

NEWS OBITUARIES

Elton Redalen, state legislator, ag official

● Colleagues and friends remembered the Fountain, Minn., farmer-politician as a selfless public servant.

By BILL McAULIFFE
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There are many things his colleagues recall about former state legislator and agriculture commissioner Elton Redalen, from his advocacy for farmers and land conservation to his skills on the dance floor.

But there's one thing they remember in common.

"The enormous size of his hands," said former Gov. Arne Carlson. "That was from milking cows. I don't think anyone knew farming as well as he did.

"He was a genuine, big-hearted person," Carlson said. "I never once heard him talk about 'what's in it for me.' He was so much a part of the Greatest Generation. He really understood public service and what it means."

Redalen died of cancer Friday at the Chosen Valley Care Center in Chatfield, in southeastern Minnesota, near Fountain, which he represented in



Elton Redalen

the Legislature from 1977 to 1990. He was 83.

Redalen, a Republican, was honored in 1990 by the nonprofit Center for Policy Alternatives

for his work on groundwater protection legislation. The next year, after he had left the Legislature when Carlson appointed him agriculture commissioner, he irritated some farm groups by advocating a state wetland protection law.

"I would guess if you were to drive onto his farm, you'd almost see an Elton footprint," said former state Sen. Duane Benson, whom Redalen recruited to run for office to represent his neighboring Lanesboro. "Ponds, crop strips, conservation, wind breaks."

Redalen served in the Navy in World War II. He led the state Agriculture Department from 1990 to 1995.

He was born on a farm near

Fountain and made a practice of buying farms his relatives had owned and selling them to his children. At the time of his death, he owned farms that originally had been purchased by his uncle and grandfather, according to the Rochester Post-Bulletin.

Former state Sen. Dean Johnson met Redalen when Johnson was a student and Redalen the school board chairman in Fountain. The two shared an apartment during legislative sessions for about 15 years, Johnson said.

"He treated me like a son," Johnson said, adding that he remembered Redalen for reading stacks of newspapers and ag journals each night after work at the Capitol.

Johnson also remem-

bered how Redalen used his hands, particularly in talking about legislators who thought farmers might be getting too many advantages. "Those hands would just clench up, and he'd say, 'I need to have a talk with that fellow tomorrow,'" he said. "He had a temper in that regard, when people said ill-informed things about farmers. But he had one of the most tender hearts I've ever met."

Survivors include daughters Sharon Asleson and Jane O'Koren and sons Craig, Gary, Steven, Donald and Jeffrey Redalen. He was preceded in death by his wife, Joyce. Services will be held Wednesday in Fountain.

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ALSO NOTED

Paul Hemphill, 73, a journalist and novelist who wrote about sports, country music and the haunted legacy of the South, died July 11 of oral cancer in Atlanta. In the 1960s, Hemphill was a much admired newspaper columnist in Atlanta and was sometimes called the Jimmy Breslin of the South. He left newspapers behind in 1970, when he wrote a best-selling book about country music, "The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music." WASHINGTON POST