

NEWS OBITUARIES

Frank Rodriguez, 86, active in labor, politics

● Rodriguez was a longtime labor leader before being elected to the House. He was known for helping others.

By KEVIN BEHR
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Frank Rodriguez, a St. Paul community activist, labor official and former legislator, died of a heart attack Friday at United Hospital in St. Paul. He was 86.

Rodriguez, a DFLer, was elected to the Minnesota House in 1979 and was said to be the first Hispanic to join that body. His daughter, AnnaMarie Krueger of Inver Grove Heights, said that her father won widespread support from Mexican-Americans in the district, resulting in one of the largest Hispanic turnouts in Minnesota at that



Frank Rodriguez

time.

"He always looked after the people who were less fortunate," Krueger said. "He felt it was his duty."

Raised on St. Paul's West Side, the low-key man many called "Ponch" lived a life of service to others, family members said.

Rodriguez was secretary-treasurer of Construction and General Laborers Local 132 for more than 30 years. Anybody looking for work found a job through him, Krueger said. If workers couldn't afford their union dues, Rodriguez either

paid them himself or found the means to cover the cost, she said.

His long labor track record won him a string of impressive endorsements in his bid for office in 1979, when he defeated a Republican veteran who had been kicked out of the House for campaign violations.

While in the House, Rodriguez served on labor, transportation and health committees and sponsored several pieces of labor legislation. He carried bills to protect migrant workers from wage exploitation, and to allow fire and police workers to accrue pension benefits while they are disabled. He was reelected in 1980 and 1982.

But some thought he was too narrowly focused on labor causes. In 1984, he was defeat-

ed by 45 votes in the DFL primary by Sandy Pappas, now a state senator from St. Paul.

Besides Krueger, Rodriguez is survived by his wife of 60 years, Ramona; another daughter, Shirley Elizondo, of Eagan; sons Frank Jr., John and James, all of St. Paul; 16 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

Visitation will be held from 4 to 8 p.m. Thursday at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, 401 Concord St., St. Paul. Funeral services will be at 10 a.m. Friday at Our Lady of Guadalupe.

News researcher Roberta Hovde contributed to this report.

Kevin Behr is a University of Minnesota student reporter on assignment for the Star Tribune.