

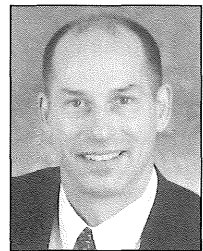
Coming home

After living outside of Minnesota during many years of military service, Severson jets into the House of Representatives

By TOM LONERGAN

When Rep. Dan Severson (R-Sauk Rapids) was 9 years old, his brother-in-law took him up in a Cessna 172 for his first plane ride.

"I always wanted to fly," said the 48-year-old freshman House member representing District 14A, north of St. Cloud.



Rep. Dan Severson

After earning a degree in physics from St. Cloud State University, Severson was trained as a Naval officer. Commissioned in 1979 to conduct flight training, he's more than fulfilled his boyhood dream.

During 22 years in the Navy, Severson flew fighter jets as a non-combat pilot, was a squadron leader, and spent three years in Washington D.C. in naval personnel and policy development. The latter experience gave him "a taste for the political structure," Severson said.

Following his retirement from the military in 2000, Severson and his family moved back home to Minnesota. He worked in a business creating new applications for light emitting diodes. Severson still flies regularly, although not during winter. He said he misses "flying fast airplanes and pulling a lot of G's (g-forces)."

In his first run for public office last November, Severson beat his DFL opponent by 315 votes. Last spring, it took 10 ballots for him to gain the Republican endorsement for a newly redistricted House seat over former five-term Rep. Steve Dehler. Redistricting had placed Dehler in the same district as Rep. Doug Stang (R-Cold Spring). Dehler moved so he could run in the new district.

Stang said he and Severson share similar concerns on economic development in central Minnesota, education equity funding, and the area's transportation needs. "Dan worked extremely hard campaigning," Stang said. "I was impressed at how aggressive he was. He's realizing the campaigning doesn't really end. That's going to serve him well."

Small cities such as Rice, St. Stephen, Sartell,

and Sauk Rapids are part of the district that Severson described as, "conservative, strong pro-life, and growing economically." He said he wants to provide "good representation of the conservative values of the district" and "be the voice for economic development."

Minnesota has a tradition as an "innovative, forward-thinking state with a very progressive education system," Severson said. However, he added, the state's "aggressive tax policy" and regulations have placed "constraints on business. We've kind of put the kibosh on economic development."

As a member of the House Jobs and Economic Development Finance Committee, he plans to support legislation to create tax free zones for qualifying businesses. In addition,

"We're not seeing business in a friendly way. The state's message to business, he said, is not, 'We're here to help.' It's more like, 'You're honored to be able to operate in our state.'"

— Rep. Dan Severson

Severson said he'd like to see the state relax some other requirements on business such as workers' compensation and unemployment insurance compensation.

"We're not seeing business in a friendly way," Severson said. The state's message to business, he said, "is not, 'We're here to help.' It's more like, 'You're honored to be able to operate in our state.'"

Severson is also a member of the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs and Transportation Policy committees.

"Economic development and transportation are linked," said Severson, who favors a multi-modal approach to transportation planning. "Rail has a place in our future." He supports the development of the Northstar commuter rail line from St. Cloud to Minneapolis. Starting the project "will be tough in this economic environment," Severson said, but the potential economic impact will be "a real positive."

He's the lone sponsor of HF487, which

proposes a 4 percent cut to the salaries of legislators and the state's constitutional officers – governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, and state auditor – for 2004-05. Their salaries were increased beginning in 2003 based on provisions in a 2001 law.

Severson said he agreed to sponsor the House companion to a bill (SF220) first introduced by Sen. Dave Kleis (R-St. Cloud), because, "we need to lead by example. My military background taught me to always lead from the front, not behind." Neither bill has had a committee hearing.

Legislators are paid \$31,140 annually, an amount not increased since a 5 percent bump in 1999. Salaries for constitutional officers, except the governor, now range from 65 percent to 95 percent of the governor's \$120,303 salary.

Moving every three years during his military career brought his family closer together, Severson said. His daughter and son attend St. Cloud State University. He met his wife, Cathy Jo, on a blind date arranged by their parents. She's a real estate broker who, Severson said, "put me through college," while working as a

dental assistant in the 1970s.

As he completes his third month in the House, Severson said he enjoys the "personal interface with different people." The best part of the job, he said, is, "I'm finally beginning to feel that I can get on top of what's been going on."

"Probably the hardest thing is trying not to look stupid."

DISTRICT 14A

2002 population: 36,887

Largest city: Sauk Rapids

Counties: Benton, Stearns

Location: central Minnesota

Top concern: "Property values in central Minnesota have increased 93 percent over the past 10 years. The cost of housing for seniors on fixed incomes has skyrocketed as a result. I want to freeze property valuations to allow seniors to be able to stay in their homes."

— Rep. Dan Severson