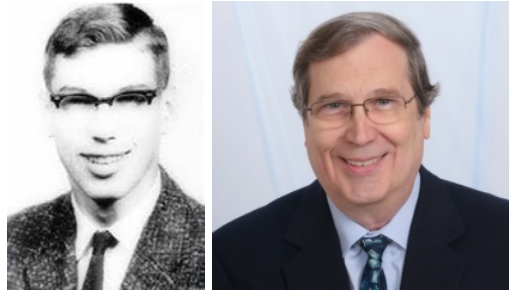


Dr. Kerry Joseph Byrnes : Okemos High School Class of 1963

An Autobiography



Then 1963 (OHS Senior Photo) & Now 2017 (Many Miles Later)

After graduating from Okemos High School (OHS), I lived, studied, worked, and traveled in many parts of the world. Yet, over the years, I began to reflect on my years at OHS and how my time there became one of the strong roots that enabled my career to grow and flourish.

OHS Years – Throughout high school, I worked to improve my academic performance. I was not all that interested in mathematics or the natural sciences, but found interest in English (an opportunity to improve one’s writing skills), Spanish (opportunity to learn a foreign language), and, as it turned out, American Government. The OHS teacher I found most inspiring was Dale Brubaker who taught American Government during my senior year (1962-63). I went home from school and shared with my parents what we had studied that day in Mr. Brubaker’s class. My parents 1962 Christmas letter even mentioned that I had discovered “the excitement of a remarkable teacher (American Government)”.

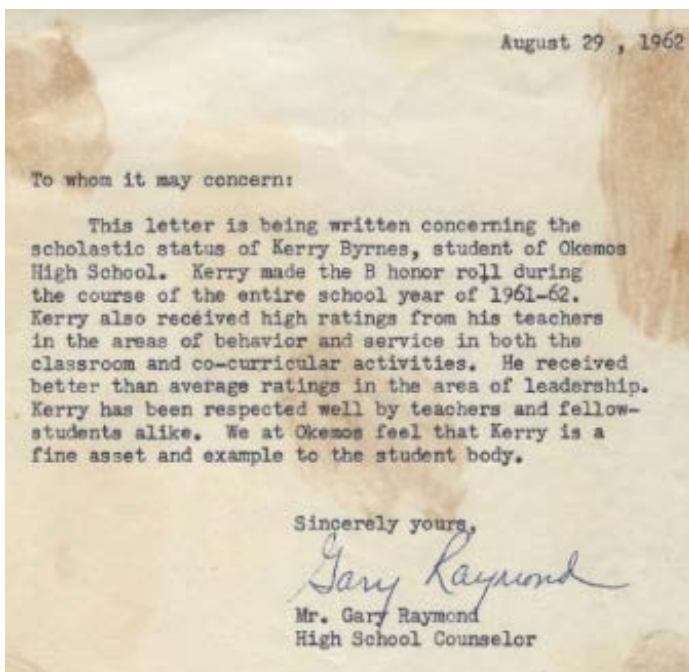
While I tried out, unsuccessfully every year, for the basketball team, there was apparent evidence I had some ability to run. Sophomore year, I tried out and made the team with cross country (Coach Mr. John Bjorkquist) and track (Coach Mr. Gary Raymond).



Cross country's most consistent runners, Hans Wiegand, Kerry Byrnes, Jim Allen, and Jim Somers run the course in preparation for the regional meet.

