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SIoux FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA

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## Schools can't tap growing wealth

System keeps property taxes down but challenges budgets

BY TERRY WOSTER  
AND BRENDA WADE SCHMIDT  
Argus Leader

Education funding report for 15 regional districts **4A**

At first glance, one might think this was good news: The value of property in the Sioux Falls School District has grown more than 20 percent during the past four years, while the taxes residents pay have increased only 9 percent.

But under a state education funding system that relies heavily on property tax, South Dakota's largest district finds itself instead in a growing financial bind.

Sioux Falls board members are spending budget reserves and looking at program cuts. And they're considering opting out of the state funding formula so they can take advantage of the growing wealth of the district as measured by the assessed value of property.

If the district does nothing, much of its new worth is spread across the state as tax relief for other districts, said Superintendent Jack Keegan.

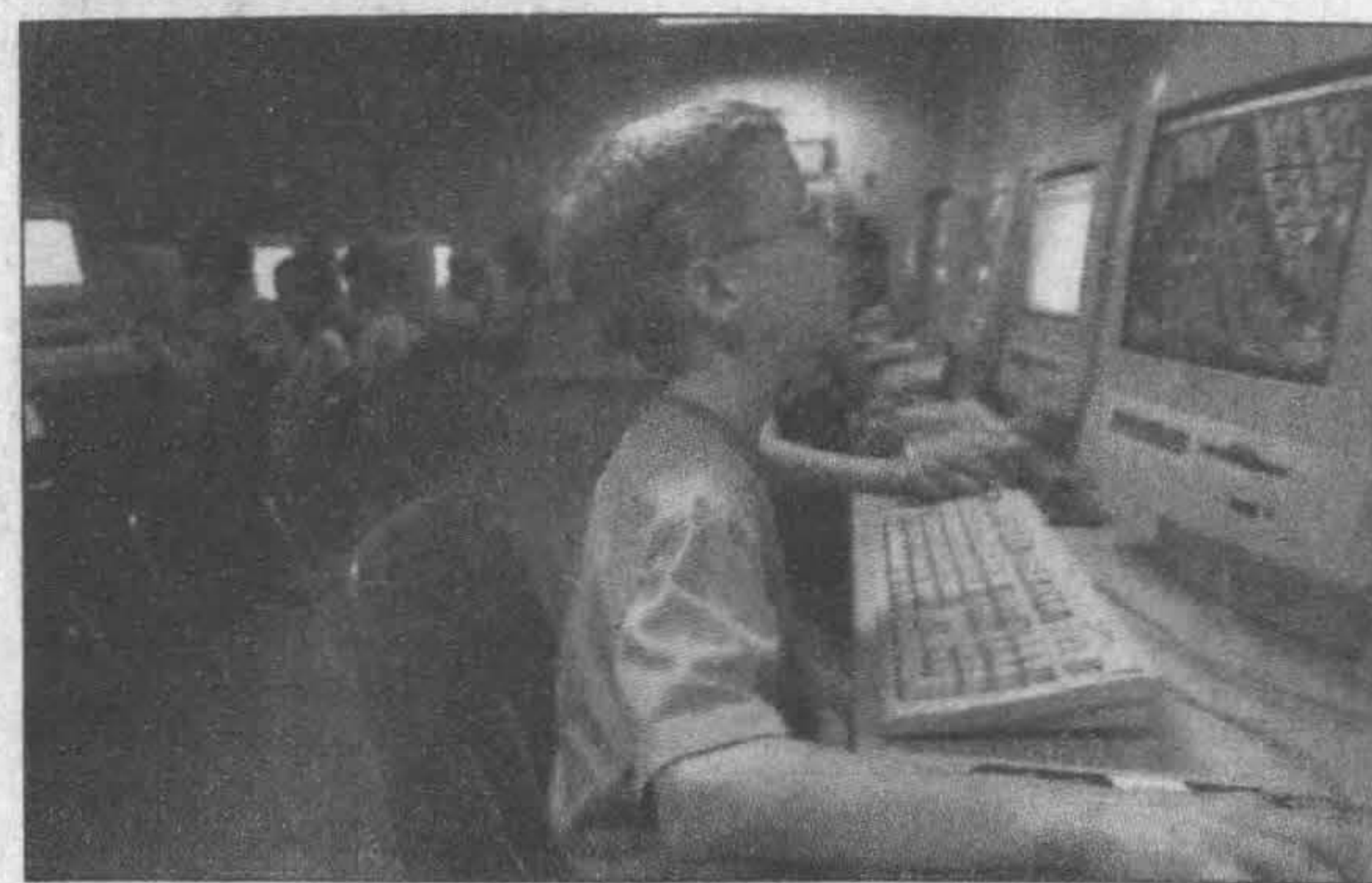
"Any district with a growing assessed valuation is an exporter of dollars to other parts of the state," Keegan said. "We're very fortunate in Sioux Falls to have this growth in property value, but we can't tap into that potential source of school money without opting out of the state formula."

