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Ex-mayor P. Kenneth Peterson killed in car crash

By Mary Jane Smetanka
Staff Writer **STM 1-1-94**

P. Kenneth Peterson, a former state representative and mayor of Minneapolis from 1957 to 1961, died Friday after the car he was riding in was struck by another vehicle.

Peterson, 78, was affectionately known as "P.K." He was a lifelong resident of Minneapolis who built a career in law and politics that extended from his hometown to the United Nations.

"He tried to help everyone," said his wife, Jean Ann. "There never was a kinder, gentler man. He never said a cross word."

Peterson was a passenger in a car that was being driven by his wife yesterday morning when it was struck at the intersection of 42nd St. and Portland Av. S., according to his wife. The accident occurred about 10:50 a.m., and Peterson died shortly thereafter.

Jean Ann Peterson and two passengers in her car were taken to the hospital, where two of them were treated for sprains and broken bones and released.

Minneapolis police said one person was taken into custody in connection with the accident.

Peterson graduated from the University of Minnesota with majors in history and speech, and worked as an insurance representative before serving in Air Combat Intelligence for the U.S. Navy in World War II.

It was after the war that he began his political career and met his wife. Jean Ann Peterson was working as a secretary to Gov. Luther Youngdahl when she met her future husband, who represented Minneapolis in the Legislature from 1947 to 1955.

While in the Legislature, Peterson earned a law degree from what is now the William Mitchell College of Law. He was chairman of the state Republican party from 1950 to 1953.

In 1957, he ran for mayor of Minneapolis and won, serving two terms before being defeated by Art Naftalin in 1961.

Peterson continued on page 5B



P. Kenneth Peterson, shown in this 1979 photo, was the mayor of Minneapolis from 1957 to 1961.

Peterson/ His political career began after the war

Continued from page 1B

As mayor, Peterson pursued policies that helped clear slum areas for redevelopment, his wife said. He campaigned on development of a new civic center and freeways, and high standards in the public schools. Peterson refused to make his phone number private, his wife said, because he wanted people to be able to call him whenever they wanted.

He unsuccessfully sought a U.S. Senate seat in 1960.

After his mayoral defeat, Peterson entered business and pursued a private law practice. From 1966 to 1972, he was chairman of the Minnesota Public Service Commission. For two years after that he was on the Minnesota Corrections Authority. He had also served on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

From 1974 to 1985, he was an administrative law judge in Minneapolis, afterward retiring to his home near the Mississippi River.

He and his wife enjoyed golf and travel. He was especially interested in Sweden and his Swedish heritage, and spoke the language, his wife said. They had been there this past summer.

Peterson also took an interest in international affairs. He was a member of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1962, and in the 1950s served as a presidential appointee on the Near East Refugee Commission.

Besides his wife, survivors include his daughters, Jane Ann Peterson, of London, England; Paula K. Peterson, of Phoenix, Ariz.; and Carol Jean Bennett, of Edina, and sisters Evelyn Johnson and Ruth O. Peterson, both of Minneapolis.

Services are pending.