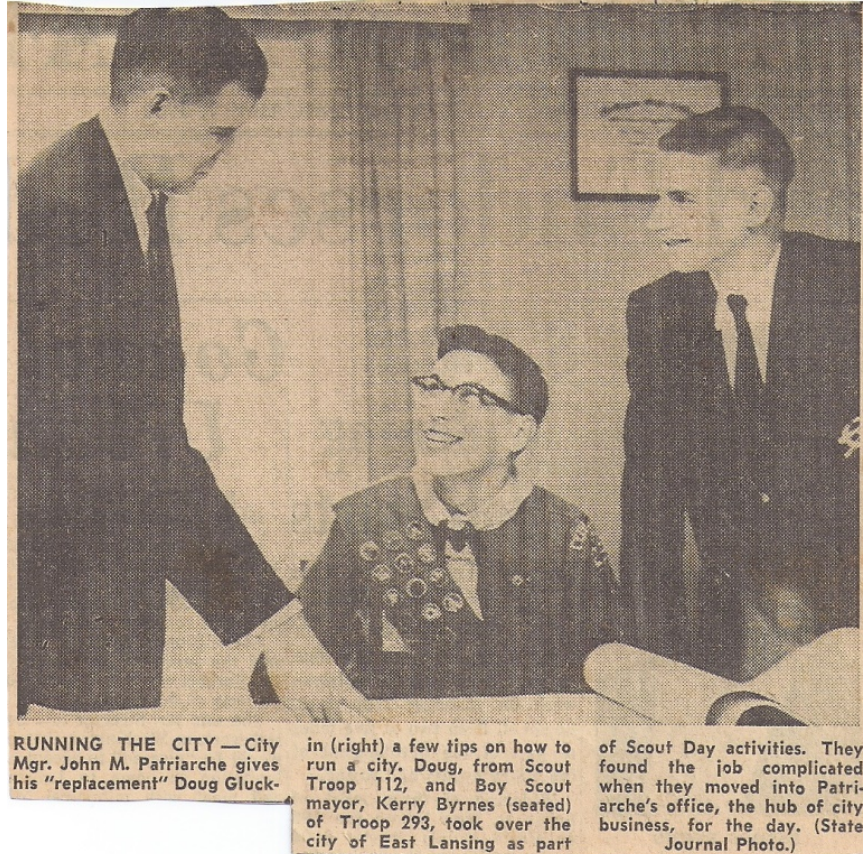
Kerry (2nd from left) in Okemos High Turkey Trot (1962)

I was a Boy Scout, Troop #293 at St. Thomas Aquinas in East Lansing and earned 33 merit badges and the Eagle Scout Award. The Eagle presentation was on February 25, 1963, my senior year and less than a month before our family left for the Philippines. My nomination for this award was strongly supported by one of my OHS teachers and coach, Gary Raymond.



While in Scouting, I also earned other recognitions including Scout Life Guard badge, Senior Life Saving badge, Polar Bear Award, Order of the Arrow and Assistant Scoutmaster.

Briefly, one day, I also somehow wound up as Mayor of East Lansing!



During high school, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, no set goal about what career I wanted to pursue. I didn't have any game plan how going to high school would lead me to a career, other than realizing I needed good grades in applying for college.

At one point, probably in my junior or senior year, I wondered why I had not been selected to be a member of the National Honor Society. I talked about this with my counselor, Mrs. Thelma Lamb. Why, I asked, with my high GPA, was I not a member of the NHS? To this Mrs. Lamb replied that I wasn't involved enough (or at all) in the school's extracurricular activities. Apparently, she thought that running track and cross country and earning an Eagle Scout didn't sufficiently pass muster as "extracurricular activities". This was a problem because I just wasn't all that interested in the extracurricular activities that OHS offered (beyond sports). I wasn't (and never have been) much of a "joiner" in group-based activities, though ironically, I went on to earn social science degrees at Michigan State in Sociology (B.A.) and Communication (M.A.), and later a doctorate in Sociology at Iowa State.

From a practical standpoint, I didn't live so near OHS that it was easy to walk or bike to and from school to participate in extracurricular activities. Our house on S. Hagadorn Road, a block from E. Mount Hope Road, had our family living more in East Lansing than Okemos with our front lawn just a stone's throw across the street from the agricultural fields of Michigan State University.

But those agricultural fields, not unlike the corn fields in the film "Field of Dreams," must have been working some spell on me that, as things turned out, led me to travel much farther than to OHS' academic classrooms or athletic fields. Indeed, the path that was unfolding eventually took me to dozens of developing countries around the world and, along the way, would witness not insignificant achievements that I hope would now make OHS proud – even if some back then felt I wasn't qualified to become a member of the National Honor Society.

