

Edward Brandt LEGISLATOR, FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER

A fighter for nonsmokers rights



By STEVE ALEXANDER
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Edward Brandt of Minneapolis, described by a colleague as “a man ahead of his time,” lived to see some of his ideas — racial equality, nonsmokers rights and racetrack betting — gain wide acceptance in Minnesota and the nation.

The 81-year-old Brandt — a former Foreign Service officer, University of St. Thomas political science instructor and Minnesota legislator — died Jan. 17 after a long illness. He was best known for helping to create the groundbreaking Minnesota Clean Indoor Air Act, which banned smoking in many public places except in designated areas.

When his efforts on behalf of nonsmokers didn't succeed during his tenure in the Legislature in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he worked on behalf of the act as a citizen volunteer. The law, the first nonsmokers-rights legislation in the nation, passed in 1975 and served as a model for laws in other states.

“He was a man ahead of his time, often proposing things that happened later,” recalled Lyll Schwarkopf of Minneapolis, whose terms in the Legislature overlapped Brandt's. In the early 1970s Brandt proposed creating a state horse-racing commis-

sion, an idea that didn't catch on for another decade.

Brandt was also insatiably curious. As an employee of the U.S. Information Agency, he served in Europe and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and used his spare time to research genealogy. He learned to read Low German and wrote several volumes on tracing family history.

“I always felt as if I'd been taken along on an adventure,” recalled Eileen Johnson of Roseville, Brandt's daughter who accompanied her parents on their journeys. “What I gained was an incredible perspective on different parts of the world, an open-mindedness. My dad was very much a part of creating that.”

Between foreign stints, Brandt was assigned to Washington and lived with his family in Maryland. After being assigned to an overseas post again, Brandt and his family ran into controversy when they sought to sell their Maryland home. It was 1965, and Brandt had listed the house under the “fair housing” label, which meant that it could be purchased by anyone. Two neighbors were outraged and demanded that he not sell to black people.

But Brandt, who considered the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. a hero and had attended King's “I Have A

Dream” speech two years earlier, didn't flinch, recalled Brandt's wife, Marie. Brandt had been brought up in the Mennonite faith in Canada and knew how to stand up for his beliefs, no matter how unpopular, she said.

“Ed was fair but firm with the neighbors, and said it was the right thing to do,” Marie Brandt said. “Later, the neighbors hung a figure in effigy from a light pole in front of our house, and one night they put a burning cross right in front of our kitchen window, so our house could easily have caught on fire.”

Undeterred, the Brandts sold their house to a black family. “Afterward, one neighbor wrote to us to say all was quiet,” Marie Brandt said. “Apparently, the upset neighbors left the new couple alone, because they'd taken it all out on us.”

Recalled Schwarkopf: “Ed was very concerned that people got a fair deal and that they weren't trampled by someone else.”

Brandt is survived by Marie, his wife of 60 years; daughters Rose Brandt and Eileen Johnson; son Douglas; son-in-law Steve Johnson; and siblings Bill, Lena, Evelyn, Nettie, Elma, Mary and Carolyn. Services were held Jan. 27.

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