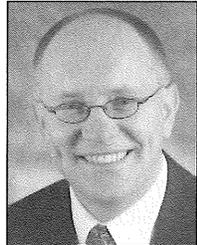


Staying connected

Strachan's family, public service connections aid in new role as legislator for geographically large, diverse district

By MICHELLE KIBIGER

Rep. Steve Strachan (R-Farmington) said he planned to run for the Legislature if the new districts created an open seat that included Farmington when they were announced in March 2002. But he never imagined it would include his home, his workplace, and his family's farm and his boyhood stomping grounds.



Rep. Steve Strachan

"I couldn't have created a legislative district that better suits me," said Strachan, who is a sergeant with the Lakeville police department. His family's farm is also in his district, near Northfield, and he joked that many family members on his mother's side live in the district, too.

"That's sort of an automatic starting point for a campaign," he said, with a laugh. "It's sort of a running joke on my mom's side that at family reunions we have about 500 people."

Like many other new House members, the character of the newly drawn district prompted Strachan to run for office. But he said that the geographic size of the district and its diverse character will challenge him to stay connected and keep abreast of key issues throughout the district.

Strachan said he has already learned how important it is to place constituent concerns first.

"If you have a constituent who bothered to show up here at the office, you leave whatever you're in and go talk to them," Strachan said of advice many other legislators have given him since his election. "That's the way government should work. One constituent is more important than spending time with other state reps."

Strachan first served in public office as a member of the Farmington Planning Commission in the early 1990s. Later, he served on the Farmington City Council from 1996 until

his election to the House in 2002.

He said he first got involved in local government because he wanted to contribute constructively to make government effective.

Rather than complaining about government, "go do something about it if you don't like it," he said.

During the campaign, Strachan said, he appreciated being able to learn so much about the specific concerns of the people in his district, which includes both great expanses of rural farming communities and fast-developing communities on the fringe of the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

The evidence is clear at people's homes.

"It really sort of brings it home to you,"

"That's the way government should work. One constituent is more important than spending time with other state reps."

— Rep. Steve Strachan

Strachan said of knocking on doors in the district during the campaign. "To me, it's not so much to get votes, as it is to educate myself on not just what people are saying to me. ... But you go around the neighborhoods and you can see what's important to people."

Strachan is looking forward to dealing with budget and local government issues, as well as criminal justice issues. His background in all three areas make him comfortable with those topics, he said, and he hopes to employ the strategies that he has found effective in his own experiences, such as listening to all sides of an issue before making judgments.

Lakeville Police Chief Dave Martens said that one of Strachan's strengths is his ability to listen to the opinions on an issue and make a well-reasoned decision.

"He's become good at two things: communicating and seeking out both sides of the issue and seeking out alternative responses," Martens said. "You just kind of see both

viewpoints, and sometimes you see that the traditional response just doesn't work and you need to think of something different."

Strachan currently has an administrative assignment with the police department, including budgeting, training, and similar tasks. As an executive officer, Martens called Strachan his "right-hand man."

Though the legislative session keeps Strachan busy, he will continue in his day job part-time — when he can during evening and weekend hours.

He joked about his wife, Sue's, response to his plan to run for the Legislature. "My wife often says, 'You get what you deserve,'" he said with a laugh. And while he knows it may not always be easy, Strachan said he's ready to work with the diverse membership of the House to make good policy decisions.

"Even though some of those council members were people that didn't always agree with me, their attitude was, 'Steve, you're always the consensus builder, you're always reasonable, you're always respectful,'" Strachan said.

"I always learned that if you don't worry too much about who gets the credit, and you respect other people and listen to them, you can get a long way."

DISTRICT 36B

2002 population: 36,713

Largest city: Lakeville

Counties: Dakota, Goodhue

Location: southeastern Twin Cities metropolitan area

Top concern: "If you're going to reduce state funding, and they seem to expect that, at least reduce some of those unfunded mandates. I'm going to try to take away some of those things. In the real world, all we're doing is passing those mandates down to the local level."

— Rep. Steve Strachan

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