

New members . . .

From heavy lifting to art, Schumacher has done it all

When Rep. Leslie Schumacher traveled the campaign trail in rural Sherburne County, district farmers asked to look at her hands.



Rep. Leslie Schumacher

"They know hard work. . . I had farmers who looked at my hands to see if I had dirt under my nails, if my hands had calluses."

They did.

Schumacher (DFL-Princeton), who has owned a trucking company with her husband and hauled freight, knows hard work, too.

"I worked for 10 years in a field dominated by men and during that time my hide toughened. . . I wasn't too shy to unload my own freight."

"There's something about being a truck driver pushing 20,000 pounds of freight that gains you a level of confidence."

Her trucking career gave way to local politics — a position on the Sherburne County Board of Commissioners — and now the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Schumacher is busy learning about the Legislature and a different kind of hard work. As a first-term lawmaker she's trying to understand all of Minnesota's laws, rules, and programs. Everything from agriculture and education to health care and taxes.

"I want to know it all now," she said. "I have this sense of running in a race. That's part of the reason I'm not sleeping."

The 39-year-old mother of two said there are many issues she plans to focus on during her tenure including reducing the state's unfunded mandates placed on local governments. She also wants to examine the state's property tax system and how it affects senior citizens on fixed incomes and other property owners as well.

Schumacher is considered a backer of local

governments. In a recent debate on a bill that would freeze salaries of top county administrators, the first-term lawmaker spoke out against the measure.

Not because she wanted county officials to earn more, but because she saw the Legislature micromanaging. The Legislature, she said, forgets that counties already have boards to set county policies. They don't need the state to do it for them.

Schumacher, who served on the Sherburne County Board of Commissioners for four years, said she noticed right away the difference between local governments and the Legislature.

"Local government is extremely independent. You're one of five [on a county board]. What you do has more effect. . . Down here, you are one of 134. There is more team-playing. You can't get things done independently here. You have to work as a team."

Because the margin between the DFL majority party and the IR minority party is very close, "I sense the need to get along," she said. "No one can be left out right now."

Schumacher was raised in New Hope which taught her well about growth and prepared her for Sherburne County's boom. She was born in the fifth house built in one of the first housing developments in what was then the Village of New Hope. But by the time she graduated from Armstrong High School, she had been in seven different schools in the district while living in the same house.

In addition to her past work as a trucker and in politics, Schumacher is also a freelance artist who creates pet portraits, wildlife art, and carvings.

Schumacher wanted to be a veterinarian when she was little. "And I grew up to be an animal artist. As soon as I found out I had to put them to sleep on occasion, I decided it wasn't the route for me. I'd rather shoot them with a camera."

In 1982, she married and moved to her husband's farm in Mille Lacs County. Five years later, they moved to their current home in Santiago Township. Her political career followed.

Schumacher said she uses a sense of humor in life and in politics. A few years ago, she was quoted in a St. Cloud newspaper story on women in male-dominated local politics. She joked:

"There's a lot of old-school politicking that goes on here. I tend to think that if I could join the other four [male] commissioners in the bathroom, I'd be better informed."

She wrote a letter to the editor sharing the good-humored response of her fellow commissioners.

". . . my board has informed me that they intend to place a sign on the bathroom door alerting me to when it is safe to enter."

When it is all said and done, Schumacher said she will know she's done a good job representing District 17B if she has conducted herself in an "ethical, honest and forthright manner." And, she added, retained "the credibility to this House seat that [former Rep. Jerry] Bauerly left it in."

— K. Darcy Hanzlik

District 17B

Population: 32,739
Distribution: 18.38 percent urban; 81.62 percent rural
Counties: Benton, Sherburne
Largest city: St. Cloud
Location: central Minnesota
Unemployment rate: 6.28 percent
Residents living below poverty level: 9.33 percent
1992 presidential election results:
 Bush/Quayle 31.22 percent
 Clinton/Gore 33.04 percent
 Perot/Stockdale 28.06 percent
 Other: 7.68 percent