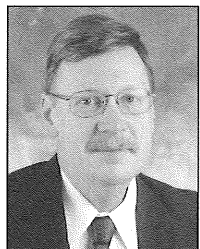


Keeping the tradition

Nelson followed his father's footsteps into business, and again as a member of the House of Representatives

By MIKE COOK

There is an old adage that the two things people never want to actually see being made are sausages and laws.



Rep. Pete Nelson

Don't tell that to Rep. Pete Nelson (R-Lindstrom).

When not in St. Paul crafting laws, Nelson owns and operates an award-winning meat shop, Community Market & Deli, in his hometown. "I enjoy them

both," he said. "I take great pride in the quality of sausage I make, and I take equal pride in making quality legislation." Nelson was enshrined in the American Cured Meats Hall of Fame in 1994.

He likes to tell the story about when Luciano Pavarotti performed for the first time at St. Paul's Xcel Energy Center, "They flew in bread and wine from Italy, but they had this Dane who lives in 'America's Little Sweden' make the Italian sausage genuine for that thing."

After leaving the Marine Corps in 1968, Nelson began to work at the shop his father, Howard, started in 1936. A few years later, Nelson bought out his elder, who at age 90 still helps out six days a week.

But it wasn't just the business that Pete Nelson followed his dad into.

Howard Nelson was a House member from 1958-60 and served in the Senate for two terms beginning in 1963.

"He was a strong leader in the Senate," Nelson said. "If it was an ag-related bill, he was always on the conference committee, and both houses always deferred and pretty much let him write how the legislation was. He wrote the first meat inspection act that Minnesota had."

His great uncle, George, served in the Wisconsin Assembly, ran for governor of Wisconsin, and ran for vice-president in the mid-1930s with the Socialist Workers Party.

Yet, Nelson learned a lesson from George that he still believes in today: "The important thing that you should remember is sometimes you need to change your mind."

He said that is especially true in the political arena. "That's one of the few — if not the only — reason I did not sign the no new taxes pledge because I want to make sure I have the ability to change my mind if given new information."

Nelson admits he never had a real interest in running for political office, yet he served for four years on the Lindstrom City Council and four years as mayor before winning an open seat in the House created by redistricting.

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sometimes we accept that opportunity and sometimes we pass it up," Nelson said. "I had a lot of people that came to me and said 'We need somebody down there that leads like you.'"

Keith Carlson, a 20-year council member, replaced Nelson as Lindstrom's mayor. "I've known Pete all my life," Carlson said. "He's a guy that'll work hard for you. He'll put in the time and effort."

"What people found with me was they could come into the butcher shop and I would listen to them, give my opinion if they wanted it, and if they wanted a commitment from me to whatever degree, they knew they had it," Nelson said. "I did not go around behind their back and undo what they were trying to do even if I disagreed with them. So even when we disagreed they still respected me."

Nelson sits on the House Taxes Committee and both transportation committees.

The latter is especially important, as 80 percent of the Chisago County's workforce commutes to the Twin Cities metropolitan area, Nelson said. He said that county has been one of state's three fastest growing counties in each of the last 10 years.

The environment is also important to Nelson, who is sponsoring a bill (HF657) that authorizes counties to require the dedication of land for public parks from land or fees received from developers. It awaits committee action.

During Nelson's Lindstrom tenure, an ordinance was enacted whereby developers are told where a park would be created in their development, instead of developers putting greenspace wherever it fit in their plans.

He talks of a city park refurbishment in Lindstrom where the city received some state grant money, used volunteer sweat equity, and had some in-kind contributions of labor and materials to create a facility that was recognized in two national trade publications.

Nelson said he is happy just to be here after

fighting off a stage-four cancer in his neck. "They say I am now cancer-free," he said. "They took out 82 lymph nodes, a bunch of neck and shoulder muscle, and beat me up with radiation, but I'm a lucky guy. God was good to me."

DISTRICT 17B

2002 population: 36,732
Largest city: North Branch
County: Chisago
Location: east-central Minnesota
Top concern: "With the growth in our area, transportation is a big issue and taxes is a big issue to everybody."

— Rep. Pete Nelson

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