College Years –at Michigan State University I earned a B.A. (Sociology) in 1967. During the summer of 1964, I studied at the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico in Toluca, Mexico, while living with a Mexican family. Later I enrolled for a semester at the University of the Philippines-Los Baños. Back to MSU, I continued to earn an M.A. in Communication in 1968, with thesis. In 1975, I earned a Ph.D. in Sociology (with a minor in economics) at Iowa State University.

In college I became interested in agricultural and rural development in the so-called Third World (or developing world). But before college, in March of 1963, the Rockefeller Foundation offered my father the director of information and communication services at the newly constructed International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines. Thus, in March of 1963 I was first exposed to agricultural and rural life in the developing world and began to learn about the challenges of agricultural development and poverty reduction in that world.

Then, just as Mr. Brubaker had sparked my interest in social issues, one of the most stimulating courses I took at Michigan State, titled Diffusion of Ideas and Information taught by Dr. Everett Rogers. Rogers opened my eyes to the link between farmers adopting improved agricultural technologies and being able to raise their farm-level incomes as a driver to reducing poverty in the rural areas of a developing country.

As a result, while at Iowa State for my Ph.D. program, I geared my courses and dissertation toward preparing me for a career to work in agricultural and rural development.

Early Working Years – after my M.A in 1968, I got a chance to work with the university's Department of Economics in Colombia as a member of a research team implementing the Integrated Rural-Urban Agricultural Marketing Research project that was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

There, I designed and carried out a study on marketing information and communication in Colombia's Cauca Valley. I completed my study report in both English and Spanish – and the

findings, conclusions, and recommendations of my report became an input to the final report of the Integrated Rural-Urban Marketing Project (PIMUR by its Spanish acronym), funded by USAID and implemented by Michigan State University's Department of Economics in partnership with the Colombian Cauca Valley Corporation. When Michigan State initiated the PIMUR project in 1968, the Cauca Valley had a relatively "poorly" developed agricultural marketing system serving Cali as the valley's largest, a system that had at its center an aging Central Market in downtown Cali plus a few nascent supermarkets (e.g., Carulla) that were very small and poorly stocked, with fresh produce (fruits and vegetables) all too often not all that fresh. Today, 50 years later, Cali's food retail system rivals that where I live (Northern Virginia), with Cali having diverse food retailers, from supermarkets to hypermarkets, that drive fierce competition among the city's food retailers that include Alkosto, Carulla, Confamdi, Exito, Jumbo (formerly Carrefour), La 14, Makro, Olimpica, PriceSmart (Costco subsidiary), and Super Inter. Only two of these (Carulla and Confamdi) existed in Cali back in 1968. Indeed, Cali is a case study of the rise of supermarkets in the developing world. One improvement in the Cauca Valley's agricultural marketing system that grew out of the PIMUR project and its recommendations was the establishment in Candelaria, a town near Cali, of the Central de Abastecimiento del Valle del Cauca SA (CAVASA) as the major food assembly and wholesale operation serving Cali's retail food system. The project is the most successful producer/supplier/food retailer system in Colombia. And a very successful start to my career in Rural International Development.



Kerry Working on PIMUR Project in Colombia (1969)

(Note: Who might be that young lady intensely focused on her work sitting at the desk behind mine on the PIMUR project in the photo above?)

From the mid-1970s to early 1972, I worked as a VISTA Volunteer in Miami, Florida, then returned to Iowa State to continue my Ph.D. studies. During this period I was on a research assistantship with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, with research on small farmer agricultural development with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Professional Years - after completing my doctorate, for the next 40+ years, my work focused on providing various strategic planning; program development; project design and evaluation; and other research, training, and technical services to USAID or other donor-funded agricultural and rural development organizations that provided technical assistance to the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

During my first post-PhD job I worked as a Sociologist at the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) from 1975-84 including short-term assignments to Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.



Kerry at IFDC (1975-1984)

I contributed to a successful grant proposal from the United Nations Development Programme and served as staff member in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Pakistan.



