Crime tops Luther's agenda in inner-ring suburb

Legislative membership is sometimes a family affair.

Rep. Jeff Bertram's (DFL-Paynesville) brother, Joe, serves in the state Senate. Rep. Jerry Dempsey (IR-Hastings) follows in the footsteps of his brother, Terry; and Rep. Kathleen Blatz (IR-Bloomington) is the daughter of former Sen. Jerome Blatz, and the wife of Tom Berkelman, a former House member.

Rep. Darlene Luther But never has a married couple simultaneously served in the Legislature. Rep. Darlene Luther (DFL-Brooklyn Park), and her husband, Bill, an assistant majority leader in the Senate, have became the first to do so.

The historic footnote makes Luther unique, but she makes it clear she's aiming to make her own distinct mark.

"I've been married to a politician for 19 years, so even though I've been involved in politics, I haven't had the opportunity to create any legislation that would benefit the citizens of Brooklyn Park or meet their needs," she said.

Brooklyn Park is a blue-collar suburb of mostly middle- and lower-income residents, she said. About half the residents live in apartments — more than in any other suburb.

"Even though it's an inner-ring suburb, we've got major big-city problems," she said.

A growing crime problem tops the list of her constituents' concerns, along with health care, welfare reform, education funding, and jobs.

"I want to do a lot in the area of crime," said Luther. "I'm authoring the attorney general's anti-stalking bill." In addition, she is also sponsoring a bill that would make it easier for juveniles to be tried as adults in some cases.

Luther actually ran for her seat twice within a year. The seat opened in 1991 after 11-year veteran Rep. Linda Scheid resigned. Luther lost the special election, but won last November's general election. The longer general election season allowed for a more effective campaign, she said.

A Cloquet native, Luther worked 18 years as a flight attendant for Northwest Airlines. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of St. Thomas, and worked a three-year stint as volunteer commissioner of fund-raising for the 1991 International Special Olympics held in Minnesota.

So far, the logistics of having two legislators in the family while raising two kids has been, well, stimulating.

"It's great. I haven't had any problems at all. Bill gets the kids off for school in the morning, and I'm there in the evening with them," she said, even though that means turning down most of the invitations she gets for evening events related to her new job.

"It's almost overwhelming. I knew it was going to be a commitment, and a big responsibility, and a lot of hard work and late hours," she added. "But I didn't think it was going to be this fun."
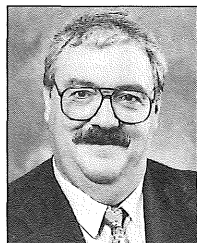
—Jim Anderson

District 47A

Population: 31,985
Distribution: 100 percent of residents live in urban areas
County: Hennepin
Largest city: Brooklyn Park (portion)
Location: northwest Metro
1992 presidential election results:
Clinton/Gore: 44.8 percent
Bush/Quayle: 29 percent
Perot/Stockdale: 25.4 percent
Other: 0.8 percent

Delmont keeps an open mind to aid constitutents

After more than two decades in the political chorus, Rep. Mike Delmont (DFL-Lexington) is finally taking a leading role.

Delmont decided to run for office himself after helping in numerous state campaigns. While this is his first term, his past work with both lawmakers and the Legislature (as communications coordinator for the Minnesota State Patrol) has

Rep. Mike Delmont put him at ease in his new job.

"Mostly in trenches," is how he describes his long-standing political activism. "I never did aspire to any district offices or central committees. I just felt I could do more working for candidates.

"And I was more comfortable doing that. I love going door-to-door, and I love meeting people and talking to people."

Redistricting presented an opportunity that the former Lexington City Council and Centennial School Board member couldn't pass by. Besides creating an open seat, the district was dramatically altered.

"What had grown into kind of a large district that encompassed part of Ramsey County and Anoka County shrunk back to just Blaine and Lexington," he said. (Lexington, incidentally, is named twice in Minnesota — there's also a smaller one in Le Sueur County).

Delmont said his district runs the whole income gamut from highly affluent to very poor. At each point on the spectrum, however, the top concern is high property taxes, followed closely by jobs.

"A lot of senior citizens are afraid of losing their homes. A lot of people who have saved for years to buy homes that were a bit more expensive than the norm are afraid of losing their homes," he said. "It was across-the-board anxiety."

While keeping those concerns in mind, Delmont isn't coming to his initial term with a set agenda.

"I like to consider myself a generalist," he said. "I'm not zeroed in on any specific issues. I like to do as much as I can for as many people as I can. That's why I'm here."

Like other first-termers, Delmont said his fellow newcomers will make their presence felt.

"They're a little bit older, they have experience in civic affairs, some of them are very well educated," he said. "I think they're very bright, and they'll add a lot."

As one of 51 suburban legislators, Delmont said he is more interested in finding common ground with colleagues from rural and urban areas than in creating a separate voting bloc.

"Part of our goal here is to get people to understand what's happening in the suburbs and how we have so much in common between the inner city and the suburbs, and the suburbs and rural Minnesota," he said. "There really is a lot of commonality, and the only way we can find out about each other is to keep the lines of communication open."

—Jim Anderson

District 51A

Population: 33,075
Distribution: 99 percent of residents live in urban areas, 1 percent rural.
County: Anoka
Largest city: Blaine (portion)
Location: north Metro
1992 presidential election results:
Clinton/Gore: 44.1 percent
Bush/Quayle: 28.3 percent
Perot/Stockdale: 26.9 percent
Other: 0.7 percent