

Continuing on her path

Brynaert moves from school board to statehouse

By SONJA HEGMAN

The day Rep. Kathy Brynaert (DFL-Mankato) walked her daughter to a school playground in Mankato is the day she started her path of public service.



Rep. Kathy Brynaert

Noticing a large number of children and just one supervisor, Brynaert decided she'd organize a playground program and include nine games the children could play. From there, Brynaert served on the Mankato School Board for 11 years and helped start several youth programs, including a health organization aimed at preventing teen pregnancy.

Her decision to run for state representative came after a lot of nudging from family, friends and Rep. John Dorn, who represented the area for 20 years before choosing not

to seek re-election. Instead, he served as Brynaert's campaign co-chair.

She worried about campaigning because it was a bit too "egocentric" for her. She had served only in nonpartisan roles and never had to pose for pictures or be in the limelight.

"I believe in democracy," she said. "I'm always talking to students and saying they need to step up to the plate. I can't talk to young people about courage and not have courage myself."

Originally from Detroit, Brynaert calls herself a "city kid" who was not ready for Mankato. She and her husband, Tony Filipovitch, arrived there from Tulsa, Okla. in 1978 when Filipovitch, a Chicago native, was offered a job teaching in the Urban Studies program at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

"Our first day there we walked around the downtown, twice," she said. "We looked at each other and said, 'In two years we're outta here.'"

DISTRICT 23B

2002 population: 36,492

Largest city: Mankato

Counties: Blue Earth, Nicollet

Top concern: Education funding

Though the job of representative is new for her, Brynaert said the most difficult part of the job will be living alone because she is renting an apartment for the session and her husband will not be joining her here.

"I've never lived alone in my life," she said, nonchalantly mentioning she was a nun in a convent for a couple of years in her early 20s.

After attending classes at the College of St. Teresa, in Winona, for a year, Brynaert decided to join the Franciscan convent in Rochester affiliated with the college as a way to come to terms with issues she was facing in her life. Brynaert left the convent because she "matured through her issues" and returned to the college where she received her bachelor's degree in philosophy.