Republican state legislators say that's exactly how the system is

supposed to work.

"If one district wants more money spent on their students than other districts, then let the district that wants more tax the taxpayers," said Sen. Dennis Daugaard, R-Garretson. "If taxpayers from any given school district want to spend more on their students, that's within their power."

When Gov. Bill Janklow and legislators rewrote the state education funding formula in 1995, they set an average cost per student statewide. That cost would be



Jeb Rinken, 11, a fifth-grader at Harvey Dunn, plays a computer game in the John Harris Elementary lab Thursday.

LLOYD B. CUNNINGHAM  
ARGUS LEADER

funded through a combination of state sources and local money, primarily property tax revenue.

After they wrote that formula,

lawmakers made a policy decision to maintain a steady ratio between

See **SCHOOLS**, page 4A

For 50 of her 80 years, 'Mrs. Sioux Falls' has helped shape the community and its culture.



Sylvia Henkin and Gov. Bill Janklow in '84



With former Gov. Joe Foss



With Sen. Larry Pressler in '78

## Sylvia Henkin, leader and lady

Fund raising and family fill former broadcaster's days

BY JENNIFER SANDERSON  
Argus Leader

Outspoken, driven and fiercely loyal, Sylvia Henkin unknowingly laid the groundwork for one of her closest friendships in the midst of a lawsuit.

"I couldn't wait to meet her," says Carole Pagones, who was a fiscal analyst with a state legislative appropriations committee in 1976 when she heard that Henkin, owner of a major broadcast company and well-known figure in Sioux Falls charitable efforts, was on her way to Pierre.

Henkin's purpose was personal. She was coming to testify on behalf of her daughter, a severely disabled young woman who needed care beyond the scope of South Dakota's human services. Elizabeth was institutionalized in Texas, and because she had turned 21, South Dakota was about to stop paying for her care.

"That was the very first time I saw her," Pagones recalls. "And I've never seen so much rear-end squirming from a bunch of legislators. Here was this extremely handsome, beautiful woman who was also very formidable when she wanted to be."

Henkin ultimately lost her fight against the state, but she gained an ally in Pagones and no small amount of grudging respect from the legislators who balked under her stare. Her steady prodding and commonsense appeals struck home.

The tactics are the same that Henkin's used to jump-start projects on dozens of community boards, cajole three children and manage two long-standing family businesses.

Most of the time, Henkin gets her way.

"I don't think it's them giving me more leeway as I get older," Henkin says. "Whether they give it or not, I take it."

She's a woman whose past intertwines inseparably with the city's recent history.

Henkin has spent 50 of her 80 years tangling with business owners and politicians - both roles she's filled at times herself - but says she aimed to be a lady, first and foremost.

She's known among friends for her puckish nature and her enjoyment of a well-put-together Bloody Mary. Sioux Falls residents know her as the woman who won unanimous appointment to an interim spot on the old City Commission, then tackled the job relentlessly for six months. Statewide and beyond, she's known for ownership of KSOO Radio Inc., the company whose KSOO-TV gave her the freedom to host "Party Line," a current events show.

Henkin has amassed a handful of aliases from those who've worked with her on projects. The two most notable: "Mother St. Pat," for her founding of the St. Patrick's Day Parade - never mind that she's Jewish, with not a drop of Irish blood - and "Mrs. Sioux Falls," which attests to her having a hand at some time or another in nearly every community board, arts organization or humanitarian movement the city has seen in a half-century.

