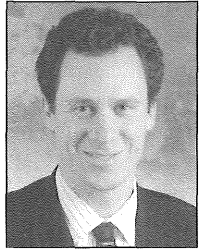


# Looking for a repeat

After 9 years of helping his hometown on the city council, Latz looks for similar success in St. Paul

By JEFF JONES

Rep. Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park) is going to miss his old job. After 9 years on the St. Louis Park City Council, he now has a seat in the Minnesota House of Representatives, but in many ways it just won't be the same.



Rep. Ron Latz

"We were a pretty close-knit group, probably even unique among city councils, but we all got along on a personal level quite well and our council meetings were rarely acrimonious," Latz said. "Here you can't get to know the entire Legislature quite so well."

Fellow council members proudly list the improvements Latz helped to make in St. Louis Park, from a new downtown to refurbished, affordable housing apartments to a new ice sheet and aquatic facility at the local recreation center. "He always took that long-term view of things," said councilmember Jim Brimeyer.

St. Louis Park Mayor Jeff Jacobs says Latz was instrumental in developing a series of neighborhood councils in the city that connected residents with their government, local businesses, and each other. "We do democracy the way they intended for it to be done when it was invented," Jacobs said.

The improvements in his home city are a source of pride for Latz, too. "In place after place after place, I can see the results of my work directly," he said, "and it's very gratifying to see the people of St. Louis Park enjoying the benefits of that."

It was talking with those people that made Latz want to run for a House seat. "I came across a lot of people who had questions about policy and about issues in the district that were affected not only by the city but by the state government policy," he said. "I felt that in order to address those interests, I could do that better in the state Legislature than I could on the city council."

Redistricting also helped him make the decision to run. District 44B now encompasses part of St. Louis Park, where Latz lives, and most of Golden Valley, where he grew up. Without an incumbent, he thought the new district was ideal for him.

Latz grew up in a family that placed a high value on public service and civil discourse. His father was a state representative from 1959 to 1967 and though he was quite young at the time, Latz says he can remember the old Ewald Dairy milk truck equipped with a loudspeaker that his father drove around town while campaigning. "I remember— even years after he was an elected official — our dinner table

conversations were about what was going on in the world around us," Latz says. "We talked about the university, we talked about local issues in Golden Valley, we talked about civil rights issues. And I saw that my parents went out and did something about those issues, too."

Latz's own two children, ages 4 and 17-months, will likely be noticing the same about their father. In addition to his law practice, Latz has served a variety of nonprofit organizations including the American Cancer Society, the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing, and the Anti-Defamation League.

He says state government isn't all that different from working in the nonprofit community. "We're all constrained by tight budgets," he says. "The prioritizing will be the same. You still have to go through the process of not having unlimited resources, having to decide how

to spend those limited resources, defining a mission, and figuring out some way of measuring what you produce and whether your goals are achieved."

Rep. Doug Meslow (R-White Bear Lake) has worked with Latz on court cases in the past and now sits with him on the House Higher Education Finance Committee. He says Latz's professionalism and integrity have carried into his work so far at the Capitol. "I see him using the same skills that I've seen him use effectively in court," Meslow said. "Those same skills have translated to his good work in the Legislature."

Latz says his primary concerns will be preserving funding for public schools and improving access to higher education. He would also like to see something done about the bottleneck on Highway 100 in St. Louis Park and take steps to protect the environment across the state.

"Ron is a global thinker," Mayor Jacobs said. "He knows that all that is good for St. Louis Park is not happening in a vacuum... it has to

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— Rep. Ron Latz

be part of a bigger plan. Ron is the kind of guy that will see the implications of his actions."

"I like politics for what it could do. And I like the process," Latz says. "I help people who need help. It's sort of my organizing philosophy."

## DISTRICT 44B

**Population:** 36,939

**Largest city:** St. Louis Park

**County:** Hennepin

**Location:** western Twin Cities suburbs

**Top concern:** "Access to higher education for anyone who has the motivation and the ability to be there — it is the economic engine of the state, and it is the long term future of our economy."

— Rep. Ron Latz

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