

Former state Rep. Ted Biernat dies at age 77

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By Karine Michael
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Former state Rep. Ted Biernat said in a 1956 Star Tribune article that he had served his four sessions in the Legislature to the best of his ability. According to his son, Minneapolis City Council Member Joe Biernat, Ted led his life as a dedicated businessman, father, husband and resident of northeast Minneapolis the same way.

Ted L. Biernat, 77, died Thursday at his home in Minneapolis after two weeks of hospice care. His wife, Sophie, and their six children were at his side.

Biernat served as a Democratic (later DFL) state representative from northeast Minneapolis from 1948 to 1956. He encouraged his children to be active in politics. "He instilled civic duty into us," Joe Biernat, who represents Minneapolis' Third Ward, said of his political life and of that of his older brother, Len, a member of the Min-



Ted Biernat, former state representative, businessman.

neapolis school board. "He had very strong convictions and lived by three rules: Always be kind, never boast — unless it's regarding your children — and always make friends."

Ted Biernat, who was DFL-endorsed in two of his reelections, fought some of the same battles his sons fight today. In the 1950s, he was concerned about financial and equity issues in the Minneapolis public schools. As a member of the House Tax Committee, he was concerned about rising taxes, and he supported workers' benefits such as unemployment insurance and worker's compensation.

Born to Polish immigrants, Biernat graduated from Edison High School in 1936. Five years later, he married Sophie Makuck and briefly attended the University of Minnesota before serving 4½ years in the Army during World War II. After the war, he sold insurance before going to work in his father's store.

The store, Biernat's Liquor and Groceries, opened in 1918, the year Biernat was born. The store operated through Prohibition solely as a grocery store. It was one of the first stores in Minneapolis to obtain a liquor license

after Prohibition. Shortly after he returned from the war, Biernat's father let him run the store for two weeks. Those two weeks turned into 2,180, before he and his family closed the business in 1986.

Walt Centryz Jr., a neighbor and business competitor of Biernat's, said Ted treated his customers and constituents like family. "People always brought letters from Poland into the store for him to translate and he was always giving out credit to his customers," Centryz said. "He dumped out thousands of unpaid IOU slips when his business closed."

Besides his wife, Biernat is survived by daughters Susan Russnick, of Fridley, and Janice Pederson, of Plymouth; sons Len, Peter, Tom and Joe, all of Minneapolis; a sister Florence Courteau, of Onamia, Minn., and 16 grandchildren. Arrangements are pending at Kozlak-Radulovich Funeral Chapel, 1918 University Av. NE., Minneapolis.