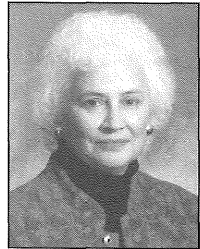


Third time's a charm

Evans brings concern to safe, strong schools back to Legislature for her third term representing District 52B

By MARY KAY WATSON

From her first job out of college as arts coordinator for the Hudson, Wis., school system, Geri Evans (DFL-New Brighton) has been passionately involved in education issues.



Rep. Geri Evans whole life.”

“I really love education,” said Evans, who received her bachelor’s degree in arts education from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn. “My training as an educator informs my

Her life is also informed by the principle of voluntarism, for which her father was her role model. She got her first taste of volunteering in 1970 when she formed a tenant’s rights group to fight an illegal rent increase.

“It was the beginning of my belief that you should do what you can to improve things in your community and to educate people about their rights,” she said.

Not surprisingly, education and voluntarism have come together often in Evans’ life: as the chair for the St. Anthony-New Brighton School Board, as president of the League of Women Voters of New Brighton, and as a board member for the Minnesota Alliance for Arts in Education, among others.

“It was in the League of Women Voters where I got my education in issues,” she said. “It was like a graduate course.”

She achieved these notable positions through years of work behind the scenes on issues such as parks, child safety, and day care for mentally handicapped adults.

Her hard work has not gone unnoticed. Among the awards Evans has received are: the Minnesota Human Rights Award, the Advocate for Heart Award from the American Heart Association, the Channel 11 Volunteer Recognition Award for Community Service, the state

Board of Government Innovation and Cooperation Service Reward, and the state Board of Education Leadership in Vocational Equity Award.

Now in her third non-consecutive term as a legislator from District 52B (she also won a seat in 1992 and 1996), Evans, the mother of two grown sons and a 37-year resident of New Brighton, plans to continue her support of the issues she has championed.

“I hope we’re beyond the rhetoric of ‘We just can’t keep pouring money down the rat hole of education,’” Evans said. “Education is an investment.”

She is especially concerned about healthy environments in schools. “I really care about safe schools,” she said.

Legislators should revisit the laws they’ve passed to see what has resulted from them, she said. “If you care about something, you ought to be sure it’s still workable.”

This session Evans plans to return to the issue of indoor air quality she advocated in her second term, when children and teachers in an elementary school in her district were getting very sick from what was found to be mold in the ventilating system.

With a rueful smile, she acknowledged that she’d also like to revisit another issue — this one from her first term. It’s the one that made her famous, gender equity in restrooms, called the “potty parity” bill by her detractors. Men may have scoffed, but her successful effort to require public buildings of certain capacities to have equivalent restroom facilities for women and men made some women cheer.

In addition to education and air quality issues, Evans said she plans to focus on health care costs — especially prescription drugs —

and property taxes, which she hears about frequently from her constituents.

She said she gets calls from people who say, “What are we going to do? We’re being taxed out of our home.”

The importance of lowering property taxes is one area where she agrees with the governor. On others she’s not as enthusiastic.

“I have deep concerns about education being 100 percent state funded,” she said.

Evans said she would prefer to see a balanced approach used in dealing with the budget surplus — one that would include some kind of rebate but that would also go toward meeting the needs she sees in education, health care, and transportation.

Regarding a rebate, Evans said, “I don’t hear much ‘Give me back all my money’ from my constituents. I hear a lot of ‘Couldn’t we pool this money and accomplish something big?’”

Evans said her committee assignments — Capital Investment, Government Operations and Veterans Affairs Policy, and State Govern-

ment Finance — were not the ones she had hoped for, but she is enthusiastic about them.

Evans said she moved from volun-

teering to politics when she “realized there’s a larger picture here.” She has fond memories of the people she worked with as a volunteer and shows an undiminished enthusiasm for making a difference as a lawmaker.

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—Rep. Geri Evans

DISTRICT 52B

1998 population (estimate): 33,707

Largest city: New Brighton

County: Ramsey

Location: northern St. Paul suburbs

Top concern: “Indoor air quality is one of my top priorities, particularly when it comes to schools. I am very concerned about safe facilities.”

—Rep. Geri Evans