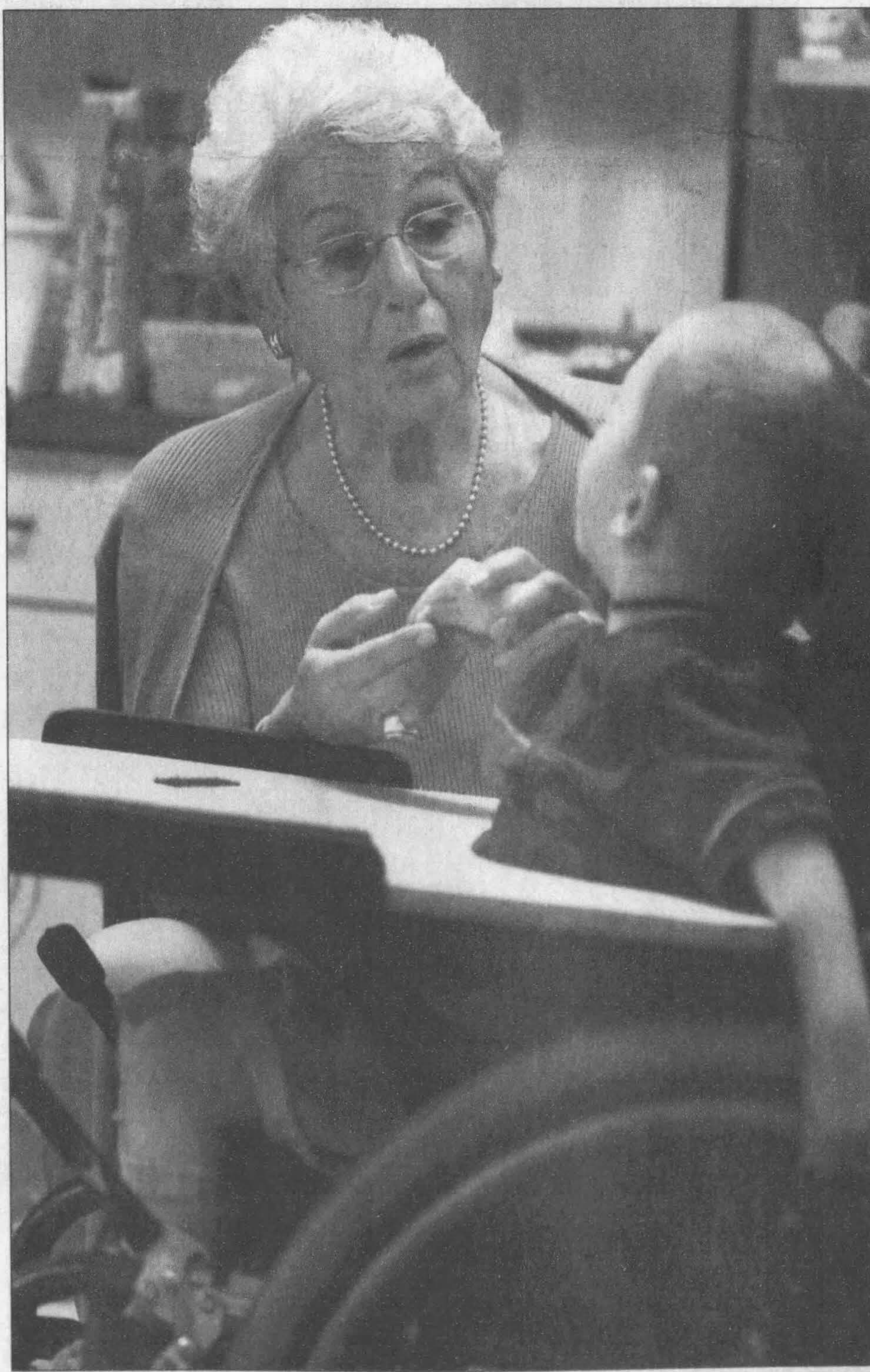
And now, at an age when some of her peers take up rocking chairs, she's driving from Rotary Club meetings to brainstorming sessions on non-profit fund-raisers.

"It's in the attitude," she says. "I know people who were old at 20."

A few years back, the entries in her day planners were crammed in so tightly that she sometimes couldn't decipher them. But her old enemy, finding time to do it all, has been replaced.

