MR. OHIO

George V. Voinovich's dedication to faith, family and state set the foundation for his unprecedented 43-year run in public office, including as a mayor, governor and senator.

By Joe Hallett, Jack Treaty and Jonathan Riskind | The Columbus Dispatch

LEVELAND — The modest two-story beige house with green shutters on a quiet street a half-block from Lake Erie holds little evidence of the life George Voinovich is about to leave.

Amid the clutter of his study, there are no photographs of him with presidents, fellow senators, governors or mayors. There are no plaques on the wall to commemorate Voinovich's historic 43-year run in public office, no proclamations about his accomplishments.

Instead, the house where George and Janet Voinovich have lived for all but 10 of their 48 years of marriage is a shrine to their family: A painting depicts a church atop a Slovenian hill where Voinovich's great-grandfather played the organ. Photographs of the Voinovich's three surviving children and eight grandchildren abound. On a table is a slide show of photos of George and Janet with daughter Molly, taken a few days before she was struck by a van and killed while walking to school in 1979. Molly would be 40 now.

least to their love seat is a photo of George and Janet with daughter Molly, taken a few days before she was struck by a van and killed while walking to school in 1979. Molly would be 40 now.

This house, along with a one-bedroom

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Gift cards

on rebound

this year

By Mark Williams | The Columbus Dispatch

Forget the diamond earrings.

Same goes for the iPod. What you really want from Santa this year is a gift card — again.

For the fourth straight year, gift cards are at the top of the list of most-requested gifts, according to a National Retail Federation survey

"They are extremely popular because they require no thought," said Bill Hardtgen, CEO of GiftCards.com and author of The Credit Card Guidebook. "It's a great way to buy something that you never would have bought for yourself.

After a two-year fall during the

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RAINWATER RUNOFF

Road salt is polluting Ohio drinking water

By Spencer Hunt

The Columbus Dispatch

The road salt that cities and businesses stockpile to melt ice along sidewalks and treat Ohio's roads and highways is increasingly polluting our drinking water, according to state environmental regulators.

Since 2009, the Ohio Environ-
VOINOVICH

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condo in Florida, is where the 74-year-old Republican plans to spend the first three in a four-decade career. Voinovich will have no office in a new state, he has no list of state to manage or legislate. How will he manage to have him around the house?

"That's yet to be determined," she said. "But the good news is that we like each other a lot."

On Friday, Voinovich unprecedented career in Ohio politics will be honored at a reception in the Statehouse. Invited friends and former staff members will attest to his effectiveness and rightfully place him among the most popular political leaders in state history, alongside the likes of former Gov. James A. Rhodes and Frank J. Lausche. Lausche's childhood nickname from the Collinwood neighborhood, Lausche was a fellow Eastern European who was the only other Cleveland to serve as mayor and U.S. senator.

Voinovich was a former one-term Cleveland city councilman and chief of staff during Voinovich's first term as governor.

"I think it's fair to say that his record of service will ever be matched by a leader from Ohio. This was somebody you knew you could count on year after year after year.

On Friday, after the Statehouse celebration of his life and times, Voinovich will go home to his new retirement.

"My No. 1 priority in retirement is to take care of my physical, mental and spiritual health," he said. "I want to do that so that I can take care of my wife. And then, there are my children. I think they are my priorities.

Voinovich is looking forward to book writing.

He will fish Lake Erie earnestly for walleye, and he and Janet will take long walks around the Wildwood Park, Whose expansion and planning has been in the works for a long time, and they will go to sunsets. "We live where you can see a panorama of the city, changes every night."

Voinovich is contemplating a third term in the Senate, but he thought better about being there when he will be 70. He will know that he and Janet are of ages — she's now 77 — remaining them to stay close by each other. Besides, a frustrated Voinovich said, the policies of Washington have gotten complicated and poisoned that it's difficult to large principles on the state level.

Some Republicans are people to understand that you've got to move forward, he said. "You've got to move as if it's your own business."

