

From tragedy to high hopes

Hayden hopes to effect big change

By KRIS BERGGREN

Although a tragedy brought Rep. Jeff Hayden (DFL-Mpls) back to his hometown in 1995 from California, it set him on the



Rep. Jeff Hayden

path toward the House seat where he hopes to make everyday life a little better for the low- and moderate-income South Minneapolis area bisected by Interstate 35W.

Hayden's childhood friend was killed in 1995, when a spike in Minneapolis murders led to the dubious moniker "Murderapolis." Hayden returned to attend the young man's funeral. Having recently been laid off, he remained in the city where he had many family ties and began to volunteer with a local park program called "Phat Summer,"

targeted to teenagers seeking alternatives to crime and gangs. Hayden ended up running the program, serving on the park's board, and taking a succession of community and government jobs, including Hennepin County financial worker, aide to Minneapolis City Councilman Gary Schiff, and eventually to a run for the city's eighth ward seat. He lost the primary by just 141 votes.

"I said I would never run for office again," he recalled. Instead, he returned to the nonprofit sphere, most recently working with Hearth Connection, a partner in the statewide initiative Heading Home Minnesota which intends to end homelessness in the state.

Yet Hayden was drawn back into politics by supporters who suggested he run for the House seat vacated by former Rep. Neva Walker (DFL-Mpls).

"What compelled me was my combination of experiences, having community-based

DISTRICT 61B

Population: (2007 est.) 37,241

Largest City: Minneapolis

County: Hennepin

Top Concerns: Affordable housing and health care, public transportation

work, neighborhood work, city council experience," which he felt would allow him "to not only win, but effect change here," he said.

Hayden has high hopes he'll be able to make laws addressing his district's concerns, which include public transportation and affordable housing and health care. Hayden, who serves on three health-related committees or divisions, has already signed onto HF135, sponsored by Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield), which would provide universal single-payer health care to all Minnesotans.

Hayden and his wife, Terri, have two children, Tomas, 12, and Sophia, 7. Hayden calls them, "The light of my life."