

Pillar of the community

Dominguez looks improve Minneapolis' north side

By Nick Busse

For a guy who's lived his entire life in north Minneapolis, Rep. Augustine "Willie" Dominguez (DFL-Mpls) has gotten around.



Rep. Augustine "Willie" Dominguez

Dominguez, who fills the seat vacated by new U.S. Congressman Keith Ellison, has spent more than 25 years working with community-based organizations and nonprofit groups, helping them develop what he calls "core areas" such as financing

and fundraising.

Among the numerous affiliations on his resume: Centro Cultural Chicano, the Minneapolis Empowerment Zone program, the Civilian Police Review Authority and the Latino Advisory Committee to the Mayor and City Council.

"I've been involved in the community

practically all my life," said Dominguez, who can even be heard spinning Tex-Mex music on his own Saturday-morning radio show on the community-oriented KFAI, where he has also served on the board of directors.

Born and raised on the city's north side, Dominguez, the 18th child in a family of 19, said he watched his hometown take a turn for the worse.

"When I was growing up, we didn't have the issues that we have now. ... We didn't have the crime as high as it is now, and the educational system was good," he said.

Dominguez said that what was once a vibrant community marked by thriving businesses and street parades has now fallen into disrepair, plagued by gang violence and unemployment. As a state representative, he hopes to help breathe new life into it by rolling back cuts to local government aid and by fostering intervention/prevention programs, especially for youth.

"Those are good programs for youth to be involved with," Dominguez said, adding that

DISTRICT 58B

Population: 36,478
Largest city: Minneapolis
County: Hennepin
Top concerns: Crime, education, employment

some such programs have been "deleted" in recent years.

Dominguez said he also seeks to improve the local education system and increase opportunities for livable-wage employment.

"The opportunities that are there are pretty much washing away. The money-making mechanisms are not there anymore. That's what needs to take place in our community."

Despite all its problems, Dominguez takes great pride in his district (which also includes parts of downtown Minneapolis), and is optimistic about its future.

"North side is beautiful, believe me," he said. "There are many good things going on, but it's like a seed. You need to grow it."