



by Tom Coombe Echo editor

Rest easy, Anne. Your legacy carries on

Anne Swenson never cared about popularity contests, taking the easy way out or capitalizing on her gender to get ahead.

In fact, one of the statements from Anne that I'll never forget, and one she repeated more than once during the decades I worked with her was this: "I don't belong to women's groups."

Anne, who passed away Wednesday afternoon at the age of 85 and after emerging from a series of health problems that would have taken the strongest among us much earlier, wouldn't have it any other way.

A trailblazer? Forget about that. She plowed through snow piles a mile high nearly five decades ago, when she purchased the Ely Echo.

Today, women own businesses, sit on the U.S. Supreme Court and serve in the U.S. Senate and one is just a heartbeat away from leading the nation.

That was unheard of nearly 50 years ago, when Anne became one of the only female business owners in town.

In a male-dominated world, Anne more than held her own, which perhaps is one of the reasons she later scoffed at organized efforts to promote women's causes. She clawed and fought and carved her own place without any help, and seemed to take offense at suggestions her gender needed a boost from government or society as a whole.

Anne was never afraid to take a stand, even when it came with a hefty price. Many times through the years, when a

controversial issue arose and the Echo took an editorial stand that was bound to ruffle feathers at City Hall, at the school or in the business community, Anne harkened back to a time not long after she bought the paper - when the Echo survived both organized advertising boycotts and she shook off threats of bodily harm.

Buying the paper gave Anne a leading role in community journalism, yet she was the first to admit she was not a trained journalist. Early on, she leaned on the skills and wisdom of the late Jackpine Bob Cary, who added both journalistic credibility and a showman's flair to the Echo's pages. Even when they disagreed, which was not a rare occurrence, there was a genuine respect between the two that helped them both make the Echo a must-read each and every week.

And though she wasn't a journalist by trade, Anne developed a passion for community journalism. She took pride whenever the Echo told a unique Ely story, and justifiably made note when the state's biggest names - from Perpich and Oberstar to Nolan, Klobuchar and Rukavina - stopped by the office or called in for an inside opinion about a hot issue.

That passion included more than 20 years coordinating one of Ely's most under the radar events - when journalists from around the globe came to Ely and the Echo every summer as part of a whirlwind tour of the country. In a matter of weeks in 2016, those journalists went from partying at Anne's house to taking in the second presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

Anne has two children, but the Echo seemed to be an equal third. She sacrificed, personally and financially, to make

sure the newspaper carried on. It's never easy to be a small-town newspaper owner, and the last couple decades have been doubly or triply so as more and more publications are gobbled up by large newspaper groups or simply go out of business altogether - as victims of dwindling population, smaller advertising bases and changing technology. Think about this: go back and look at the businesses that advertised in the Echo when Anne took over in the mid-1970s. Zup's, and the Echo itself, are two of the few still around. That is a testament to Anne's leadership, loyalty and perseverance.

That uninterrupted passion for her business sometimes made Anne a tough boss, but she lived up to her own demands. She didn't expect an employee to do anything she wouldn't do herself, and well through her 60s she was often the last to leave the building - sometimes as the clock closed in on midnight.

Anne appreciated loyal staff and some were treated to dinner and drinks at her favorite summer haunt - Burnside Lodge. She knew the impact an Echo paycheck had for many of her workers and once shed tears while laying off an employee long ago.

There's no doubt Anne softened a bit in her golden years. She cut back those office hours to a schedule that still added up to full-time and still spent many evenings at home working to make the Echo a better publication.

The pride she took in family was more evident as well. Both upstairs in the old Echo office on Sheridan to her desk at the center of what sometimes is office chaos on Chapman, there were photos of kids and grandkids and precious moments. She

treated longtime staff as family, making note of photos and special moments and offering thoughtful gifts. For Anne, it was a bit of work-life balance that may not have been there earlier in her tenure,

The last couple of years weren't easy for Anne, who made independence a badge of honor. Strokes and other maladies impacted her eyesight, her ability to drive and her balance, but not her feistiness or love of the Echo. Recent columns made note of her transition yet included her spunk and tell-it-like-she-feels-it demeanor.

