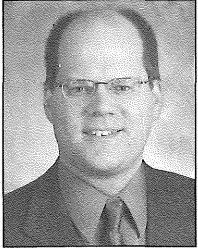


Keeping himself accessible

Gardner's blog helps him connect with constituents

By **LEE ANN SCHUTZ**

Besides being a new member of the House, Rep. Paul Gardner (DFL-Shoreview) claims new membership to the Minnesota chapter of the General Society of the War of 1812, a group of descendants from the historic war.



Rep. Paul Gardner

Gardner's avid interest in genealogy, and his 15-year search of his family's lineage, led to documentation that his great-great-grandfather played a significant role in the war.

But tracing his family roots is not the only area where he has a strong interest — just bring up the topic of recycling.

Gardner stepped down as executive director of the Recycling Association of Minnesota after his election. Between his family of four's

composting and recycling efforts, they don't generate enough garbage to fill a 30-gallon container weekly.

An avid recycler since his college days, he recognizes how the state can benefit economically from recycling efforts. "We actually need more recyclables. Countries, like China, are buying up scrap metal, aluminum and plastic. And this has driven up the price, making the business of recyclables attractive," he said.

Gardner earned his House seat by the slimmest margin of any member. His 55-vote lead triggered an automatic recount, where four of those votes went to his opponent.

Throughout the campaign, he focused on five issues: education, affordable health care, transportation, environment and rising property taxes.

"Transportation is very important to my constituents. I-694 is a bottleneck between 35E and 35W. That hasn't been on the

DISTRICT 53A

2002 population: 36,629

Largest city: Shoreview

Counties: Anoka and Ramsey

Top concerns: Transportation, education, health care, environment and property taxes

(construction) calendar because of funding issues. I think you will see a big suburban push for transportation funding," he said.

To make government more transparent and accessible to his constituents, Gardner has established his own weekly blog at www.paulgardner53a.blogspot.com. "It's not commentary, but it's a chance for people to see who is coming to the office. I really want constituents to speak up," he said.

Gardner also serves on the House Energy Finance and Policy and Environment and Natural Resources Finance divisions; House Environment and Natural Resources Committee; and is vice chairman of the Minnesota Heritage Finance Division.