She holds her hands out in front of her, palms down.

"Look at this. Steady as a leaf," she says. "No problem at the piano or behind the wheel. But I pick up a pen and I shake. My handwriting's getting so



(ABOVE) VAL HOEPPNER / ARGUS LEADER; (TOP LEFT AND MIDDLE) ARGUS LEADER FILE PHOTOS; (TOP RIGHT) SUBMITTED PHOTO  
Sylvia Henkin enjoys a visit with Trevor Matousek, 5, in the preschool room at the Children's Care Hospital and School. Henkin is a longtime member of the board of directors for CCHS and says it's her favorite volunteer work.

bad I can hardly read it. I call up my daughter Susan and say, 'Do you know where I was supposed to be today?'"

Chances are, Susan McGowan knows.

"I keep a file on her just like I do for each of my kids," says McGowan, a former KSFY anchorwoman who lives in

Sioux Falls with her husband, Gene. "Things she's done, photos, where she's going."

Henkin cannot bully the shaking into going away. Commonly called an intention tremor, it surfaces when she calls on fine motor skills, such as those used in writing. Before it affected her signature,

McGowan convinced her to have a rubber stamp made from her script. She now signs all her checks with an ink pad.

The tremor isn't so bad yet that it impacts Henkin's driving. So until her doctor tells her otherwise, she's keeping

See **HENKIN**, page 6A

## Bison gores, kills Custer park visitor

Wildlife area's first fatality won't change S.D. policies

BY LEE WILLIAMS  
Argus Leader

Custer State Park plans no change in procedure after a 76-year-old visitor from Michigan was gored to death by a buffalo.

"The park and the state are very saddened by news of his passing," Custer State Park Superintendent Rollie Noem said Saturday following the death of Ernest Barna of Allen Park, a Detroit suburb.

"We certainly hoped for a quick recovery, but the outcome is a reminder for all of us that when we're outdoors enjoying the wonders of nature, we need to view all wildlife from a safe distance."

Park officials have no plans to destroy the animal, since the attack wasn't the result of any unusual aggressive behavior, but rather natural instinct, Noem said.

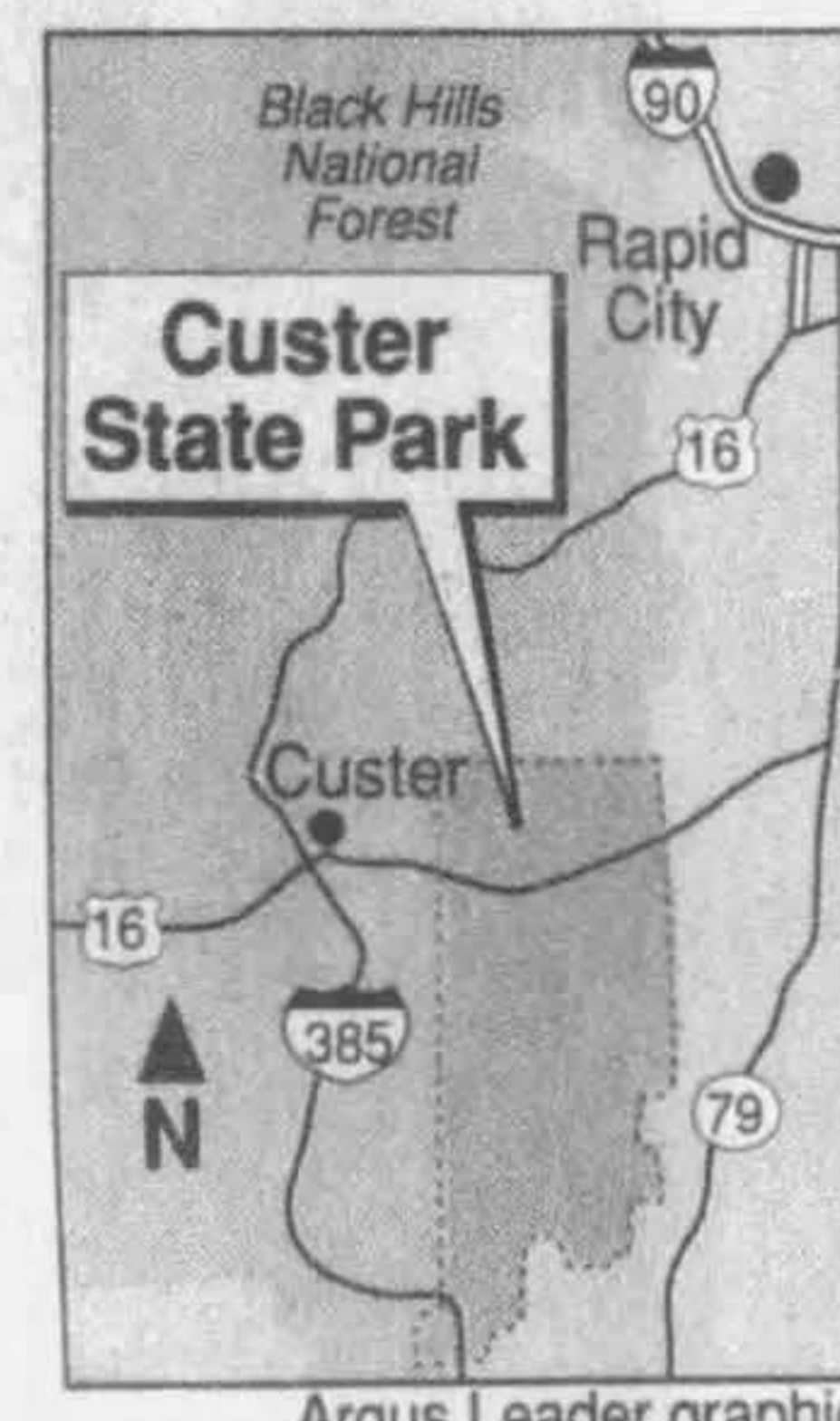
"He chose not to get out of harm's way," Noem said of Barna. "He put himself in close proximity to the animal, and the park buffalo are wild animals. What he did was very unfortunate, but he chose not to move back with his group and let the bull walk through."

