

# Guided by his past

## Backgrounds in business, religion, transportation have led Beard to the House of Representatives

By JEFF JONES

Rep. Michael Beard (R-Shakopee) says even a cloudy day is a nice day in Minnesota.



Rep. Michael Beard

That might be easy to say for an amateur pilot like Beard, who enjoys soaring above the clouds at least as much as driving beneath them, but that optimism has deeper roots.

Growing up in the foothills of Pennsylvania, Beard often lived in the shadow of mountains. "The sun would come up at 6:30 in the morning, but you wouldn't see it 'til after nine," he said. "The sun might not set 'til eight in the middle of the summer but the last you saw of it was after six."

And on cloudy days? "They'd be right down in the hills and we just felt kind of claustrophobic. Here (in Minnesota), the clouds can be 600 feet above the ground and you can still see halfway to Hutchinson. It looks like a nice day to me."

When he and his wife, Karen, came to Minnesota to attend Bible college, they knew they wanted to spend their lives here. "There was more of an entrepreneurial spirit about the place," Beard said. "We liked it, we wanted to come back here and raise our kids."

It also gave him the opportunity to work for himself.

He started Beard Communications, which produces a variety of Christian publications, in 1987 and purchased the nondenominational *Minnesota Christian Chronicle* newspaper in 1995. Now 25 years old, the publication has a bi-weekly circulation of more than 20,000.

Beard professes great respect for anyone trying to "make a go" in business. "You have to be out there every day selling yourself, selling your concept, your services, your business, your idea," he says. "Whether you're selling corn or you're selling newspapers."

Operating and building a company hasn't

always been easy. One of his business ventures failed and he has presided over difficult budget decisions to make ends meet. "I'm intimately familiar with fear and terror," he says. "Like, 'Yikes, it's payday and I don't have any money in the bank.' That's a terrible thing to face."

Those experiences guide his work as a freshman representative while the Legislature tries to balance the state's budget for the upcoming fiscal year. "Cutting budgets is never any fun, but it's a very necessary thing," he says. "And after you've done it for 10 or 12 years — fattening up in the good times and cutting back in the lean times — you get a little less emotional about it."

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Along with his business experience, Beard brings a strong faith background to his work as a legislator. His daughter, Amy, is the bookkeeper and general manager for the *Minnesota Christian Chronicle*, where her father still serves as publisher. "He wants to make the world a better place," she says. "He isn't in charge, but he's a tool being used."

Beard says his relationship with God keeps him from thinking too much of himself. "He's the king, I'm a creature, I understand the relationship there," he said, laughing.

His employees have seen his faith at work. "He spends a lot of time in prayer before he makes a big decision," says Michael Norman, the *Chronicle's* graphic designer. "He likes to know all sides of a problem before making a decision."

Lisa Beard calls her father a visionary. "He has big ideas," she says. "His ability to network is amazing."

Beard is happy to be sitting on the House Transportation Policy and Transportation Finance committees. "If it floats, if it rolls, if it

flies, I enjoy it. I'm in love with it," he said.

After college, Beard returned home and worked as an engineer trainee for the Pennsylvania Central Railroad, which he calls the best job he ever quit.

He left the job after a couple of years to come to Minnesota, but admits to missing it at times. "There's something about rolling through town and blowing your whistle and waving at the kids that's just every boy's dream come true. There's nothing like pulling that throttle and feeling 14,000 horsepower kick you in the butt."

Transportation is among the things government ought to be about, Beard says. When it comes to building roads and infrastructure, maintaining a court system, and providing quality education, state dollars are well spent. Beyond that, though, he suggests taking a hard look at the way sales taxes are collected from cities and counties, the way money is distributed to local governments, and the way social services are administered.

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things. Some great things. Some good things," Beard said. "But a budget crunch like we're in now gives us an opportunity to get connected to reality. What is the best stuff? We may have to sacrifice the good to retain the best."

### DISTRICT 35A

**2002 population:** 36,485

**Largest city:** Shakopee

**County:** Scott

**Location:** southwest Twin Cities metropolitan area

**Top concern:** "We have an excellent opportunity to withdraw from things that we shouldn't be in and reorient government to the issues at hand: education, transportation and the judicial system. We must be about those."

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