

The following was written by Edward Verlich and published in The Zajednicar.

Much has been written in newspapers, magazines and journals about the late Minnesota Gov. Rudy Perpich who died at his home in Minnetonka, a suburb of St. Paul, MN, on Sept. 21 of colon cancer at the age of 67.

Rudy Perpich was a 40-year member of Velebit Lodge 240 (Croatian Fraternal Union of America) in Hibbing, MN where his parents, Anton and Mary Perpich, are golden members of the CFU and where family members are enrolled.

Proud of his Croatian heritage, Governor Perpich frequently attended CFU and Croatian affairs and visited the CFU Home Office on his trips to and through Pittsburgh.

On his last visit to the Home Office in 1991 enroute to Croatia, he talked about his dream of influencing and increasing trade between Croatia and the United States, especially Minnesota.

Few people knew that the former governor had been suffering from colon cancer since 1992, keeping it a family secret. His brothers, George of Shoreview, Tony of Pine City and Joe of New York City, said he didn't want anyone worrying about him. Friends recalled that while they were hospitalized, many with cancer, Rudy would call to wish them well, never mentioning his medical problems.

At the 1983 CFU national bowling tourney in St. Paul, then Governor Perpich and his cousin, CFU Sports Director Rudy Perpich, rolled the first balls in the tourney while the TV cameras caught the action.

We received newspaper and magazine clippings from several members, and the following remarks were excerpted from these articles:

While the public knows a lot about Perpich the politician, lawmaker, educator and businessman, it has known less about Perpich the historian.

Edward Nelson, director of the Iron Range Research Center, said, "He had a real strong sense that we need to know where we've been to know where we're going."

Thousands of items stacked in boxes donated by Governor Perpich are stored in the basement of the state-subsidized history center which is part of Ironworld.

One woman recalled, "When he came into office, he had an open house for all the people, and I went down with my kids, the first time we had ever been in the capitol and the governor's office."

He served as governor 1976-78 and 1982-1990, the longest-tenured governor in state history.

Boris Miksic, a Croatian-born Twin Cities businessman just named Croatia's counsel general to the United States, said Perpich returned to his Croatian homeland in 1991 after losing a re-election bid, living through the first 18 months of the bloody war of aggression.

"He made the decision to go back, and stayed through the worst years of the war," said Miksic, the chief executive of Crotec Corp., a chemicals maker in White Bear Twp., MN.

Miksic said that Perpich's dedication to the fledgling nation will never be forgotten by the Croatian people.

"The country was brand new and he worked as a consultant to the president because the nation needed recognition and needed help," Miksic said. "Everyone knew of him and the people of Croatia respected him immensely for that."

In Minnesota, Perpich tried to help newly arrived Croatians who were injured in the war, calling doctors and directing them to hospitals, Miksic said.

The Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis was filled with 2,000 mourners attending the Mass of Christian Burial.

South Dakota Gov. Bill Janklow, who delivered the eulogy, said, "Rudy never grew too old to walk hand in hand with his wife in public."

Following his graduation from Marquette University in 1954, he married Delores (Lola) Simic of Keewatin.

His daughter, Mary Sue Perpich Bifulk, in her eulogy said, "If I were to wish something good for all of you, it would be that at some time in your life, you could be blessed with a husband, a friend or a father like my dad, Rudy Perpich. He was as pure as a person can be."

Columnist Nick Coleman wrote "He was Minnesota's cheerleader. He dragged the state into the global economy, came up with ideas faster than McGyver on speed and had that rarest commodity among the political class: a vision... It will take historians and the biographers years to sort him out, but Rudy Perpich earned the right to be remembered as a great."

Former State Sen. Ron Duklich, also a Hibbing native, told, "My memories of him start when I was 5...He was my dentist. I remember people paying him in potatoes and chickens."

Dan Loritz, former Legislative liason, stated, "Whatever he did or talked about, it was always about people, education for people, jobs for people."

Former Gov. Wendell Anderson thinks Perpich was underrated by a lot of people. "The fact that he was a little different from the crowd led some people to think he wasn't very smart. He was very intelligent...a delight to be around."

U.S. Rep. James Obestar, D-Minn., declared, "He was always working the angle that would somehow mean jobs and economic development. Always."

Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., said, "He had a fierce committment to education. He had a lot ideas that people put down, but he didn't give up. But what I remember him for more than anything was his methodology. The Rudy Perpich methodology was to go to the cafes and have coffee and pie and interact with people. He had great people skills."

A headline in the Star Tribune in Minneapolis blared, "Perpich was a package deal- A vote for Rudy meant you'd get the rest of the family."

Doug Grow, Star Tribune staff writer, wrote: "Minnesotans will remember Rudy Perpich for all sorts of things. But remarkable as the political legacy is, it was the relationship with the family: his wife, Lola, son Nick and daughter Mary Sue that made Perpich unique from all the others."

The Daily Tribune editorialized, "Perpich had vision and a strong sense of values that flavored his public life. And he was armed with the mind-set that things could be better...As governor, he worked with an energy never before or since seen in Minnesota. He tried to tilt some windmills, but he also made a lot of progress."

A Star Tribune editorial said Governor Perpich's achievements "included torture treatment center, youth service, the Super Bowl, school choice, the Mall of America, the Gorbachev visit, the state's first woman lieutenant governor, nation's first female majority on a state high court, prestigious awards for good government, the arts school, the budget reserve, an end of state estate taxes for most people, reduced and simplified income taxes, an expanded forest products industry and much more. Just as important were things immeasurable. He has made Minnesota a

better place to be educated, to work, to own business. He has made it more caring place to be poor, to be handicapped and to be a member of a minority. His kind of caring isn't so popular anymore."

Columnist Jim Klobucher wrote stirringly about the former governor, "He was a decent man. He was honest, and he made a difference in thousands of lives. Disabled people know that better than most."

Lori Sturdevand, Star Tribune writer, said, "'The Star Tribune is going to need two reporters covering the governor's office to keep up with me,' he boasted after 1982 election. He wore out more of us than that. But none of us would have missed it."

Peter Popovich, former Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, told the Star Tribune: "Rudy tells the story about his father who was so thrifty. Rudy and Lola were leaving on their honeymoon, and the Old Man said

'Before you go, go upstairs and change clothes. That suit you're wearing will be used by the three boys coming up behind you! And Rudy went and changed."

Like Rudy, his three brothers were all state senators.

Bernie Brommer, president of the Minnesota AFL-CIO, said, "Throughout his political career, he (Perpich) listened to workers' concerns and influenced and shaped government policy and programs to help working people and the poor."

The Star Tribune noted, "Perpich was an unabashed booster of Minnesota, going after everything from a chopsticks factory to a Saturn car plant to the 1996 Olympic Games. Job creation became a mantra for Perpich. He crisscrossed the country, indeed the globe, trying to line up jobs for Minnesota. In his typical think-big manner, he vainly sought to entice General Motors with \$1.2 billion in tax breaks to build a Saturn plant here. Instead, the car giant chose Tennessee."

Among the accomplishments cited after his death, none stood out more than

Gov. Perpich's role in education- getting the state to pay a larger share of local school costs; open enrollment programs permitting students to attend schools of their choosing, regardless of district boundaries; provide state money for Head Start; creating a Minnesota Arts High School in Golden Valley; and setting up the University of Minnesota's Commitment to Focus, designed to emphasize graduate programs.

As a father, Rudy Perpich "gave love that was pure and unselfish from the beginning to the end," said his son, Nick Perpich.

We remember Rudy Perpich. May he rest in God's Eternal Peace. Slava mu vjerna.