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NEWSPAPER OF THE TWIN CITIES

Chenoweth identified as man slain on beach

Police investigation focuses on hate crimes against gays

By Mark Brunswick
Staff Writer

John Chenoweth, former state senator and head of the Minneapolis city pension fund, was identified on Monday as the man killed during a weekend shooting at a beach frequented by gays.

Police said the shooting, which left another man seriously wounded, was related to the shooting death two weeks ago of Joel Larson, another gay man, in Loring Park.

Police would not describe the possible connection but said they are investigating the deaths as bias crimes against gays. "Certainly that's the natural assumption," said police chief John Laux. "Whether this is the motive or there are other motives, I'm looking at this as a hate, bias crime."

The Hennepin County medical examiner identified Chenoweth, 48, as the shooting victim yesterday afternoon after examining dental records.

Although investigators say they are

not ruling out any possibilities in the Chenoweth shooting, Lt. Brad Johnson, head of the department's homicide unit, said police are focusing more on Chenoweth's gay lifestyle than his previous business dealings as a possible motive.

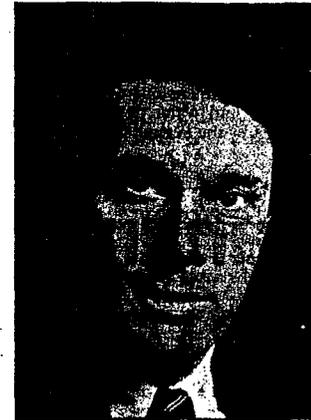
Chenoweth, a well-connected former DFL state legislator, resigned as head of the city's pension fund in May last year. In the months that followed, his handling of personal and fund investments was questioned and he was named in lawsuits.

"Gay-bashing is only one possibility, several others are being investigated," Johnson said.

The connection in the deaths of Chenoweth and Larson fueled concerns from members of the gay community that police were not doing enough to solve the slayings. Gay activists attended an afternoon news conference and peppered Laux with questions. They also called for a protest outside City Hall in which they denounced inactivity in the cases and also called for putting openly gay police officers on the force.

"Sometimes maybe a sense of arrogance overclouded what he did, but he fought for what he believed in. How people perceived that varied."

Chenoweth left the Senate in 1979 to become director of MERF. Word of his gay lifestyle followed him from the Legislature to City Hall. Chenoweth chose not to discuss it,



John Chenoweth

Deputy Police Chief David Dobrotka and several other city officials met with the activists for an hour to try to defuse tensions over what gays characterize as the department's pattern of hostility or indifference toward them.

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Chenoweth often threatened to quit and said he could land a much higher-paying job in the private sector. He earned more than \$80,000 in his last year at MERF.

But he had had no known employment since he left MERF, and he complained that his job prospects were harmed by the charges that he

Chenoweth's public career

These are some of the highlights and controversies that marked John Chenoweth's public career:

1968: Elected to Minnesota House of Representatives from the East Side of St. Paul.

1970: Elected to Minnesota Senate, where he focused on public employee issues, including pensions.

1979: Resigned from Senate to take position as executive director of the Minneapolis Employees Retirement Fund (MERF).

1987: Relationship with MERF board of directors strained after Chenoweth bought a Jaguar automobile with MERF funds for business use.

1990: Resigned from MERF to enter private sector; departure followed by criticism of his investment strategy and losses in the junk bond market and other speculative investments.

unwisely invested the fund's money. Fruth, his attorney, said Chenoweth had been working on his defense for the lawsuits and was optimistic after a court hearing in which Fruth moved to have them dismissed.

Fruth and Hacking, MERF's executive director, said it is unclear what will happen to the three suits in which Chenoweth is a defendant.

"It's a hell of an end to somebody's life," said Lind. "But I'm sure the story isn't over, because of all the litigation that's going on."

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