Barna was gored Thursday morning by a

See **BUFFALO**, page 12A



KEVIN WOSTER / ARGUS LEADER  
A buffalo grazes recently at Custer State Park.



Argus Leader graphic

## Condit admits affair with missing intern

BY MARK SHERMAN  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Rep. Gary Condit for the first time told investigators he had a romantic relationship with Chandra Levy, a source familiar with the investigation said late Saturday. Police reiterated that he is not a suspect in the disappearance of the former federal intern.

In his third interview with Washington police and FBI agents Friday night, Condit acknowledged what he had not in two earlier meetings, that his relationship with Levy, 24, was more than a friendship.

Terrance Gainer, Washington's second-ranking police official, would not discuss the details of the 90-minute interview but said Condit was fully cooperative.

"The congressman was not a suspect before the meeting, the congressman was not a suspect during the meeting and the congressman is not a suspect since the meeting," Gainer said.

Gainer stressed that police still don't know what happened to Levy, who has not been seen since April 30. Police are investigating Levy's disappearance as a missing-persons case, not a crime.



Gary Condit

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# 'I respect people's ideas and views, but ... I do what I damn well please'

Continued from 1A

up the routine: to Florida to visit a friend, to the Twin Cities to see a new great-grandchild, across town to visit McGowan or son Joe Henkin - whatever gets her out of the house and among friends.

For someone who's been on her own since being widowed nearly 30 years ago, that might be just the point.

## A life of challenge

Henkin's legacy will be one of firsts and lasts.

She was the youngest in her family and the first woman to graduate from Drake University with a broadcasting degree. The first female president of the Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce, she also was among the last remaining Wolff cousins who were forced to shut down the family's chain of department stores that had been founded by her father.

She has a knack for speaking what's on her mind, and she's careful not to place someone else's opinions above her own convictions. Had she done that, she reasons, she might not have made it nearly this far.

Her father died when she was five months old, leaving her mother to care for her and two older brothers. Widowed herself at age 53, she took over her late husband's business and rose to become a broadcasting force to reckon with. She's raised three children, including her special-needs daughter. She's battled breast cancer and flatly refused an operation that would've removed a tumor from her pituitary gland, telling doctors she didn't like the surgical route they'd have to take and opting for a different treatment instead.

None of this is remarkable, she says. It's life. She didn't expect these things, and she certainly didn't plan for them. But neither was it her plan to give up or give in.

