

“It’s the best job I know of”

Ron Liepert:

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After six years as a news reporter and two as the premier's news secretary, Ron Liepert is quite at home in Alberta's Legislature.

by Hugh Johnston

A fellow can learn a lot from his roommate.

Last summer, Ron Liepert of the Cooking Lake district spent about two weeks "cooped up in a motel room" in Montreal with Alberta Energy Minister Merv Leitch, as Leitch, Premier Lougheed and others hammered out an energy agreement with Ottawa.

"I learned an awful lot," Liepert says.

The learning process continues because Liepert is Premier Lougheed's news secretary.

"It's one of the best jobs I know of. The most interesting thing about it is to be working with Mr. Lougheed, learning from him," Liepert says.

He adds the premier is "damn difficult" to keep up with.

"He's a very demanding person probably because he's a very hard worker," Liepert says. "For him, an average day is getting up for a jog at 6:30, then an hour reading while having a bite to eat. He's always in the office by 8:15 and he rarely leaves before 5:30. Then there's two or three nights a week where there's an evening function of some sort."

"He's a goer. I just hope when I'm 54, I have the same stamina he's got today."

Liepert says his job can best be described as a

"liaison between the Premier, Cabinet and primarily the media."

It's his job to help set up press interviews with Mr. Lougheed and cabinet ministers, help those ministers prepare and release press releases and make sure they are available to the media when the newsmen and women come calling.

It's also his office's responsibility to keep the premier abreast of current events, both provincially and nationally. That involves putting together a weekly package of clippings from all major Western Canadian daily newspapers, as well as all Alberta weekly newspapers.

Ron Liepert says he got the job in January 1980, after four years in radio and two years with ITV covering the legislative beat.

As a result, he got to know the premier and Cabinet reasonably well so he was not intimidated by them. However, he admits he had no idea what he was getting into.

"I don't think I had an appreciation for the kind of hours that have to be put in...that an awful lot of things have to be done in private," Liepert says.

However, he soon found out and still finds the position a challenge.

"You have to be a certain kind of individual to do this job," he says.

"You have to be prepared to personally make some sacrifices in

your family life and your family has to make sacrifices."

"You may have something planned, but if the Prime Minister calls a conference, I'm on the plane to Ottawa — it's that simple."

"If the Premier calls an election, I'll tell my wife I'll see her in a month, because I'll be tied up," Liepert adds.

As if to illustrate the point, the interview suddenly stops in mid-stream, as the green phone on his desk buzzes.

"It's a private line. I can't hold these calls," he explains.

Later on, the interview is interrupted once more, as a voice asks over the intercom if he can "spare five."

Liepert is back in 10 minutes and picks up his train of thought as if he was never away.

The biggest satisfaction he gets from his job is helping someone in the media get to the person they need to talk to, Liepert says.

"If they go away happy because something's been accomplished, I feel good," he says.

He adds he also enjoys helping people other than those in the media.

"If I'm alone in the office, I'll answer the phone and handle a constituent's problem. I'll take their concern and work on it," Liepert says. "You just can't define your job and just say you won't touch anything else."

Liepert admits however, he has to tread carefully when it comes to dealing with requests from his neighbors out near Cooking Lake.

"Obviously, I'm privy to a lot of information. I can't start playing favorites just because they're my neighbors," he says.

"My wife knows a little more because I have to inform her of my schedule," he adds with a chuckle.

Ron and Linda have been living in the Cooking Lake area since 1977, having lived two years previously in Sherwood Park. They have a daughter Kylee, 10 and a son, Cody, 3½.

When Liepert isn't chasing all over the country with Mr. Lougheed, he plays fastball in Fultonvale and serves as secretary of the South Edmonton Rural Fastball League. He has also organized the Fultonvale Sportsman's Dinner the last two years, which he describes as his most rewarding outside activity. Last year's line-up included Wayne Gretzky.

Liepert says he doesn't plan to stay in his position forever, but really can't imagine what else he would rather do at the moment. That seems to go for his past as well.

"If you had asked me three or four years ago what I would be doing today, I wouldn't have said this job," he laughs.