He implemented welfare programs, work compensation, health care and health care for the elderly. He also served as U.S. Senate for 30 years. Voinovich was re-elected to the Senate three times. Voinovich eight years as governor, were wrapped up by economic change, but they ended in prosperity. At the end of his first two years, he cut $571 million from the state budget and raised taxes, largely in the rich, by more than $400 million to avoid further fiscal insolvency in state government. Voinovich was anything but a take-charge governor. He implemented welfare and work- compensation reform, spent massively on children's programs and for new schools, and allocated 5000 million extra to poor school districts after the Ohio Supreme Court declared the school-funding system unconstitutional in 1997. Perhaps his greatest challenge came on Easter Sunday in 1993 when a riot erupted at the state's maximum-security prison in Lucasville. Inmates controlled the prison for 11 days, the largest state prison riot in U.S. history, resulting in the death of a 28-year-old inmate. Under enormous pressure to go to the prison himself and, ultimately, to storm it with troops, Voinovich listened to the counsel of experts to stay away. The inmates released, avoiding more bloodshed.

If anybody wanted to study how a governor handles a crisis, they ought to look at what George Voinovich did during Lucasvillie," said Attorney General-elect Mike DeWine, then the lieutenant governor. "His election to the Senate in 1988 fulfilled one of Voinovich's chief ambitions. Throughout his career, he had often said he was more interested in becoming a senator than in being governor.

In 1986, when he was still mayor of Cleveland, he rejected pleas from Republican advocates of Gov. Rob

Voinovich and his staff boasted that he was the No. 1 alphabet hawk in the Senate. He reinforced that in his first term during the Clinton presidency when he opposed Republican efforts to cut taxes without cutting spending.

But in 2001, President George W. Bush announced office and pushed Congress for a major tax cut. The federal government had run a $288 billion surplus in the 2000 fiscal year and the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office was projecting that the government would have a staggering $3.4 trillion in revenues in 2006. Conservatives were eager to cut income-tax rates across the board. Voinovich opposed the tax cut because he was opposed to a tax cut for the middle class.

The administration badly wanted Voinovich's vote. Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill invited Voinovich over for a breakfast meeting while White House budget chief Mitch Daniels visited Voinovich at his office. Both, Hollingsworth, said, insisted that the Bush administration would maintain federal spending in the future.

In addition, Voinovich was meeting privately with Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan. Over breakfast in the Senate dining room, Greenspan warned that the surplus was so large that some tax reductions would help the econo- my. Greenspan insisted there was a risk to the economy in paying down the national debt too rapidly. Voinovich rebuffed and joined 45 other Republicans and 12 Demo- crats in approving the tax cut. Two years later, with the economy struggling from a recession, Bush once again called on Congress to reduce federal taxes. This time, the administration wanted to reduce investment taxes for growth, but cut personal income taxes — by about $700 bil- lion over 10 years.

Once again, the administration needed Voinovich's vote. By the spring of 2002, the combination of the 2001 tax cuts, the 9/11 terrorist attack, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq and the associated deficits, as well as Bush's efforts to curb federal spending and wanted Congress to pass legislation that would provide prescription drugs to Medicare beneficiaries. That tax cut was an issue in Ohio plans worried Voinovich.

The day before Thanksgiving, then White House Chief of Staff Andy Card invited Voinovich and Republic- an Sen. O'Reilly from Maine to the White House, where they pleaded for their votes.

Voinovich refused. "I stuck up for my gains," he said. Facing opposition from Voinovich and a handful of lawmakers, the administration reduced the $351 billion and scheduled it to expire at the end of 2010. With those concessions, Voinovich voted for it.

"Today, with the federal govern- ment's fiscal deficit near $1 trillion, Voinovich acknowledges that the 2001 tax cut made the defi- cits worse, but he said, "It's not the first share that contribute to that," the answer would be no.

