

### **David C. Olson, Minnesota Chamber president, dies at age 57**

David C. Olson, 57, longtime distinguished president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, died July 16, 2014, after an 18-month fight with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He is widely credited for the chamber being recognized as the state's premier business advocacy organization and respected for his uncanny ability and art of bringing people together for setting strategy and solving problems.

"David's deep commitment to improving the state's economy and the lives of Minnesotans carried throughout his career," said Bill Blazar, senior vice president of public affairs and business development at the Minnesota Chamber. "He loved our state. He worked every day to make it better and loved being engaged in anything and everything that would make our economy stronger."

Olson was named president of the Minnesota Chamber in 1991. The organization represents more than 2,300 Minnesota companies, 130 local chambers and 65 business trade associations at the Minnesota Legislature on a variety of issues that impact the growth and development of the state's economy.

During his tenure, Olson made grassroots participation central to every aspect of the Chamber's work. His insistence on listening to member concerns – and then engaging businesses of all sizes and types statewide at the Capitol – was evident both in the Chamber's legislative accomplishments and its organizational strength. Under his leadership, the Chamber also sought private-sector solutions to statewide problems. Its Waste Wise program has helped hundreds of Minnesota businesses reduce waste and be more environmentally sustainable for almost 20 years.

The Chamber received the President's Award from the Association of State Chamber Professionals for its overall accomplishments during the 2012 program year. In addition, its 95-percent member retention was recognized as the highest among state chambers for the fifth consecutive year.

The Chamber achieved many accomplishments for businesses in Minnesota under Olson's leadership. In 1995, it delivered significant workers' compensation reform, resolving one of the state's most persistent and contentious problems. In 2006, it led the successful "Vote Yes" campaign that constitutionally dedicated more transportation funding. In 2008, it spearheaded significant changes in the delivery of health care to promote quality care at an affordable price and secured funding for the state's transportation system through a major funding initiative. In 2014, the Chamber successfully repealed the sales tax on business-to-business transactions so Minnesota companies can compete on a level playing field with their peers across the country.



"The Minnesota Chamber is stronger than ever because of an excellent board of directors and staff. David built that each and every year," said Jeff DeYoung, managing partner at Baker Tilly and chair of the Minnesota Chamber Board. "He was also directly responsible for building the statewide voice of business at the Capitol."

Other organizations also sought Olson for his expertise in shaping and advancing public policy. In recent years, ensuring a skilled workforce for Minnesota employers became a high priority for him personally as well as the Chamber. He served six years on the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities Board of Trustees, including as chair from 2007-10. During his tenure, he made great strides in initiatives to better align postsecondary offerings with workforce needs. In 2010, he served as chair of the Chancellor Search Committee that selected Steven Rosenstone.

Olson had a successful background in chamber work even before joining the Minnesota Chamber. He served five years as president of the TwinWest Chamber of Commerce and three years as executive director of the Burnsville Chamber of Commerce. Prior to that, he held staff positions in economic development, transportation and energy at the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce.

He also was a member of local and national boards. He currently served on the boards for the National Association of Manufacturers, United Way and Northern Star Council Boy Scouts. He was chair-elect of the Council of State Manufacturers Association, lead business representative on the Workers' Compensation Advisory Council and a member of the Generation Next Partnership Board. He served on a number of other business and community work groups.

Olson earned a master of science degree in public administration from Mankato State University, and a bachelor of arts degree in urban/political science from St. Olaf College in Northfield. He was an Eagle Scout. He is survived by his wife, Carolyn, sons Erik and Nick.

Funeral arrangements are pending.