

Working in different octaves no problem for Rhodes

President Bill Clinton intrigued the nation when he belted out a few throaty jazz riffs during his inauguration this past January, leaving little doubt that a changing of the guard had occurred.



Rep. Jim Rhodes

But for those of you who questioned whether a Republican could have played the same soulful tune on a saxophone, meet Rep. Jim Rhodes.

Music is a way of life for the newest member of the Legislature, a man who could play the piano before he could read, who worked his way through college playing in dance bands, and who got his first introduction to politics through the St. Louis Park community band.

Like Clinton, Rhodes also plays the saxophone — the only difference being that “I play alto and he plays tenor.” He dismisses the idea that “politics has anything to do with playing sax.”

Instead, Rhodes sees music as a universal language that can cross all barriers, and he hopes to apply that same outreach philosophy to his work at the Capitol.

“Once the election is over, we all have to work together,” said Rhodes. “That’s the Ameri-

can system.”

Rhodes was elected Jan. 12 in a special election to fill the seat held by former Rep. Gloria Segal, who resigned because of illness after representing the area for 10 years.

The area is predominantly DFL, but Rhodes’ heavy community involvement was a factor that seemed to transcend political lines.

He’s been the top vote-getter in every St. Louis Park school board election since he was first elected in 1980 and has been a member of a host of community organizations.

In addition, he was the driving force behind a local program through which old musical instruments are refurbished and given to students who can’t afford them.

“I care a great deal about what happens to our community, and, to a large degree, what happens to the state,” said Rhodes, explaining why he ran for the House.

As the general manager of Albrechts clothing stores, business issues such as workers’ compensation costs concern him. But he said he hopes to focus on education and children’s issues at the Legislature.

“Do you know we have children who do not have a place to live after they leave school right here in the metropolitan area?” he asked. “We’ve got to make sure the children are helped.”

That Rhodes is willing to work with the DFL

seems apparent. After former Rep. Segal defeated him in 1982 the first time he ran for the Legislature, Rhodes went to her victory party. In turn, she supported him in his school board races.

And at his State Office Building office, he has both a portrait and biography of that famous give-’em-hell Democrat, Harry Truman, on display.

“Harry Truman never forgot his role in life and that’s why I put that up there so I’ll never forget my role in life: to be an ordinary citizen.”

Now he hopes to reach out to Minnesota’s most famous legislator-musician, Sen. Florian Chmielewski (DFL-Sturgeon Lake).

“I’m going to go over and introduce myself,” said Rhodes. “Music has no party bounds.”

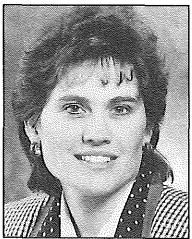
—Grant Moos

District 44B

Population: 32,033
Distribution: 100 percent in urbanized areas
County: Hennepin
Largest City: St. Louis Park (portion)
Location: western Metro
1992 presidential election statistics:
Clinton/Gore: 52.6 percent
Bush/Quayle: 27.1 percent
Perot/Stockdale: 19.5 percent
Other: 0.8 percent

Neary pushing for tax and campaign reform

Newly elected legislators have long come to the Capitol with proposals to change the course of the state. Rep. Pam Neary (DFL-Afton) is no exception.



Rep. Pam Neary

But Neary, whose district stretches from Lake Elmo to the Wisconsin border’s Prescott Bridge, wasted no time in tackling two major systems — property taxes and state aid to local governments.

A measure she’s proposed would virtually turn old tax and revenue systems upside down. Property taxes would be linked to income and ability to pay; state aid would flow to communities according to their revenue-raising capacities.

Neary’s proposal (HF921) would “narrow” state funding priorities to schools, family programs, and children’s services. Fire and police protection, and expenses such as road maintenance and plowing would be left to local communities.

Removing traditional school reliance on property taxes, Neary believes, would be a change well-received by her constituents. District 56B,

in the east metro area, includes Lake Elmo, Lakeland, Afton, Denmark Township, and the eastern half of Woodbury.

Neary said she hoped to remain focused on issues that are important to her constituents through a series of town meetings she holds with other local elected officials. She initiated the meetings shortly after taking office.

She described her constituents as “well-read, and very cognizant of what the issues are. They also know what needs to be shored up and strengthened.”

Neary attributes her area’s interest in public policy partly to the rapid residential development in Washington County. Families new to the area, she said, “want to connect themselves to their community. It’s the new suburban mechanism of connectedness.”

Creativity should be more frequently offered in suburban schools, according to Neary. “Families are looking for more choices in education — to crack some molds if their child doesn’t fit in. They are pressuring schools to take some risks and offer more choices.”

Neary has been a government affairs consultant for the National Organization of Women, the Community Clinic Consortium, and Friends

of Public Education. Formerly, she was a program evaluator in the Office of the Legislative Auditor. Before moving here from Colorado, she was a substitute teacher.

Two months into her new job, Neary has sponsored nearly a dozen bills proposing change — bills which range from campaign reform to encouraging state employees to do things differently by offering monetary incentives for money-saving ideas.

“We need people who are willing to push for change,” said Neary. “Expanding people’s horizons and bringing up new ideas is a crucial part of my job.”

—Joyce Peterson

District 56B

Population: 32,555
Distribution: 74.5 percent urban, 25.5 percent rural
County: Washington
Largest City: Woodbury
Location: eastern Metro
1992 presidential election results:
Clinton/Gore: 40.1 percent
Bush/Quayle: 33.0 percent
Perot/Stockdale: 26.3 percent
Other: 0.6 percent