Historians likely will judge Voinovich's 10 years as Cleveland mayor as his most defining career accomplishment. A year after Cleveland became the first American city to default since the Depression era, Voinovich defeated Mayor Dennis J. Kucinich, a Democrat, in 2001 on economic, financial stability with help from city banks and new taxes.

"Voinovich is a mayor who Cleveland will stand out for most people," said John D. Vander, a Cleveland political scientist. "He helped save Cleveland from bankruptcy and turn it around."

Showing Cleveland to a visitor the day before Thanksgiving that year, Voinovich barely contained his admiration for the city. Memorable from his skin as he pointed out his Serbian grandfather Victor Bernos old neat market at 160th and Holmes streets, passed by Collinwood High School where he and his brother were arrested in the hall of fame, and perused the ward's famous Mid-Cleveland Shopping Co. "Del excellence in the bar," he said.

Voinovich, a son of a coal miner and a native of West Vir- ginia, brought his family to Ohio at the age of ten. He attended Glenville High School, graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Art and later served in the Army at the front of the world, in nomad, as mayor, Voinovich presided over the most active downtown. It is fair to ask whether a mayor will have a similar effect on the downtown Evans, the basketball arena for the Cavaliers, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Cleveland Indians. The Center would have been built if Voinovich, as mayor, had not been the center of the downtown corporation partnerships.

It was a public-private partner- ship that did it. Voinovich, referring to the transformation skylines, "it was a symbolic relationship between all these various entities who said this is important to the city. People tell me they like the architecture on the Rock and Hall of Fame. Let's do it again," Voinovich would say. "I'm still doing them.

Voinovich demurred when asked if he had a final message for future mayors.

"Are you really ready to quit?" Janet asked, perhaps one last time. "Just a reminder to the next one, then it's someone else's turn," his humor, she said.

''What are you doing?"Green bay Packers quarterback Brett Favre has signed a seven-year contract extension with the team. The deal is reportedly worth about $180 million, making him the highest-paid player in the NFL.
The Voinovich file: A life in politics

As mayor of Cleveland, Voinovich restored financial stability with help from city banks and new taxes.

Voinovich won his first term as governor in 1990, after he was defeated for the U.S. Senate seat he really wanted.

As governor, Voinovich dealt with the Lucasville riot and a ruling that the school-funding system was unconstitutional.

- July 15, 1936: Born in Cleveland, oldest of six children
- 1958: Earned bachelor's degree, Ohio University
- 1961: Earned law degree, Ohio State University
- Sept. 8, 1962: Married Janet Kay Allen of Lakewood; they would have four children
- 1966: Won first of three terms in the Ohio House
- 1971: Appointed Cuyahoga County auditor, a year later winning the seat and serving until 1976
- 1977: Elected Cuyahoga County commissioner
- 1979: Elected lieutenant governor on the ticket with Gov. James A. Rhodes
- Oct. 8, 1979: Daughter Molly, 9, hit by van and killed
- 1981: Defeated Cleveland Mayor Dennis J. Kucinich, a Democrat in office when Cleveland became the first U.S. city to default on financial obligations since the Great Depression; Voinovich was re-elected to four-year terms in 1981 and 1985
- 1988: Soundly defeated by incumbent Democrat Howard M. Metzenbaum in race for U.S. Senate
- April 11, 1993: Tested by 11-day inmate takeover of the maximum-security prison in Lucasville, which results in the deaths of one guard and 10 inmates
- 1995: Won second term as governor after defeating Democrat Robert Burch with 72 percent of the vote, a 20th-century record in Ohio
- March 24, 1997: The Ohio Supreme Court rules the state's school-funding system unconstitutional; Voinovich and GOP legislative leaders blast the decision but then allocate record amounts to aid poor school districts, renovate school buildings and improve technology
- 1999: Joined the U.S. Senate after easily defeating Democrat Mary O. Boyle
- 2005: Began a second Senate term after easily defeating Democrat Eric D. Fingerhut
- Jan. 12, 2009: Announced he will retire from the Senate at the end of 2010