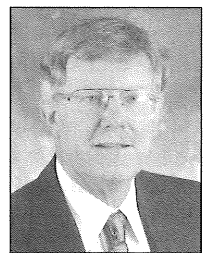


A man of many hats

Heidgerken brings experience as teacher, coach, businessman, and local official to the House of Representatives

By JEFF JONES

Rep. Bud Heidgerken (R-Freeport) has been called many things in his life — teacher, business owner, coach, board member, director, city councilman, husband, father, and grandfather — but do not call him a freshman.



Rep. Bud Heidgerken

“I demand the same respect as anybody else down here and I realize that some of the people have been here a long time,” said the first-term legislator. “I look upon them as being younger than me, a lot of them. I look upon me as bringing more experience to the table than what they have. They may have it at the state level, but they don’t have it at the local level like I do.”

Heidgerken said he’s paid his dues in 21 years as a high school teacher, 12 years as a business owner, and by serving on dozens of boards and commissions, including economic development councils, recreation boards, and the school boards and city councils in Freeport and Brooten.

And to top it off, Heidgerken still works 40 hours each weekend at the award-winning Charlie’s Cafe in Freeport. He takes care of the bookkeeping and scheduling for the restaurant’s 30 to 40 workers, many of whom have worked there more than 25 years. His wife, Ann, is in charge in the kitchen. “I take care of one end, she takes care of one end and it really works out very well. We’ve had a very successful business,” he said.

In addition to his two full-time jobs, he continues to run the largest fast-pitch softball league in the Midwest, which he has done for 40 years. He also spent 27 years as a wrestling coach, and until two years ago, he coached youth basketball.

Heidgerken ran for the House as a DFLer in 1988 and lost by 150 votes. He said the experience was disappointing, but very important.

“It taught me to be humble. It taught me to go out and pick myself up like I’d been teaching my kids to do when I was a wrestling coach,” he said.

Last year, Heidgerken switched party affiliation and the man who beat him in 1988, former Rep. Sylvester Uphas, served as honorary chair for his campaign.

“Deep down, the first time he ran as a teacher and a strong union man,” Uphas said. Since then Uphas said he thinks Heidgerken has fallen in line with the conservative fiscal views of the district. “He’s become more realistic now that he’s in business for his own ... to realize that people have to perform before they can get a raise,” Uphas said.

Heidgerken says the well being of his district depends on the success of its farmers, for whom he is a strong advocate.

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On behalf of dairy farmers, he is encouraging Minnesota schools to take steps to promote milk among students. “We’re seeing what happens to little kids. They’ve got their mouths full of rotten teeth because the only thing they drink is pop,” he said. “They don’t know what milk is.”

He has also been a vocal opponent of Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s proposal to significantly cut subsidies for ethanol producers, which he says would force three of the state’s ethanol plants to close, resulting in lower corn prices for farmers. He calls ethanol “the one positive thing that we have going on in our district.”

Heidgerken said he isn’t afraid to break with his party over issues he finds important. “You have to represent what you really feel is right

for your district, and my area is farmers, and they’re very, very important to me. And yet at the same time I’m a businessman and I can see that end of it. At the same time, I was an educator and I can see that end of it, too,” he said.

He says his experience as a teacher makes him wary of the governor’s plan to freeze the pay of public employees. “I have problems with telling people who have been working for years that their salaries are frozen,” he said. “I had that happen to me in the Nixon era. Nixon froze my salary. I’ve never forgotten that.”

Always curious, Heidgerken says his favorite part about being a legislator is sitting on committees. He says he tries to put himself in the shoes of whoever is testifying and identify with their point of view. “I love the knowledge that is thrown at me,” he said. “They’re giving me more and more literature to read at night. I’m usually here until midnight reading. And I try to get myself informed on as many issues as possible.”

With four busy committees — he sits on both agriculture and education policy and finance committees — he says getting all the information he wants is hard to do. Still, it’s

no surprise to hear him say, “I love it. I wouldn’t mind being on a fifth.”

DISTRICT 13A

2002 population: 36,758

Largest city: Sauk Centre

Counties: Kandiyohi, Pope, Stearns

Location: west-central Minnesota

Top concern: “If I could help my rural economy, it would be number one. ... If agriculture’s doing well, our rural economy is doing well. Then my little towns are going to do well, and everything else is going to do well. We’re all in it together.”

— Rep. Bud Heidgerken