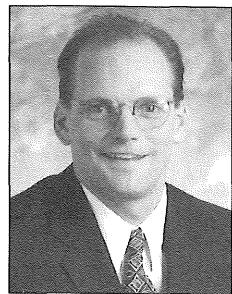


# Giving it a try

Newest representative looks to bring common sense, hard-working approach to St. Paul

By MIKE COOK

It was happenstance that started Rep. Greg Blaine (R-Little Falls) on his road to the Minnesota House of Representatives.



Rep. Greg Blaine

The republican was elected Nov. 6 to replace Rep. Steve Wenzel (DFL-Little Falls) as the representative for District 12B.

Blaine and his wife, Michelle, were in a Duluth restaurant this summer when they saw Wenzel as they prepared to leave. Since Blaine's father, Jerry, knew Wenzel from past lobbying efforts at the Capitol, the Blaines stopped to say hello.

"Steve insisted we sit down," Greg Blaine said. "I had been reading that he was being considered for an appointment (to a position with the U.S. Department of Agriculture)." They talked about the Legislature and campaigning.

During their conversation, Blaine said Wenzel encouraged him to run because he fit the profile of the district. "At first I laughed about it. He said 'You're the perfect person. This is a farm district and the person that fills this seat should have a farm background.'"

The conversation lasted for about 90 minutes inside the restaurant and about another hour outside. "He kept saying that he wanted me to think about it," Blaine said, noting he was getting more excited the more they talked.

After returning home Blaine continued to discuss the possibility with his family and workers at his dairy farm. He decided to enter the race on Aug. 10 — just 11 days before the endorsing convention and less than three weeks after his Duluth meeting with Wenzel.

Though Wenzel did not officially endorse either

candidate, he said that Blaine is "a very worthy successor."

Blaine has always had an interest in politics. He said he's even thought about running for the Legislature before. He recalls talking to his father, who has served on a township board "for over 30 years" many times about politics, but the younger Blaine was always more interested in the state level.

"I never thought I'd have the opportunity to serve," he said, referring to Wenzel's 29 years representing the district. "It's something I thought I had the capability to be effective at."

Blaine, 40, has no experience in a publicly elected position, such as school board or city council. However, he has been involved in leadership at his church and with the Jaycees.

"In talking with constituents they like that I am not tied bureaucratically and have no hidden agenda," he said. "They also like that I'm a common sense, hard-working person — a prime example of the people of District 12B."

He may not have a specific agenda, but there are issues Blaine will fight for, most notably agriculture. He expects to replace Wenzel on both the House Agriculture Policy and finance committees.

Both seem an ideal fit for Blaine, who owns Bartchelle Dairy in Little Falls. He has run the

farm full-time since 1996, after 15 years as a press foreman for a printing company. The farm now has about 180 head of cattle, including 70 milking cows, which Blaine tends to in the morning. They also farm about 400 acres of corn and alfalfa.

In addition to agriculture, Blaine said two key issues are education and pro-life measures, such as the women's right to know bill and stopping partial-birth abortions, which he says are a key concern in his district.

"I believe this district is one of the strongest pro-life areas of Minnesota," he said.

Education was one of the top issues mentioned by residents during the campaign. "My big point is to try and restore some equitable funding to rural areas," he said.

Blaine knows that other issues the Legislature may deal with in 2002 are a potential budget shortfall and publicly funding a new stadium for the Minnesota Twins, which he would have a hard time supporting until baseball "gets its house in order."

"I'll have ears like a cornfield to find out what people think," he said of potential budget discussions. "I'll just try to give the best product to people at the least cost. Belt-tightening is something nobody likes but it will force people to become better managers. It's a good accountability check."

Blaine is well-aware that constituents will be watching his actions closely. "People of my district will keep me in line. They expect accountability. I feel my voice is a gift from God and I will use it for the betterment of the people of this district."



PHOTO BY ANDREW VON BANK

With wife Michelle by his side, Rep. Greg Blaine is sworn into office Nov. 15 by House Speaker Steve Sviggum during a ceremony in the House chamber. The republican from Little Falls replaces former Rep. Steve Wenzel, who accepted a position with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in August.

## DISTRICT 12B

### District 12B

**1998 Population (estimate):** 34,912

**Largest cities:** Little Falls, Baxter

**Counties:** Cass, Crow Wing, and Morrison

**Location:** north central Minnesota

**Top concern:** "Having lived in Little Falls all my life, I understand what residents expect from our government. We expect fair funding for our schools and affordable health care for our seniors. We also expect the Legislature to stimulate economic growth in our farming community and to use our tax dollars wisely."

— Rep. Greg Blaine