

Don Dobmeier Purchased Business In 1958...

Reflections On Dobmeier Funeral Home History

By Michael Stein

It's been more than 60 years since Don and Margaret Dobmeier purchased the funeral home in Barnesville.

Now 91, Don spends much of the year near the much warmer climes of Brownsville, Texas, near the southern U.S. border.

Don looked back with fondness on his three decades in the funeral business in Barnesville.

He had his first experience in the funeral business in 1944, when he was still in high school at Park River, North Dakota.

"Like most high school kids, I wanted a little spending money," Don said. I worked at the local funeral home and would go on ambulance calls. In those days, many funeral homes would also operate the local ambulance service. Before I got out of high school, I got my draft notice, passed the physical out at Fort Snelling and joined the Navy."

While serving in the Navy, Don was in the hospital corps, where, he said, "I got a little bit of medical training but not enough to save anybody's life."

After his discharge, Don attend the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks and picked up where he left off in Park River working at a funeral home.

"I really got my feet wet working at the funeral home in Grand Forks," Don said. "From there I went to the University of Minnesota and got my certificate there as a mortician. At that time in Minnesota, at that time Minnesota was a to license state funeral director and embalmer jobs they were combined shortly after my license was just one license so that's basically how I got into it."

Don purchased the Barnesville funeral business in 1958, operating it for 30 years until his son John bought it and ran it for 20 years before he changed careers.

Don said one of the biggest differences in the business at that



Don Dobmeier, seated in the center, is surrounded by family and significant others at a 90th birthday celebration.

time was funeral homes in small communities also ran the local ambulance service.

"That was really a pain in the neck," Don said. "I don't recall how many years we ran it, but you never made any money in the ambulance business. I think we charged \$7.50 to transport a patient to Fargo, and that was hard to collect. About all we had was the vehicle and a stretcher. We didn't provide much in the way of medical care. It was mostly just transportation to the emergency room."

The end of the ambulance service came with government involvement in health care.

"It got to be you had to be certified so we finally got out of it," Don said. "We sold the ambulance to the city for a dollar. It was probably the best dollar I ever made because I got rid of a big headache."

The years went by and the business grew—as did the Dobmeier family.

"We raised seven kids upstairs over the funeral home," Don said. "Margaret did her best the keep the kids quiet when we had families downstairs. That was a heck of a job sometimes when



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the kids were young."

Don looks back with no regrets about being in the funeral service business.

"I got a lot of satisfaction out of it," Don said. "I believe I did a good job working with families at a difficult time in their lives. It's something you don't really learn in school. I didn't have any particular approach. I think for me it just came naturally. And 99 percent of the families we worked with were lovely people."

Don's involvement in the Barnesville business community wasn't just the funeral business.

The 1960s was a golden age for what was called "five and dime" variety stores. Front Street was home to a Woolworths, Zimmerman's Variety and Ben Franklin store.

"We had so many children with good appetites, so we owned and operated the Ben Franklin store for awhile," Don said. "There wasn't a lot of money being made in those days. We were all pretty much in the same boat trying to keep businesses going."

Not surprisingly, the funeral business changed over Don's 30 years, particularly with government regulations and local ownership.

After helping John get started in the business, Don and Margaret were able to retire and head south for the winter.

The Dobmeier Funeral Home move to Front Street will mark the end of an era for the combination home and business.

"There's so much history in that grand old house," Don said. "Margaret and I enjoyed living there and watching the kids grow up."

Of the move to the former Wells Fargo building, Don said, "It's a terrific move. That is going to be a wonderful facility for the business and will be great for the community."

After 20 years in the funeral business, John moved on to become a high school teacher in Moorhead; Karl also followed

in his father's footsteps and works for Vertin Funeral Home in Breckenridge; Tom lives in Barnesville and works for Super Valu in Fargo; Daniel lives in Princeton, Minnesota; David was a dentist in West Fargo and has since retired; Mary lives in Barnesville and is married to Jay Braton; Susan lives in Moorhead

and works for Hornbachers.

Don spends his summers in the Forest Hills area near Detroit Lakes.

"I have a place by the 10th green," he said. "I enjoy sitting out there and watching the golfers cheat. I try to get to Barnesville and play some pinochle."

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