Kerry Working in IFDC Training Programs: Bangladesh (L) & Indonesia (R)

In late 1984, after 9+ years working with IFDC, I departed for Washington, DC to work, over the next five years or so, on various USAID- or other donor-funded projects as a salaried employed or in some cases as a short-term consultant (e.g., as a member of a firm's proposal writing team or a firm's project staff).

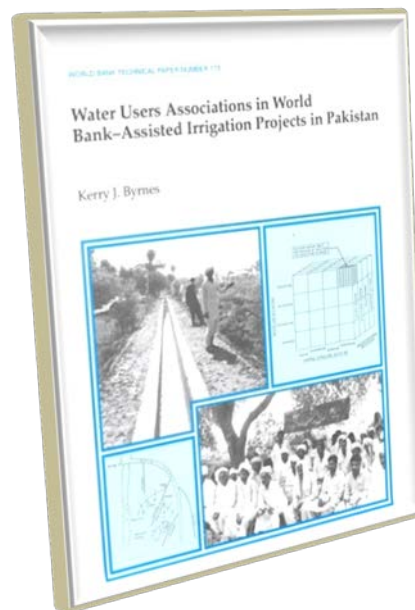
During this period, I carried out numerous consulting in the Washington, DC area. Notably, I worked with the Management Training and Development Institute (MTDI). One assignment I took on was translating that workshop's training materials into Spanish; then I organized and

delivered in Spanish a mini-Management Communication for Development workshop for a MTDI client - the U.S. Bureau of Census.



Kerry (Back Row Right) in MTDI MCD Workshop in Orlando

During two months of the summer of 1996, I co-led a five-person team that evaluated the USAID-funded Agricultural Technology Development and Agricultural Technology Transfer projects in Panama. A year later, during the summer of 1987, I served on a team that evaluated the USAID-funded Forestry Planning and Development project in Pakistan. That same summer I designed and carried out a study for the World Bank on Water User Associations (WUAs) in Pakistani provinces under a World Bank-funded On-Farm Water Management projects.



Focusing on the LAC Region – Beginning in 1989, the balance of my professional career was targeted on agricultural and rural development in Latin America and the Caribbean. From 1987 to 1989, while working with USAID’s Center for Development Information and Evaluation, I conducted evaluation-related studies on USAID-funded projects, including Farming Systems Research and Extension projects in Latin America, Asia, and Africa; worked with a colleague to write a monitoring and evaluation plan for a USAID health project in Bolivia; collaborated with a colleague in evaluating the USAID-funded High Impact Agricultural Marketing project in the Caribbean; and conducted a field study in Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica).

While some of those years in the 1985-89 period had me working as a short-term consultant role (notably from 1985-87), during which there were occasional “between engagement” periods of “down time” during which I kept scrambling to line up my next consulting gig, I was happy in 1987 to return to salaried employment for a couple of years working with USAID’s Center for Development Information and Evaluation. However, in 1989, opportunity arose for me to hire on with Chemonics International as the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Advisor on the USAID-funded Latin America and Caribbean Agricultural & Rural Development Technical Services (LACTECH) project. On this project, I carried out an indepth review of USAID assistance to agricultural research, extension, and education over a multi-decade period, aimed at providing recommendations to improve USAID strategy, programs, and projects supporting agricultural research, extension, and education in the LAC region.

Also, working with Chemonics colleagues, I developed an Organizational Management for Sustainability workshop to provide developing country NGO staff with knowledge and skills that they could use to strengthen their administrative and financial systems, internal and external communication systems, new business development systems, and human resources systems. We delivered this workshop multiple times in Spanish to eight LAC countries: Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and once in Jamaica (in English).

In 1993, my advisory and technical assistance work for USAID’s LAC Bureau and USAID Missions and assisted organizations continued when the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of International Cooperation and Development in the Foreign Agricultural Service hired me to continue working closely with USAID’s LAC Bureau on agricultural and rural development issues. Then, after nearly 20 years as a USDA employee, USAID’s LAC Bureau brought me on as a Foreign Service Limited direct hire employee, in which position I served a little over two years from 2012 until I retired on September 30, 2014.

