

Jeff Around Town – February 11th, 2025

Jeff: The music you hear each week for Jeff Around Town comes from George Gershwin's "An American in Paris", and just like the title, Bernard Duhem, Bernie, to his friends, could easily have lived in France, but instead he called Nebraska home. Recently, Bernie died unexpectedly. If you didn't know Bernie, it's quite possible he touched your life in some way.

First, a very few things he did and why it's important to his story. During his tenure as president of Alliance Francaise Omaha, he helped establish a French language school here in the metro. He was also a vice president and treasurer for the federations of Alliance Francaise USA.

Now, if you're not into French culture, Alliance Francaise was founded in Paris in 1883, and the Omaha Alliance has been around for over a hundred years. Now, if you've been to Paris, you probably know that besides the Louvre, the other great museum there is the Musée d'Orsay, while Bernie was on the board and the treasurer of the American Friends of the Musée d'Orsay. In recent years, Bernie was instrumental in creating a new sister city relationship with a region in Normandy, France, where Omaha Beach is located, which of course played a vital role during the D-Day landings of World War II.

So, thanks to Bernie, we have this wonderful sister city relationship Omaha does with the Omaha Beach area. Last year, one of his daughters was able to accompany him to Omaha Beach, where together they raised an American flag. One last accolade.

Bernie was honored by the French government with the title of Chevalier de l'Ordre National d'Amérité. Oh, I could also tell you that Bernie had visited every single metro stop in Paris, 321 to be exact, and that his wife, Rosemary, insisted they visit every church in Paris. Way, way too many to count.

Or that he was an inspiration to me personally when I started learning French six years ago and encouraged me when I launched a free weekly French conversation group. Now I could go on and on. More than the accolades and accomplishments and the anecdotes, he was a gentleman. He was kind, generous, always ready with a warm smile to share with you. He was so humble, you would never know he'd accomplished all that he had. Heck, I didn't even know about the Chevalier de l'Ordre National d'Amérité until he passed away.

And if I did, I forgot about it because he never talked about it. Instead, he always wanted to know how you are. He could have lived anywhere in the world. Certainly, he could have lived in France. I used to think that one day he and Rosemary would just move there permanently. But they chose Omaha.

Omaha, after all, is a special place and we're blessed with others like Bernie, those who are connected to something bigger than themselves, not just geographically, but in all the ways they see the beauty and magic of Omaha and imagine what Omaha can become.

Now, even if you didn't know Bernie, he made your town a better place. He connected Omaha to something bigger, to Omaha Beach and beyond.

To those of you who choose to live here because you also see the magic, to those of you who work to make Omaha a better place, there's only one thing to say to you, merci beaucoup, merci.

And to you, Bernie, au revoir, my friend, and bon voyage. You will be missed.

And that's another Jeff Around Town.