

# Leonard Lindquist gets a deserved award for his life of community service

Jim Marshall, a Purple People Eater of some renown, calls Leonard Lindquist "my hero."

Tony Bouza, the grandiloquent ex-Minneapolis police chief, once wrote Lindquist to proclaim: "Blessed be the peacemakers."

Mayor Don Fraser calls him, simply, "a really neat guy."

Their tributes, among others, have inspired me to break a precedent: I'm about to say something nice about a lawyer.

By all accounts, Lindquist has left an indelible mark on our community and, in a variety of ways, on the country as well. Consider:

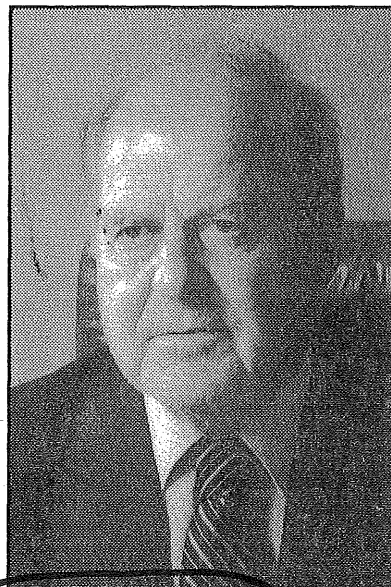
■ As a founder with Senior U.S. District Judge Earl Larson of the law firm now known as Lindquist & Vennum, he set out from Day 1 to make the firm a strong and supportive base for attorneys dedicated to community service and public life.

Among the firm's alumni: Fritz Mondale, former vice president and U.S. senator; Orville Freeman, the former Minnesota governor who served as President John F. Kennedy's agriculture secretary; Minneapolis Mayor Don Fraser, who also was a U.S. representative, and Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Alan Page, himself a onetime Purple People Eater.

■ As a lifelong Republican, Lindquist not only helped loft the aforementioned Democrats onto the political scene, but also found himself up to his pinstripes in a passel of liberal causes. As a state legislator in the 1950s, for instance, he was a leader in the fair-housing battle and sponsored the state's first law banning racial discrimination in nursing homes. And in the 1960s he was tapped by Minneapolis Mayor Art Naftalin, another DFLer, as chairman of the Mayor's Committee on Fair Employment Practice.



**Dick Youngblood**



**Leonard Lindquist**

"Leonard is a true mugwump," said Freeman, now an associate in the Washington, D.C., office of the Popham, Haik law firm. "He called himself a Republican, but he always supported whoever he thought was right."

■ As a prominent national labor mediator and arbitrator, Lindquist was asked by Fraser to intervene in 1982 in the violent, three-month printers' strike at the Bureau of Engraving Inc.

The result: Lindquist wooed the two sides back to the bargaining table and had the strike settled within days, thereby eliciting Bouza's biblical reference.

■ As a man who devoted his career to representing working people — from nurses to pilots to Mayo Clinic residents — Lindquist was hired as outside counsel in 1969 to help form the National Football League Players Association and assist in negotiating its first contract with NFL owners.

Although the relationship endured until 1988, Lindquist's initial meeting with one of the group's founders, John Mackey, was not what you'd call promising. Perusing a press release that identified Mackey as the tight end of the Baltimore Colts, Lindquist asked, if there wasn't a misprint: "Shouldn't this be *right* end?" he inquired.

"I'd never seen a professional football game before," Lindquist confessed in an interview the other day. "I'd never had much time for that sort of thing."

To hear him tell it, he still doesn't have all that much spare time, never mind his age — 81 — and his lengthy but so far successful battle against prostate cancer. Indeed, the reason I'm bringing the gent to your attention this morning is that I've uncovered a significant failure here in the twilight of his illustrious career.

Truth be told, Lindquist is simply lousy at this retirement business.

For one thing, while he retired from active law practice in 1988, at age 76, Lindquist still spends 20 to 30 hours or more a week as a labor arbitrator and mediator, a chore that has taken him in recent months from Miami to

Chicago to Seattle — not to mention a few lesser-known outposts in between. On a recent Tuesday, for example, he was aboard a 7:30 a.m. flight to Grand Forks to mediate a labor dispute.

More important, to borrow Fraser's words, Lindquist persists in the notion that lawyers — even octogenarian lawyers — “have an important and continuing obligation to the larger community.”

All of which brings us back to the reason why Marshall, a member of a Minnesota Vikings defensive line dubbed “The Purple People Eaters,” is saying nice things about Lindquist.

Marshall and former Vikings running back Oscar Reed are the founders of a truly creative inner-city organization, Professional Sports Linkage Inc., which uses athletes, business executives and other celebrities to help show at-risk youngsters that there are worthwhile alternatives to crime and drugs.

The private nonprofit organization offers programs ranging from chess, tennis and theater clubs to academic tutoring, job training and placement to about 100 youngsters referred by the courts, police, probation officers and community workers.

So what's all this got to do with Lindquist? Well, to help Marshall and Reed get started, he placed the resources of Lindquist & Venum at their disposal, including free legal advice, staff assistance and meeting space. “We didn't even have to pay for the doughnuts,” said Reed, who has gained a couple of pounds since his playing days.

More important, Lindquist began putting the arm on acquaintances for contributions of time and money. “He did not request contributions,” Marshall recalled. “He didn't encourage contributions. He *insisted* on contributions.”

And this wasn't an isolated example, Marshall added: “At an age when most people would be out fishing, he's still doing what he's been doing for years — trying to make people's lives better.”

And so, at a banquet early in September, Marshall announced that he and Reed were giving Lindquist their first annual Leonard Lindquist Award for Excellence in Community Service.

For his part, Lindquist has a fairly simple explanation for his unwillingness to relax: “I've always felt that, if the willingness to give dries up, so does the spirit,” he said. Thus, despite prostate, cataract and hernia surgeries in the past three years, “I want to remain in the service as long as I feel I'm doing some good.”