Summary of Work for USAID – The bulk of my work during the last 30 years (1984-2014) of my career entailed working closely with USAID on agricultural and rural development issues in

Latin America and the Caribbean. I carried out desk assignments (studies) as well as dozens of temporary duty travel assignments to 21 countries in the LAC region. These assignments focused on addressing various development assistance challenges, including food security; trade capacity building; NGO organizational management; and agricultural research, extension, and education. Specific tasks included strategy and program development; project design and implementation; technical studies and project evaluations; design, delivery, and evaluation of training courses; writing briefers and speeches for Bureau leadership; and representing USAID's LAC Bureau in interagency meetings with the Department of State, the Department of Agriculture, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and other USG agencies (e.g., Customs, Commerce, and FDA). As I neared retirement, I donated all my professional papers to the University of Illinois' [Agricultural Communication Documentation Center](#).

Mentoring of Younger Professionals – While working with USAID, I mentored many USAID new hires across various hiring mechanisms, including USDA RSSAs or PASAs (acronyms for USAID to access personnel through USDA) and, at USAID, International Development Interns (IDIs), New Entry Professionals (NEPs), USG Presidential Management Fellows (PMFs), and Mission-based Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs). Recently, one Foreign Service National who worked for years with USAID/Honduras wrote to me:

I will always have great respect and admiration for my friends and mentors in USAID and you are one of them. You are always humble and showed us empathy and respect and that at the end is what builds relationships that last forever. (*Eduardo Chirinos, former USAID/Honduras FSN*)

Similarly, after retiring, I received a note from another young colleague with whom I had worked at USAID while he was a USDA PASA.

I wanted to formally thank you for everything that you did for me while I was at USAID and after as well. Your mentoring of me was very much instrumental in building my personal capacities around USAID program design and expansion of responsibilities related to Latin America and the Caribbean. I...feel I would not have made it at USAID, nor would I have landed the amazing job that I have [without your mentoring]. ... It really saddens me that I won't be running into you in the field, but I think if anyone deserves a rest and some R&R after so many years of work, it is definitely you.

I was very happy that so many people showed up for your going away party because for every person that was there, there is no doubt in my mind that 10 other persons from all over the world would have stood up to say you helped them as well. I think that your willingness to take not only the time but also the trouble to help and mentor people is what makes you special and unique. (*Steven Long*)

Collaborating with Colleagues – Later in my career, while trying to “beef up” my profile on LinkedIn.com, I reached out, with a bit of trepidation to a few professional colleagues to ask if they would write a short recommendation for my profile. Below is a summary of what they had to say, though I'm sure there probably was a lot they could have said that was not fit for print:

