

Obituaries

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A.H. Peterson, shaper of health care, dies

By **Trudi Hahn**
Star Tribune Staff Writer

A. Harold Peterson, who helped bring better hospital services to rural Minnesota, died Sunday of a brain hemorrhage in Wyoming, Minn. He was 84.

Peterson, a Chisago City Democrat who served one term in the Minnesota House, was already a political activist in the sixth grade, said his wife, Grace.

"He stumped for Floyd B. Olson [gubernatorial candidate in the 1930s] and was asked to leave school and bring his parents back with him the next day," she said.



A. Harold Peterson improved the state's system of hospitals.

He served in the Navy during World War II, and was executive officer of the submarine Tuna when it was among a large fleet of ships monitoring the 1946 atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific.

After graduating in 1950 from William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul, he became a member of the law firm of Hvass, Weisman & King.

In 1953 Peterson started organizing community leaders from Chisago City and Lindstrom to promote hospital districts, a concept that started in Minnesota, said Daniel Anderson, president of Fairview Lakes Regional Health Care.

At the time, only cities and counties were allowed to operate public hospitals, and finances were often insuffi-

cient to run a hospital in a rural area. Peterson was instrumental in the 1955 passage of legislation establishing hospital districts, which allowed multiple communities to operate a hospital together, Anderson said.

Peterson became the first chairman for Chisago Lakes Hospital District Board in 1955. Chisago Lakes Hospital opened in 1957, and he continued as district-board chairman until his death.

In 1986, he helped create Chisago Health Services, one of the first mergers of a publicly owned hospital with a private physicians' practice, Anderson said. It became part of Fairview Lakes in 1994, and when Fairview Lakes Regional Medical Center in Wyoming opened in 1998, Peterson was elected chairman of the Fairview Lakes Regional Board.

Peterson was elected to the Minnesota House in 1960 from the 56th District. District boundaries were redrawn during his two-year term, and he lost the 1962 election, his wife said.

In the early 1960s he became general counsel for a rural telephone association, lobbying the U.S. Congress for low-interest loans to extend modern telephone service beyond urban areas. He retired from that post in 1984.

In addition to his wife, survivors include sons John of Seattle and Kim of Del Mar, Calif.; daughter Martha Bevan of Vail, Colo.; seven grandchildren, and a brother, Donald, of Big Lake, Minn.

Services will be held at 11 a.m. today at Chisago Lakes Lutheran Church in Center City, Minn.

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