

A different 'toon

Cartoonist Ed Fischer's work on display at History Center

By MEGAN MALUGANI

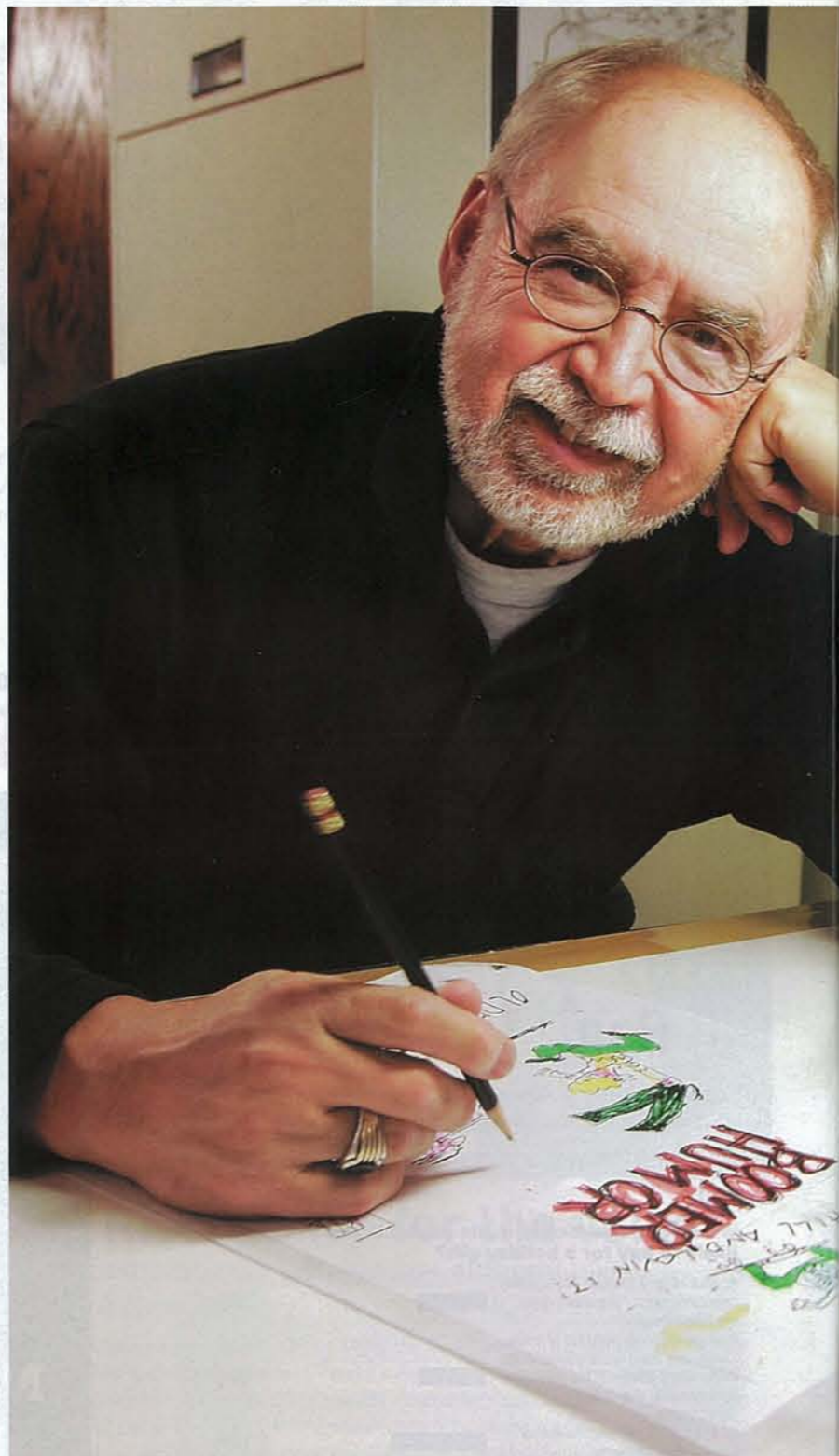
Photo by KEN KLOTZBACH

IN THE BUSINESS OF POLITICAL CARTOONING, thin skin could send a talented artist into early retirement. So it's a good thing the unflappable local cartoonist Ed Fischer learned early how to ruffle a few feathers without getting too ruffled himself. Fischer has been sued twice, threatened, and seen his name—with "sucks" after it—painted on the side of the Rochester *Post-Bulletin*, where he worked for 25 years poking fun at—and sometimes wickedly lambasting—a lengthy list of newsmakers ranging from the Hells Angels to drunk drivers and from the pope to railroad executives.

"I point out things that are wrong in the community. That's a *good* thing. I make people aware of it, anyway, so they can think about it," Fischer says. Making people reflect—and making them laugh—comes easily to Fischer, who started creating cartoon books as a first-grader in Minneapolis and sold his first cartoon, to an archery magazine, at age 12. Developing cartoons "isn't hard for me now. It's very natural. Unfortunately I can't do as many cartoons as I get ideas for," Fischer says.

The political cartooning field has changed since Fischer's early years in the business, when he worked as a part-time editorial cartoonist at the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* before moving on to full-time cartooning jobs at the Omaha *World-Herald*, *Tulsa Tribune*, and then the *Post-Bulletin*. In the heyday of political cartooning, there were about 250 full-time political cartoonists at newspapers around the country; that number has now dwindled to 80, according to Fischer. And the contents of the cartoons have also evolved. "My personal opinion about it is that everyone is trying to be Jay Leno now," Fischer says. "There's no taking sides and being hard-hitting anymore. I try to mix it up and do a little of both," Fischer says.

Being hard-hitting sometimes translates into creating cartoons that are scathingly critical. "If I have to do it, I can do a really mean cartoon. I don't like to do it, but I can," Fischer says. Becoming too friendly with the subjects of his cartoons is a danger, though. Doing nasty cartoons about politicians like Governor Tim Pawlenty and former Senator Dave Durenberger became a lot tougher after meeting the men face-to-face, Fischer says. Fischer met Durenberger at a hotel for breakfast once, and "after that I couldn't do a mean cartoon. He was a really nice guy."



Fischer is now retired from his full-time job at the *Post-Bulletin*, but slowing down is not his style. In addition to traveling frequently with his wife, Lavonne Lovstad Fischer, he still provides cartoons to the P-B and dozens of other newspapers through his national syndicate. Fischer—who keeps a whopping 8,000 to 10,000 cartoon originals in his garage—is also the author of eight books, including *101 Things to Do With Lutefisk* and *What's*



So Funny About Getting Old? He is currently working on a sequel to *What's So Funny About Getting Old?* that is tentatively titled *Boomer Humor*. "I'm very blessed. I've always known this is what I wanted to do," Fischer says. "I admire people who are really dedicated to their work, and I feel like I am."

AN EXHIBIT OF ED FISCHER'S CARTOONS is on display at the History Center of Olmsted County through June. The exhibit includes 44 cartoons on four major themes: transportation, politics and politicians, health, and Rochester. For more information, go to www.edfischer.com or www.olmstedhistory.com, or call the History Center at 282-9447.