

New members . . .

# 'Political life' came unexpectedly for former White Bear mayor

The Legislature and its players will offer newly elected Rep. Harry Mares the perfect setting to apply all sorts of psychological theories.



Rep. Harry Mares

For years he has taught White Bear Lake High School students social psychology — the study of how the attitudes, motivations, and behavior of an individual influence, and are influenced by, groups.

"It'll be an interesting study," the first-term Independent-Republican from White Bear Lake said.

The 56-year-old football and gymnastics coach evolved into political life.

He was born and raised in Racine, Wis., one of seven children. "The first two boys were named Tom and Dick. My father named the boys. Then I came along and he had to name me Harry."

He began teaching in Rochester, Minn., then taught in California for a while. He returned to Minnesota to teach in White Bear Lake in 1966.

While his first wife was pregnant with their fourth child, it was discovered she had cancer. She died in 1975 and Mares later married a high school friend who was widowed and had three children of her own.

"All I can say is my wife is a saint," he said, explaining that at one time she was raising seven children under the age of nine.

The family was united by its size. Mares fondly remembers Sundays when he and his wife would line up the kids, cut their nails, and wash their hair. One of his children has cystic fibrosis, and it took a family effort to take care of her.

With the kids pretty much grown in 1985, Mares was looking for a change and an announcement in the White Bear Press caught his eye — the city was looking for volunteers to serve on policy committees.

That's where it all started and his political career has quickly snowballed.

In January 1986, he was appointed to the White Bear Lake Planning Commission. "I had no idea of political life," he said.

In November 1989, he was appointed to an uncompleted term on the White Bear Lake City Council. In March 1990, he won a full council term. In March 1991, he was elected mayor with 70 percent of the vote.

In November 1993, he was elected mayor again. "There were only seven votes against me and five of them were for Barney," he said.

"I was happy as mayor, but this opportunity presented itself," Mares said, referring to his House campaign. "I never intended to be on the council. I never intended to be mayor. I never intended [to be in] the Legislature."

"I don't know if anything prepares you for the Legislature." But, he added: "I'm glad for the experience I've had at the local government level."

Mares' legislative agenda will focus on his areas of expertise: education and local government.

"Education is a big item on my agenda. . . . We've asked the school to assume a lot of responsibility in the social issues. . . . The question has to be asked: 'What role do we want education to play?'"

If it is to be a social institution, then define its social roles and assign it a proper budget. If it is to be an educational institution, then define that and fund it properly."

If he gets his wish, he will sponsor and pass a bill in his first term to eliminate unfunded mandates imposed by state government on school districts. Those are programs and services state government requires school districts to offer but doesn't fund. He already has introduced a bill on the topic this session.

On state funding for local governments, Mares said he understands local governments are a target. Many, he said, are run efficiently, but some are not.

Local governments need to share resources, plan ahead, set goals, and save for the future. As mayor of White Bear Lake, he developed a strategic plan before drafting a budget, the priorities of which were outlined by 35 citizens and leaders in the community.

"My local government experience should be a big help as a legislator. 'I've been there,'" Mares said.

—K. Darcy Hanzlik

## Do you know?

It's true lawmakers sometimes need a break after some particularly hectic legislative sessions. Fifty-five years, however, is a little extreme.

That's what Thomas Smullen, a former lawmaker from Le Sueur County, took between his terms in the Legislature.

When Smullen began in the Minnesota House in 1875, the state was still a teenager — railroads had expanded rapidly, farms numbered 46,500, and lumber and flour mills were big employers.

Smullen left only to return about 55 years later, serving in the Senate during the 1931 and 1933 sessions, an era of the Great Depression. At the time there were multiple Minnesota bank failures, farm prices were in a slump, and 70 percent of Minnesota iron range workers were without jobs.

Smullen was born in New York City on April 14, 1852, and came to Le Sueur County in 1863, according to the *Minnesota Legislative Manual*. He was 22 when he began his legislative career and when he returned, 78.

It is unclear why Smullen left the Legislature after 1875, but he did continue his work in government. Over a period of 20 years, he was mayor of Le Sueur, registrar of deeds, and city assessor. He was a municipal judge for 12 years. He also was deputy bank examiner under Gov. John A. Johnson, and during World War I, a county food administrator and county director of the public safety commission.



Thomas Smullen

### District 55A

**Population:** 32,921  
**Distribution:** 98.44 percent urban; 1.56 percent rural  
**Counties:** Ramsey, Washington  
**Largest city:** White Bear Lake  
**Location:** northeastern Metro  
**Unemployment rate:** 3.26 percent  
**Residents living below poverty level:** 4.26 percent  
**1992 presidential election results:**  
 Bush/Quayle ..... 30.88 percent  
 Clinton/Gore ..... 43 percent  
 Perot/Stockdale ..... 25.12 percent  
 Other: ..... 1 percent