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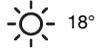
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Siegert, longtime Dubuque Irish community booster, dies at age 80

BY ERIK HOGSTROM erik.hogstrom@thmedia.com 7 hrs ago



Kenneth Siegert

The former co-owner of Shamrock Imports in Dubuque, the co-founder of the Irish Hooley music and culture festival and the organizer of regular tours of Ireland never forgot his German roots.

Ken Siegert, 80, died Sunday at his home of pancreatic cancer.

“He always kept in touch with his German heritage,” said Mike Martin, a longtime friend who served alongside Siegert in the Dubuque Jaycees and with the Dubuqueland Irish group.

A Dubuquer of German ancestry, Siegert married Maureen Corcoran, an Ireland native, 58 years ago. The pair owned Shamrock Imports — a store on Fourth Street stocked with Irish items — for more than 30 years before selling it to one of their sons.

The couple became icons for Dubuque’s Irish community, according to Rob McCullough, the current Irish Hooley board president and a member of local Irish musical groups.

“Years and years back, we would go to the St. Patrick’s Day parade that was downtown, and it was followed by a party with music and food. Ken and Maureen ran it for a long, long time,” McCullough said. “That was the beginning of my understanding of what it was like to celebrate being Irish, and Ken and Maureen were heroes for all of us. He was always an influence.”

Keven Siegert, Ken’s son, likened his dad’s involvement in the local Irish community to a craftsman building a foundation.

“Dad was responsible for creating the foundation upon which the Irish community in Dubuque was built,” Keven Siegert said. “He put the right people in the right places, who then created the resources upon which Irish heritage could flourish.”

Ken Siegert was born Nov. 4, 1937, in Dubuque. The family farm was located near the Dubuque County Fairgrounds, and Siegert was active in the Dubuque County Fair. He served as both board president and honorary director.

He was director of purchasing for Phoenix Chemical in East Dubuque, Ill., for more than 35 years. His community involvement included

leadership positions with the Jaycees, the Cable Car Association and other nonprofit organizations.

“He was really a decent guy,” Martin said. “I have a lot of good memories about Ken. We were good friends for years and years.”

Ken and Maureen Siegert led area residents on tours of Ireland for years — a tradition passed to one of the couple’s sons and daughters-in-law about six years ago.

“He was a great organizer,” Martin said. “He organized all of those trips to Ireland, but they made a couple to Germany, too, and he visited his grandparents’ hometown in Germany.”

Keven Siegert said his dad’s travel and curiosity about different places inspired the family.

“It gave us a broader understanding of the world around us and inspired us to be curious as well,” said Keven, a documentary filmmaker. “We also learned about customs and foods different than ours and learned to be more accepting of other cultures.”

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