She let us all know about her weeks-old transition to the nursing home but anyone who knew Anne knew that Boundary Waters Care Center would never be a long-term destination.

This week came with another downturn in health, a transfer to Ely-Bloomenson and then Virginia. Anne seemed to know what would be next and the reports from Tuesday into Wednesday came with sadness but not much surprise. Peacefully, with family members at her side, her extraordinary life came to an end.

True to form, there won't be a funeral, and it's also fitting that she timed her passing to make deadline. A last-minute column from a vacation home in Florida? What better way to honor Anne's memory.

She leaves behind a family she truly loved, but a newspaper that continues to have her personal stamp and both the battle-scars and victories that came by forging her own trail at a time when it wasn't easy or popular to do so.

Rest easy, Anne. Your legacy carries on.

Letter to the Editor

...If in fact, one entire section...were used by TMM as a dry stack tailings facility, that is only about .7 of 1% of the School Trust lands (86,000 acres) contained in the proposed Federal withdrawal area.

Dear DNR Commissioner Sarah Strommen:

I write to you as the Chairman and CEO of two Ely based 501 (c) (3) non-profits, Up North Jobs and the Ely Area Development Association. We have actively promoted economic development and job growth in northeastern Minnesota for the past 10 years. We all serve as unpaid volunteers.

We, and many, many pro-mining organizations, governmental entities and stakeholders are profoundly disappointed and distressed over the actions of the U. S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management who recently canceled two mineral leases held by Twin Metals Minnesota (TMM).

Your letter of February 15, 2022 to Kelly Osborne, Twin Metals Minnesota's CEO, advises that the DNR "has directed its staff to stop work on the environmental review for the proposed Twin Metals project". Your letter indicates that the decision by the DNR to stop work on the environmental review was reached in collaboration with TMM. And, given the fact that TMM will probably be compelled to seek relief in court to overturn the arbitrary, capricious and politically motivated decision by the Biden Administration to kill TMM's proposed copper-nickel mine, we believe we understand why TMM wants to end or pause the income contract for the DNR's

work on the environmental review.

Still, we wish to call your attention to your "concerns about the proposed location for the tailings disposal facility". You wrote,

"In addition to the DNR's regulatory role, DNR serves as the manager of state lands and state owned minerals. In this capacity, the DNR has a responsibility to make decisions about the use of these lands and minerals that are in the best interest of the State and any mineral beneficiaries. Based on information available to date, the DNR has determined that Twin Metals' currently proposed location for its tailings facility would potentially encumber School Trust mineral resources. Furthermore, the DNR believes this use would pose an unacceptable financial risk to the State and potentially to the School Trust Fund. The DNR has notified the Office of School Trust Lands of our concerns

with the proposed tailings facility location".

We understand your concern and concur with your statement that the DNR has a responsibility to make decisions about the use of these lands and minerals that are in the best interest of the State and any mineral beneficiaries. Yet, we are puzzled by your concern that the use of TMM's tailing facility on Public School Trust land would "would pose an unacceptable financial risk to the State and potentially to the School Trust Fund".

Please consider these facts. TMM's proposed dry stack tailings facility would be situated on less than one section, i.e., on less than 640 acres of Public School Trust lands. The proposed federal withdrawal area consists of 234,328 acres. Within the federal withdrawal application area, there are approximately 86,000 acres of Public School Trust lands. (publicly available GIS Data)

If in fact, one entire section (640 acres) were used by TMM as a dry stack tailings facility, that is only about .7 of 1% of the School Trust lands (86,000 acres) contained in the proposed Federal withdrawal area. And, TMM has not suggested that the School Trust Fund would not be compensated for the use of 640 acres of School Trust Lands.

We don't understand why and perhaps the DNR can explain how this would pose an unacceptable risk to the State and potentially to the School Trust Fund.

Lastly, we suggest that your concerns regarding financial risk to the State and to the School Trust Fund regarding Minnesota Permanent School Trust lands should be directed to the U. S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

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