percent.

There also would be decreases in commercial and industrial property class rates. The lower tier of market value (the first \$150,000) would go from 2.7 percent to 2.36 percent, and the remainder would go from 4 percent to 3.5 percent.

Owners of apartment buildings with four or more units would see their class rate go from 2.9 percent to 2.5 percent. Those with buildings with two or three units would see their class rate go from 2.1 percent to 1.7 percent, and owners of buildings with just one rental unit would see that class rate go from 1.9 percent to 1.25 percent on the first \$75,000 of market value, and from 2.1 percent to 1.7 percent on the rest.

The bill also includes a provision that would exempt "distressed homesteads," in which dilapidated homes in marginal neighborhoods are being rehabilitated by the owner. Those homeowners would get a maximum five-year exemption from property taxes if their homes need at least \$20,000 in repairs. The measure would include only owner-occupied, single-family homes in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth.

An amendment offered by Rep. Bob Milbert (DFL-South St. Paul) would exempt all property owners from having their property value for tax purposes increase by more than the rate of inflation, as determined by the Consumer Price Index, or 5 percent, whichever is less.

The limit would not include improvements in the property. The provision would end in 2002.

Savings, seniors, and studies

Under the bill, senior citizens with an annual income of \$40,000 would qualify for the senior property tax deferral program, increasing the maximum from \$30,000.

Also, the bill calls for the state's budget reserve to increase from \$522 million to \$582 million.

Finally, the bill calls for creation of a tax study commission. The commission — made up of state, county, and local officials and members of the public — would study the financial relationships between state and local governments in Minnesota. ❀



Pleasant likens House service to Army; continues active community life

By Grant Martin

Ray O. Pleasant compares his experiences in the Minnesota House of Representatives to an advanced education.

"It's like getting a master's degree," Pleasant said. "When you're an elected official you're force-fed information and you learn very quickly. You have to — you're going to vote on it later that day."

Pleasant was the second African-American to be elected to the House. The first, J. Francis Wheaton, was elected in 1898. Pleasant was elected in 1972. Both served districts in the Bloomington area, and both served as Republicans.

Pleasant, who worked as an engineer for 31 years, first got involved in local politics when he was appointed to a Bloomington city advisory council working with environmental issues.

"The city was developing rapidly at that time and there were certain areas we wanted to maintain in their natural state," he said.

Pleasant was elected to the Bloomington City Council in 1969. He was successful in securing federal grants to preserve park areas in the city.

After serving three years on the city council, Pleasant decided to run for the House seat. He was successful in his first bid for the House and served eight years until 1980. He chaired the House Local and Urban Affairs Committee in 1979.

"It was a good experience, but I wouldn't want to go through it again," he said. "It was sort of like the Army in that way."

Pleasant readily admits that his thoughts on the Legislature are influenced by the last session he served. After the 1978 elections, the party division in the House was a tie, 67-67. The two parties were forced to negotiate a bipartisan leadership, with a Republican speaker and a DFL majority leader.

Pleasant says that it was an unproductive and contentious period for the House.

"You had to raise your hand three times just to get a pencil," he said.

Pleasant says that after that experience he decided leave politics up to his wife, Gene, who is currently serving on the

governor's judicial selection board. The board is responsible for interviewing potential judges for appointment.

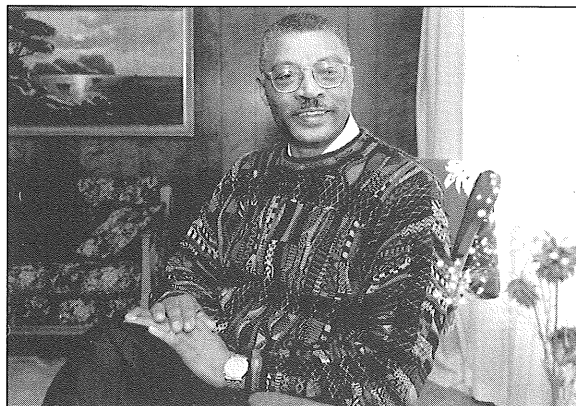
Since his time in the Legislature, Pleasant has continued his active community involvement. Most recently, he has been donating his talents to a Normandale Community College advisory board. Six years ago, he helped start an annual golf tournament that raises \$17,000 each year for student scholarships.

Pleasant, who has worked for the Richfield Bank and Trust Company since he left the Legislature, says that he plans to retire at the end of this year. But retirement does not mean inactivity.

"I stay active. I'm not one to just stay home and watch TV," he said.

Pleasant said he will continue to do the things he loves: fishing, traveling, golf, and most important, community involvement.

Pleasant has recently been appointed to serve on a voluntary advisory board for a



Former Rep. Ray O. Pleasant was the second African-American elected to the House. He served from 1973 to 1980.

residential group home in Eden Prairie. The home, operated by a Baptist church organization, provides services to boys ages 12 to 18 who are experiencing emotional or behavioral problems.

"We've had quite a success," Pleasant said. "One of our students is now the manager of a KFC [restaurant]."

The group home seeks to provide a safe and supportive environment for the boys so they can eventually return to their families.

Pleasant says that he is very excited about the opportunity to serve the organization.

"That's my new agenda," Pleasant said. "That's my next thing to be educated on."

