

# Ascending the ladder

## Lillie moves from city to state government

By **MATT WETZEL**

After a decade on the city council, Rep. Leon Lillie (DFL-North St. Paul) saw an opportunity to take his experience to the state level.



**Rep. Leon Lillie**

"I wanted to make sure we kept a strong voice for the area," he said.

And his campaign for the House seat was a family affair. "My wife and the rest of my family got involved. It was

a fun thing to do that. Getting out there and being with them," he said.

A major issue in District 55A, which includes Maplewood and North St. Paul, is education. "It's important to the people in my area that higher education is affordable," Lillie said. "You don't want to see where the less affluent won't

have access to higher education."

Health care is also a concern. "I would try to make health care available to everyone. How we get there, obviously, that's the sticking point," he said.

Transportation is on the minds of his constituents, also. "The need (for new roads) is very great," he said.

But again, the key issue is funding. Lillie said that raising the gas tax one-half cent and then dedicating the proceeds to roads is an option.

"I'm comfortable with making the choices," he said. "I think there's support out there and I'm willing to ask."

If he could have sponsored the first bill of the session, it would have been the bonding bill. "That was important. Voters are disappointed with us for the work (the Legislature) did last session."

Lillie, who defeated former Rep. Scott Wasiluk in the primary, said he wants to work

## DISTRICT 55A

2002 population: 36,753  
Largest city: Maplewood  
County: Ramsey  
Top concerns: Education, health care, transportation and jobs

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with his colleagues on both sides of the aisle. "I'm trying to build friendships. I realize by working together, hopefully we can keep that perspective," he said.

Lillie is a union man, and he believes jobs are important. "People need decent jobs. I realize businesses need to be viable. Quality of life is kind of what I'm all about."

A member of the International Association of Machinists, Local 1833, Lillie works as a ramp agent for Northwest Airlines at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

# Governance with patience

## Peterson takes on new role to serve familiar constituency

By **LEE ANN SCHUTZ**

Bow ties.

Rep. Neil W. Peterson (R-Bloomington) wears them for a reason. "You remember me, don't you?"



**Rep. Neil W. Peterson**

It's not that he's trying to draw attention to himself; the ties are more of a personal statement. It's his way of saying the stereotypical life of a retiree is not for him — he's living life his way. And that is to continue a life of public service.

Representing a portion of Bloomington is a continuation of his long years of service to that constituency. He served three terms as the city's mayor, and four terms as a city councilor. During some of that time, he steered the city through the opening of the Mall of America.

Peterson had very little time to make his decision to run for the House. Six-term representative Alice Seagren was appointed commissioner of education by Gov. Tim Pawlenty on the last day candidates could file to run for the Legislature.

"My wife suggested I run, and so did an acquaintance. So I jumped in, and here I am."

Now that he's at the Capitol, he's exercising patience with the process. "I don't have an agenda. Good governance is important, and I think that means not opening your mouth first, but instead, observe what is going on and listen to your constituency and instincts."

Although his district covers the western portion of Bloomington, if, on the east side of the city, a casino becomes part of any Mall of America expansion, it would impact his constituents. He explained that the hospitality industry, with more than 8,000 hotel rooms along Interstate 494, has a huge impact on the

## DISTRICT 41B

2002 population: 36,523  
Largest city: Bloomington  
County: Hennepin  
Top concern: Transportation

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local economy.

His sense is that the people there do not want a casino, nor is he in favor of balancing the state budget on gambling revenue.

Peterson describes his district, which also includes a portion of Edina, as mature, second-ring suburbs with a population that is older and high income. He sees good connecting roads as one of the area's greatest concerns.