Ever. "I respect people's ideas and views, but for the most part, I do what I damn well please," Henkin says. "People seem to let me for some reason."

Don Skadsen, who was public safety commissioner during

Henkin's short time on the former city commission, thinks he knows why: "You don't put pressure on Sylvia Henkin," he says.

Henkin came to the commission in late 1990, after Kenny Anderson, the city's finance commissioner, had died of complications following a stroke. The commission needed someone to serve the remainder of his term until an election the following June.

"We didn't think she'd accept. People said she was too busy," Skadsen recalls. "Why would she want to get involved with this? We couldn't believe our good luck when she said she agreed."

The hot-button issue of the day was the proposal to approve a \$63,000 study of the Minnehaha County emergency medical services system. Skadsen supported a single-provider ambulance system in Sioux Falls, and he said so on-air during a KSOO radio broadcast.

"Politically, it was like a David and Goliath case about free enterprise," Skadsen says. "I looked at it from the public safety standpoint, but Sylvia saw it differently." Henkin stormed into the station offices and told Skadsen exactly what she thought. He, in turn, invited her to take a closer look at materials from the city attorney and health department, then make her own decision.

"Less than two weeks later, she came back and said, 'I want you to know I'm behind you 100 percent.' And she stuck to it," says Skadsen.

Henkin ended up casting the swing vote that officially approved the study. And she made a friend. Later, when organizing the city's first St. Patrick's Day Parade, she'd call upon Skadsen for police to control crowds.

Amanda Kleinsasser, whom teachers paired with Henkin during a yearlong mentoring program, puts Henkin's personality more simply. One of several students Henkin mentored over the years, Kleinsasser calls Henkin "the woman who knows everything," and she means it.

"When I was campaigning for treasurer of DECA (a student marketing association), she helped me learn how to present myself and encouraged me to run for state," says the 18-year-old Roosevelt High School graduate. "We blew away the competition."

Kleinsasser, who supported herself for a time, works two jobs and hopes to attend classes at the



Sylvia Henkin serves up food for her great-grandchildren - (from left) Allison Thornton, 12; Susan Thornton, 10; and Chaska McGowan, 4 - at a family picnic on the Fourth of July at Rotary Park.

Henkin and Amanda Kleinsasser share a laugh over lunch. Henkin mentored Kleinsasser during her senior year at Roosevelt High School. The dog on the table is Henkin's purse.

VAL HOEFFNER  
ARGUS LEADER



Don Skadsen

University of Sioux Falls.

"I think my teachers knew that she would be an extra hand to help," Kleinsasser says. "She's supportive, but she tells you things flat-out."

## A special child

By far Henkin's biggest struggle has been a most personal one, as mother of a developmentally disabled daughter.

Born with severe brain damage, Elizabeth began suffering violent seizures as a toddler.

By the time she was 8, her hyperkinetic condition made it impossible for her to receive proper care in Sioux Falls. Her parents reluctantly sent Elizabeth to the Brown School in San Marcos, Texas. Henkin still counts it as the hardest decision she's ever been faced with.

It was protecting Elizabeth that took Henkin to the Legislature in 1976, and eventually into court. "I sued the state, and I won the first round," she says. "But they turned it over on appeal four years later."

Today, Elizabeth is in her 40s and lives within less than a day's driving distance, at the South Dakota Developmental Center in Redfield. Despite her fight more than 20 years ago, Henkin is comfortable with the choice today.

"Elizabeth has a very demanding personality," Henkin says, requiring 24-hour care. "And while there was a time when I wouldn't have felt right about placing her at one of the institutions here, some have made a lot of progress."

Others watched the demanding business and civic leader cope, in part, by finding comfort in charitable work for disabled children.

"I always admired Sylvia and

her husband because they had so much to deal with in their lives," says Monsignor John McEaney, a Roman Catholic priest and long-time friend.

Because of Elizabeth, Henkin saw the need to reach out to the deaf community, Children's Care Hospital and School, Special Olympics and Sioux Vocational Services. She remains active today, counting them among her favorite charity efforts.

## Committed volunteer

Henkin's list of civic commitments is immense and her interests varied. In addition to children's charities and arts groups, she's served on boards as diverse as the YWCA and the Sioux Empire Fair. She's also held leadership posts in the business community and helped raise money for everything from Mount Rushmore to the Great Plains Zoo.

