



May 18, 2011

Rueda: Schaffer left mark on Minnesota State,

those who met him

By Jim Rueda [Free Press Sports Editor](#)

- The big fella passed away this week and no, I don't mean Twins great Harmon Killebrew.

Jim Schaffer, former Minnesota State director of marketing and promotions, died on Wednesday of cancer. The last 10 years of his life he was confined to a wheelchair. A stroke had not only left him unable to move, but also robbed him of his ability to talk.

And let me tell you, Jim Schaffer could talk.

Even if he hardly knew you, he always had a way of making you feel special. As if everything you had to say was important.

In many ways he was a lot like the Killebrew we've heard being eulogized these last few days. Always a kind word for everybody, a larger-than-life figure, appreciative of his wife and family and for being part of the local community.

Schaffer was a New Ulm native who is a member of the New Ulm Cathedral High School Hall of Fame. He graduated from MSU in 1970 and earned a master's degree in 1984. His work experience included stints with the YMCA, with IBM and a three-year hitch in the U.S. Army.

I first saw Jim about 30 years ago during a racquetball tournament at the YMCA. He was playing doubles and you couldn't help notice the guy who could both play the game well and had a lot of fun doing it.

If you've ever played in those city-wide tournaments at the Y, you know it can be very competitive. Nobody likes to lose yet, somehow, nobody minded very much losing to Jim Schaffer. He just had the knack for making it seem OK if you came in second in a match against him.

When he took the job at MSU in the mid 1980s, our paths crossed more often. Whenever we met, there was a smile on his face and a gleam in his eye. No matter how my day was going, I always felt better after talking with Jim.

The stroke slowed him down but didn't knock him out. He was still a fixture at many MSU athletic events.

The cancer first appeared about five years ago. He battled it as best he could in his weakened condition but it finally got him this week.

The guy who almost always put others before himself is gone. Like most who have had the privilege to know Jim Schaffer, I will miss him.

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