

Wearing many hats

Liebling adds representative to her list of activities

By RUTH DUNN

Some people may have been surprised when Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL-Rochester) was elected to the House, but she wasn't.



Rep. Tina Liebling

In a three-way race in 2002, Liebling and an Independence Party candidate together gathered more votes than Republican Carla Nelson.

"I was optimistic I could win a two-way race," she said.

Rochester, once a Republican stronghold, tends to be a swing area now, says Liebling. "The area has changed with lots of political moderates moving in who are liberal on social issues."

Although her life was filled with a law practice, community involvement, three children

and a physician husband with a busy career of his own, when she was urged to run for office, she took the chance.

Gridlock at the Legislature — especially failure to pass a bonding bill — was a key factor in her victory in 2004, she believes. "Many unemployed people were counting on jobs from the bonding bill. When that didn't happen they were upset."

That bill included two key projects in the Rochester area — a laboratory for the genomics partnership between the Mayo Clinic and the University of Minnesota, and a nurses training facility at the community college.

Education is also a key issue in her district with many highly educated people who don't want public schools to be second rate, she explains. Health care, of course, is also an important issue for her constituents.

Liebling gave up her criminal defense practice

DISTRICT 30A

2002 population: 36,591
Largest city: Rochester
County: Olmsted
Top concerns: Economy, health care, education

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in 2002 when she first ran for office. She is now associated with another law practice. She spends a lot of time now in St. Paul and it's hard for her to be away from her two younger children Hannah, 16, and Samuel, 11. The oldest child, David, is a college freshman.

But still, she said, "It feels good to be here, like it's the right thing to do. I always want to learn new things and face challenges. I know that's going to happen here. It already has."

Bridging the divide

Poppe seeks results in bonding and education

By BRETT MARTIN

Rep. Jeanne Poppe (DFL-Austin) didn't exactly follow in her father's footsteps. Sure, they both have a background in politics and civic involvement, but she is a DFLer and her father was a Republican.



Rep. Jeanne Poppe

"I am involved in politics because I had my dad as a role model," Poppe said. "Perhaps the one thing he taught me is to stand up for what I believe."

After losing a close House race two years ago to Jeff Anderson, Poppe reversed the results in the last election. She said her district, like the country, is divided over issues and she intends to heal the division.

"I want to bridge that divide," she said. "We need more communication and more listening."

Poppe sees herself as a good listener and problem solver, which she attributes to her background as an educator. She is a career counselor on leave from Riverland Community College in Albert Lea.

"To be a good counselor, you have to be a good listener," she said. "You have to help people see what they might be missing by helping them see all sides."

One of Poppe's priorities is making sure the bonding bill passes to provide relief to her district hit hard by a September 2004 flood where two people lost their lives. Some constituents need help relocating and preventing future flood damage. Poppe is also focused on making sure all children receive a quality education from pre-school through college.

"Kids have got to be given every advantage they can be given in education," she said. A mother of three, Poppe considers how each legislative decision will affect her family.

DISTRICT 27B

2002 population: 36,857
Largest city: Austin
Counties: Fillmore and Mower
Top concern: Substantial rural economic growth

"Kids have got to be given every advantage they can be given in education."

— Rep. Jeanne Poppe

"I think about how is it going to impact my mother who's living on Social Security and has medical needs. I also think about how it's going to impact my teenagers and future grandchildren," she said. "We have to think more long-term. We need more than a temporary fix; we need to solve problems."

Poppe serves on three House committees: Environment and Natural Resources, Local Government, and Rules and Legislative Administration.