"She's always had an unstoppable amount of energy," says Jim Enteman, who grew up a few blocks from the Henkin home and graduated the year after Joe Henkin. "I guess what really impresses me is that she's always willing to step forward."

Raised in a small community where everyone did his or her part, Henkin says she didn't know any other way. She's carried the mindset with her to Sioux Falls, a city that she says has been generous to her family. She thought it only right that she return the favor.

"I can't tell you how fortunate we are to live in Sioux Falls," she says. "We have the problems the big

cities do. We have crime and drugs. But we can handle it."

Henkin's sense of civic duty might have been learned, but her determination most definitely was inherited.

Her father, Rabbi Theodore Wolff, emigrated from Poland in the early 1900s, disheartened by a wave of anti-Semitism. He first settled in Mankato, Minn., serving the Jewish Orthodox community there. He saved up his earnings, and when he had enough, he sent for his betrothed.

Sonja Kravnar spoke no English - in fact, Henkin later would say she was her mother's eyes and ears.

As the Wolff family grew to include sons Louis and Paul, Mankato seemed to shrink. Realizing that his family needed more, in 1915 Wolff moved them to Sheldon, Iowa, where he opened Wolff's Dry Goods Store. He continued his rabbinical duties, this time without pay.

Six years later, Wolff died of peritonitis, an inflammation of the smooth membrane that lines the abdominal cavity. Henkin remembers him only in photos and through a few letters.

Louis, in his early teens when his father died, finished high school and took over the store. Under his guidance, the Wolff chain grew to include 13 stores in northwestern Iowa and southwestern Minnesota.

Family staffed and ran the stores whenever possible, and Henkin grew up in the Sheldon branch. "From the minute I was tall enough," Henkin says, "I was running the cash register."

Math came easily for Henkin, as did most school subjects. Teachers, impressed with her abilities, moved her ahead several times. She graduated in 1937, at age 16, then attended junior college for a year before enrolling at Drake Uni-

versity in Des Moines.

## Fierce independence

Henkin does "what she wants to do, when she wants to do it," Pagones says. "It's a great life, but she's worked hard for it."

McGowan tells people if her mother doesn't know the answer, she'll do one of two things: find out or make it up. "Who's going to argue with her?" McGowan asks.

Henkin set the tone early on, first, in the Civilian Pilot Training Corps, where she was the only woman among 14 students. She joined in 1938, a year after graduating from high school.

"There was a PBS special around Memorial Day this year that really brought that time back to me," Henkin says. "It was about Jacqueline Cochran and Amelia Earhart and the rest of the Women's Airforce Service Pilots who ferried planes from manufacturers to the coasts during World War II. I got a letter from Jacqueline, once. But for the grace of Mort Henkin, I would've been right there with them."

A broadcaster's son, Morton Henkin was being groomed to take over KSOO Radio Inc., returning to the family station after finishing law school. A respected musician on piano and on trumpet, he seemed a smooth-dealing, big-city success story - the opposite of any man Sylvia Wolff had ever known.

KSOO Radio carried advertisements for Wolff's Dry Goods Stores, and brothers Louis and Paul Wolff sent their sister to see if they were getting their money's worth.

After a two-year engagement, Sylvia Wolff and Morton Henkin got married during a 1944 National Association of Broadcasters convention in Chicago. They expanded the operations to include KSOO-TV, which now goes by the call letters KSFY.

Henkin and her husband would have 30 years together before cancer claimed his life and changed hers forever.

"The morning after my husband's funeral, I had a group of friends over to the house for coffee," Henkin remembers. "The station people from New York all had come out, and there, at my kitchen table, they announced that I'd been elected to take over. "What I didn't realize is that I'd been problem solving all along," she says. "I was a sounding board for my husband when he came home and talked about work. I think I learned by osmosis."

A year later, son Joe joined her at the station, and the mother-and-

son team branched out with the company's first FM station, KPAT. They also owned Aberdeen stations KKA-AM and KQAA-FM for a short time.

