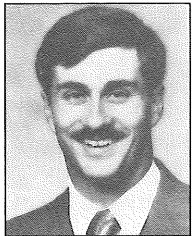


Freshman profile . . .

Finseth hunting for workers' compensation reform

Two coyote pelts hang on the walls of Rep. Tim Finseth's (IR-Angus) office.

He shot the coyote himself on his farm near Oklee. Those pelts, along with another office fixture, an Arctic Cat snowmobile that could fit in your hand, represent what Finseth doesn't intend to forget: He represents rural interests. Arctic Cats, big ones, are made in Thief River Falls.



Rep. Tim Finseth

"My district [1B] is heavy in agriculture and agriculture-related business. I'm trying to make this a better state for business and agriculture to operate together, like having less burdensome taxes on ag businesses," Finseth said.

Voters elected him on his third try, during a July 1993 special election. He takes former Rep. Wally Sparby's seat. Sparby, a DFLer, resigned last May after 11 years in the House to become executive director of the state's U.S. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. Finseth, 30, said he won the historically DFL district because residents' concerns mirrored his own.

"More people are concerned with state government becoming bigger and having more regulations," he said. "It's beautiful up there in northwest Minnesota. It's a slow and

peaceful area to live in and the people want to make sure it stays that way. I think people in a rural district have a sense of independence and they want to keep it."

His district borders North Dakota, which makes workers' compensation costs one of the area's top priorities. Some Minnesota businesses leave the state to take advantage of lower workers' compensation insurance rates, Finseth said. He told voters he wanted to lower those rates. In addition, he pledged to try to scale back state spending and hold the line on rural property taxes.

The special election came in the political off-season, but Finseth had no trouble recruiting campaign volunteers. They came looking for him.

Because he had run for office in 1992, Finseth was "geared up and ready to go" when Sparby announced he was leaving. "It didn't take me long to get geared up again," he said.

The campaign against Joel Swanson, a Thief River Falls DFLer, went smoothly and before Finseth knew it, then-House Speaker Dee Long was administering his oath of office.

He is on leave from his job as manager of the Marshall County Soil and Water Conservation District. Before re-election time rolls around, he'll decide whether to continue that leave of absence or to quit his job. He doesn't want to take time away from either his constituents or the farmers in the conservation

district and may have a difficult time balancing both, he said.

Finseth lives in St. Paul during the session, but makes the 325-mile drive back home to wife, Ruth, and five-month-old-son, Cameron, on weekends. Once there, he also can talk to constituents, hunt, fish, and, for a few more weeks, go snowmobiling.

Already, he has noticed a faster pace than he had expected around the State Office Building.

"I didn't realize there are so many issues. I knew it would be fast, but not this fast," said Finseth, who serves on the Judiciary, Housing, and Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs committees as well as on the Judiciary Finance Division. "But I'm looking forward to helping pass legislation. I've been waiting since July to get in the chamber."

— Jean M. Thilmany

District 1B

Population: 32,796

Distribution: 51 percent of residents live in urban areas, 49 percent live in rural areas

Counties: Marshall, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake

Largest city: Thief River Falls

Location: northwestern Minnesota

1992 presidential election results:

Clinton/Gore: 39.1 percent

Bush/Quayle: 36.6 percent

Perot/Stockdale: 22.2 percent

Other: 2.1 percent