

## DuBuque was dentist by day, face of Pabst Theater at night

Car crash in South Africa killed theater enthusiast

By Amy Rabideau Silvers of the Journal Sentinel

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Tom DuBuque, a retired dentist, was house manager at the Pabst Theater.

Milwaukee theatergoers might not recognize Tom DuBuque's name, but they recognized the smiling man in a tux at the front of the house.

For more than 40 years, DuBuque served as house manager at the Pabst Theater. He retired from his day job - DuBuque worked as a dentist in Wauwatosa until recent years - but kept returning to the Pabst Theater season after season.

He planned to be back this week, after a trip to South Africa. Instead, friends and colleagues heard that Thomas DuBuque was fatally injured Monday in a car crash there. He was 64.

"We heard they had a freak snowstorm in South Africa, of all places," said Andrew Nelson, public relations manager for the Pabst Theater Foundation. "A car skidded into his and that's how the accident happened."

A memorial service will be planned at the Pabst Theater.

"To many people, Tom is the Pabst Theater," said Chris Segedy, his assistant house manager there.

DuBuque's interest in all-things-theatrical began as a child, when his mother took him to see Forrest Tucker in "The Music Man."

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"My mother still jokingly regrets having ever taken me there," he said in a 1993 interview with Damien Jaques, then drama critic with The Milwaukee Journal.

He started using his spending money to buy \$2.10 tickets for the front of the Pabst gallery. His own onstage efforts included performances in junior high and at Wauwatosa East.

"He had the lead in 'Harvey,' playing Elwood P. Dowd at Tosa East," said his cousin, John Starkweather.

DuBuque's father died when Tom was 4, he said. Tom and his mother, Audrey, moved into the Starkweather household for a couple of years, until they could buy a home just blocks away in Wauwatosa. Years later, DuBuque would help out his aunt, Dorothy "Dot" Starkweather, who survives him.

As a teenager, DuBuque also began volunteering with professional theaters. That led to a paid job as a ticket-taker and then house-managing duties at the old Palace Theater on Wisconsin Ave. Soon he was supervising usher crews at the Pabst, too.

It proved to be good work while at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Marquette University's dental school, but made for at least one unusual situation.

DuBuque liked to tell how he ended up with a conflict for his own graduation from dental school in 1972.

"I took tickets wearing my cap and gown," he said, laughing at the memory.

That graduation ceremony was held at the Pabst Theater, which then closed for more than three years until the decision was made to renovate.

When it reopened, DuBuque was back, working the house with his crew. In 1976, he founded Milwaukee Theatrical Services, formally contracting with the Pabst Theater and other venues.

Other house-management gigs included working the first five years at the Alpine Valley Music Theatre; the Riverside Theater; and Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra concerts at the Milwaukee County Zoo.

Favorite DuBuque stories included the one about the car that hit the theater building - the show continued - and the time his staff had to clear the theater during a bomb scare. Once he had to deal with an amorous couple busy in a women's restroom stall during "The Christmas Carol."

Then there was the time a mouse unexpectedly took the stage during a piano recital by John Covelli, then MSO assistant conductor.

"I was up in the gallery during the performance," he said, "and I start hearing laughter. This was a serious recital and I was puzzled. . . . It turns out a mouse was running back and forth across the stage.

"I don't think poor Mr. Covelli knew about the mouse. He certainly must have wondered what was going on."

And when DuBuque was working, there was always a dentist in the house.

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"I once did some emergency work on Betsy Palmer when she was here doing 'Gigi,' " he said. "But I usually don't get the stars. It seems the guys in the backup band usually have the emergencies."

DuBuque traveled the world, including regular trips to New York and London.

"He would see 10 plays over a five-day trip," said Wayne Lueders, his longtime friend and attorney.

DuBuque loved entering sweepstakes, sometimes winning free trips. When he won other less valuable prizes - notably a year's supply of tampons - that was good for making friends laugh.

He was also involved with groups including the Theatre Historical Society, based in Illinois. Other members knew he was good at organizing and running tours, calling "OK, folks, back to the bus!" in his friendly, booming voice.

"Theater is my true love," DuBuque would say, "but dentistry pays the bills."