While KSOO Radio Inc. was feeling growing

pains, Wolff's Dry Goods Stores were suffering. In 1986, Henkin and her cousins helped close the last of the branches, ending 71 years of operation. Four years later, Henkin would sell her second family business, the broadcasting company that had been linked to the family for 62 years.

Others in the industry still learn from her example.

"Her presence in the marketplace really is invaluable," says Jack Hansen, general manager of KSFY-TV. "She chips in with ideas when it's called for, but she's not intrusive, and she doesn't talk about the past as if it's the end-all. When she does talk about how things used to be, it's usually along the lines of, 'Let me tell you how we screwed up.'"

Hansen met Henkin in 1997, dur-

ing his first few months at the station she'd helped build. She's never called to complain about how the new management went about its business, Hansen says.

"I think early on, she called a couple of times and said, 'You've got to do something about (news anchor) Alex Strauss' hair,' but she's not trying to tell us how to do our jobs."

## Still pushing

Henkin's lagging in one of her many battles over the years - and true to character, she hasn't yet raised the white flag.

As one of several who helped raise money to commission the likeness of World War II flying ace Joe Foss, she wants to see the bronze statue moved to the center of the main concourse in the Sioux Falls Regional Airport.

"One of these days, Sylvia will get a large enough group together, and we'll go out and move Joe to the middle by ourselves," Pagones says.

Pagones believes Henkin's brand of enthusiasm is spreading.

"She has tremendous leadership skills, but we have different abilities in how we make things happen," says Pagones, who's also executive director of Main Street Sioux Falls.

"I make everybody fall into row - 'This is your job, get in line' - and off we go. Sylvia somehow has everybody feeling so good that everybody wants to do something," Pagones says. "She cares about people so much, and that comes across."

## Past and present

Henkin's made herself over many times, but she finds comfort in the stability of her home.

It's the same house in which she and her husband raised their children, in the McKennan Park neighborhood that is the backdrop for many of her happiest memories.

Behind the wide, almost squarish front door - a trademark of designer Frank Lloyd Wright - little has changed in the past 20 years. The piano sits against the same wall, and atop it, photos migrate in and out of frames as Henkin's nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren grow.

They're instructed to call her "Grandma GG" because she doesn't like the title "great-grandma," and they're rewarded with chocolate chip cookies.

In the paneled dining room, plaques, awards, newspaper clippings, certificates and photographs hang in a jumble.

Henkin's purse collection surfaces in the kitchen, the basement, the upstairs bedrooms. The bags are sequined, covered in faux fur, fashioned from wooden wine crates.

A photo album on the kitchen counter holds sales slips from particularly successful bargain-hunting trips. A detached price tag in the living room is jammed between the glass and the silver of a photo frame, attesting to a slash from \$65 to \$19.99.

From the phone in the sitting room, she returns calls and makes polite inquiries as to the soup of the day at Samantha's Deli, a favorite eatery.

"I get so disgusted with myself," Henkin says. "I used to be able to whip up a meal in no time because I had everything on hand. Now I never seem to have what I need. But my kids are good about calling to say, 'We're having leftovers. Want to come over?'"

Her daughter and son are on the lookout for what she calls "their next daddy." In three years, she'll have been widowed as long as she was married.

"I'm on the prowl," Henkin says. "But I don't know if I want to be married again at 80. I'm not sure I want to train another one."

Once owner of the state's most powerful private broadcasting company, she now shuns most radio reports. KSOO-AM was the nation's longest-running family-owned station, and she says large corporations have wiped out the community-minded private business owner.

"They buy the syndicated stuff and plug it in," she says. "I can't stand to listen to half the stuff on the radio today - that Don Imus is crude. There's no sense of propriety anymore."

In the next breath, she'll call "Pretty Woman," a romantic comedy about a prostitute and one of her top-paying clients, the "cutest movie I've ever seen."

Henkin's radio dial, of course, is tuned to 1140 AM.

"Maybe I shouldn't be criticizing," she adds. "What I learned, what my kids learned, we learned in the good old days. And that's not all bad."

Reach reporter Jennifer Sanderson at jsanders@argusleader.com or 575-3629



Sylvia Henkin (center, waving) sits with various legislative leaders at an event in the early 1980s. From left are Shirley Halleen, John Timmer, Hemming Olen, Henkin, Tom Kruger, Keith Paisley, Dave Munson and Jean Elde.