

From walleye to campaign reform . . .

Sparby ends expansive career that mirrors his district

As the gavel's rap sounded the close of the 1993 legislative session, it also signaled an end to Rep. Wally Sparby's 11 years of House service.

The Thief River Falls DFLer has resigned to become executive director of the state's U.S. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASCS) Office. The agency oversees dozens of farm programs which funnel millions of dollars into the state.

A farmer himself, Sparby has been an ardent spokesman for the state's agriculture community since first being elected in 1980. He said he's looking forward to serving farmers in his new role.

"I've been campaigning for [the position] since right after the election," he said. "I'm very excited about it."

Sparby was appointed by President Bill Clinton. He replaces Don Friedrich, who had been appointed in 1980.

The 1980s were a tumultuous time for agriculture and his rural district in the Red River Valley, an era marked by tractor caravans to the Capitol and the drone of auctioneers disposing of failed farms.

A member of the Agriculture Committee since his first day as a legislator, Sparby had a hand in landmark farm legislation that was an outgrowth of those crisis years: Creation of a Rural Finance Authority that still helps young farmers get their start, the farmer-lender mediation program that has helped farmers keep both their businesses and way of life, and creation of the Agricultural Utilization and Research Institute.

"I always thought the mission here was to help people and to have an impact on their lives," he said.

Sparby has also left his mark on northwestern Minnesota, pushing for improvements at technical and community colleges in Thief River Falls and helping bring public radio and television to what many consider to be the most



Rep. Chuck Brown gave a parting handshake to Rep. Wally Sparby, who is retiring after 11 years in the Legislature. Sparby gave a farewell speech to his fellow House members a few minutes before midnight on the session's final day. He is resigning his seat to become executive director of the state's U.S. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation office.

isolated corner of the state.

"It's hard for a lot of people to understand, but it's a tremendous area to live in — second to none in the state of Minnesota," he said. His new job also means settling in the Twin Cities.

Sparby also noted two accomplishments in his final session — carrying the House campaign reform package and passage of a bill setting new size limits for walleye and northern pike. Both bills will have long-enduring effects in the state, he said.

His departure breaks up a trio of DFLers from Senate District 1 that has been together since 1982 — Rep. Jim Tunheim of Kennedy and Sen. LeRoy Stumpf, also of Thief River Falls. A special election will be held to determine Sparby's successor.

Running for office had always been a dream of Sparby's. So when the House seat opened up

in 1982, he gave it a try and succeeded. In three of his six terms, he ran unopposed. Friends also encouraged him to run for Congress.

In a farewell speech to his colleagues on the House floor as his last session ground to a halt May 17, Sparby said the past 11 years have been fulfilling — and fraught with some personal milestones, too.

Since first coming to the Capitol in 1982, all four of his children have married, both his parents have died, his waistline has thickened a bit, and his hair has turned a snowy white.

"You get to meet a lot of nice, interesting people in this business — and I'm going to miss that," Sparby said. "I've always appreciated the opportunity of having been able to do that."

—Jim Anderson

It's a fact!

Minnesota's first newspaper, the *Minnesota Register*, hit the streets dated April 27, 1849 with a "printed in St. Paul" disclaimer.

In fact, it was printed two weeks earlier in Cincinnati, and shipped to Minnesota by its publisher, Dr. A. Randall, for an April 27 distribution.

While it was printed outside Minnesota, it was still the first newspaper ever published for the territory, and contained "valuable articles from the pens of H.H. Sibley

and Henry M. Rice," according to Judge Charles Flandrau in his *History of Minnesota*.

Randall had met with territorial leaders in 1848 to discuss the necessity of a Minnesota newspaper and intended to bring his printing presses to Stillwater that fall. "But the navigation of the rivers closed earlier than usual." Randall never returned to Minnesota, and later moved to California. His *Register* was dated just one day before the premiere issue of *The Minne-*

sota Pioneer published by James Goodhue, which actually was printed on Minnesota soil.

Goodhue originally intended to name his paper the *Epistle of St. Paul*, but according to Flandrau, "upon sober reflection [Goodhue] was convinced that the name might shock the religious sensibilities of the community, especially as he did not possess many of the attributes of our patron saint."