- Kerry Byrnes was the Associate we (Management Training and Development Institute) turned to when the U.S. Census Bureau asked MTDI to offer our Management Communication for Development program in Spanish. He led the effort, translating materials and delivering in the outstanding way that he had demonstrated in our English language versions. These programs were based on team-work, listening, knowledge of development, and, importantly, sensitivity to the needs of the participants. His knowledge, engagement and humor enlivened every workshop in which he participated and the participants regarded him highly. He was an important member of our team. - *Robert C. Morris, Executive Director (Retired), Management Training and Development Institute*
- Kerry Byrnes was the supervisor for a major USAID-funded project under my direction at our university. His wise counsel, guidance, and responsiveness at all times contributed immeasurably to the success of the project. His extensive, deep knowledge of agricultural and small business development in Latin American and the Caribbean is unmatched. Kerry is a true credit to USAID, to the economics profession, and to the nation. I speak for all of us at Florida International University when I say that we hope to work with him in the future, during as well as after his US government service. - *Jerry Haar, Executive Director (Interim), Executive & Professional Education, Florida International University – College of Business*
- Kerry Byrnes is the consummate professional - well informed, well connected, well prepared, thoughtful, articulate, enthusiastic and helpful. Furthermore, his work is high quality and he makes things happen. I always appreciate and enjoy working with him. - *David Jesse, former supervisor in USAID and currently Independent Consultant for International Organizations.*
- I have known Dr. Kerry Byrnes for the past 6 years as a colleague at USAID. Dr. Byrnes is among the most respected and knowledgeable persons I turn to for information and advice on agriculture and food security programing. He is especially strong in agriculture policy and trade matters. He provides balanced and clear analysis on the impact of policy and trade decisions on production, job creation, income growth and poverty reduction in developing country agriculture and regional economies. His analyses, both written and spoken, are insightful, reflecting his years of experience in international agricultural development. One thing I appreciate most about working with him is his reliability and responsiveness to whatever request for assistance. He has been a superb mentor to new USAID Foreign Service Officers, participating in training events to share his knowledge and experience. He is an outstanding team leader and contributor in any endeavor. - *John Thomas, USAID Agency for International Development Agriculture Development Officer (retired)*
- I have worked with Kerry Byrnes in different roles and organizations over two decades. He is an outstanding professional. Deep insight, strategic vision, extensive experience in rural development, very sensible and practical perspectives on what works and what doesn't and why. I can think of no better partner to analyze a field situation, or develop a thought piece. - *Huntington Hobbs, former Associate Director, Strategic Planning & Research Coordination, MasAgro at the International Center for Maize and Wheat Improvement, Mexico, and currently Independent Agricultural and Rural Development Consultant*

- Kerry is very knowledgeable in his field, continually seeks win-win collaboration and is open to new ideas. These characteristics are essential to finding creative situations and exploring new ways of approaching a problem. His strong orientation to getting results does not overshadow his approachable style. His work product has always been thorough and well-conceived. Kerry is a pleasure to work with and clearly committed to making a positive difference in any endeavor he is engaged in. - *David C. Hatch – Managing Partner at Hatch Global Consulting*
- I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Kerry Byrnes in the assessment of constraints to the agriculture sector in Central America. His technical expertise and solid guidance and direction to the professionals in the team have been invaluable. - *Jorge Segura, Owner, SEGURA Consulting LLC*

Honors – During the 25+ year period (1989-2014) I worked with USAID’s LAC Bureau, mostly 19+ years as a USDA employee sandwiched between four years as a Chemonics employee and two years as a USAID employee, these organizations honored me individually or as a member of a group with recognitions for my contributions to the missions of USDA or USAID, as follows:

1999 USDA Spot Award for outstanding work on the USDA Hurricane Reconstruction Plan

2000 USDA Group Honor Award for Excellence, FAS Hurricane Recovery (HR) Team

2000 USAID Certificate of Meritorious Service to Office of Regional Sustainable Development (“In recognition of exceptional performance in developing the technical content and programs for the third Presidential Summit of the Americas and its superb technical advice on several new regional programs and strategies”)

2002 USAID Meritorious Unit Citation–Trade Working Group (“In recognition of the Group’s foresight and teamwork in guiding the Agency’s effort in the emerging field of trade capacity building, and particularly for its support in the preparation of the 2001 survey report “USG Initiatives to Build Trade-Related Capacity in Developing and Transition Countries”)

2003 USAID Certificate of Appreciation (“In recognition of his outstanding efforts made that led to the successful launch of the CAFTA Trade Negotiations”)

2003 USAID Superior Group Award – Broad Based Economic Growth Team (“For their outstanding effort in designing and implementing a program to assist the USG in creating a Central America Free Trade Area”)

2004 USAID Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade (EGAT) Team of the Month Certificate of Appreciation “for the new USAID Agricultural Strategy: Linking Producers to Markets”

2004 USAID Meritorious Honor Award (“For increasing Agency awareness on free trade and improving the quality of USAID support for trade capacity building assistance”)

2010 USAID Meritorious Group Award (Emerging Trends in Environment and Economic Growth – “For promoting innovation thought and teamwork to identify critical cross-cutting trends,

emerging issues and opportunities that are likely to shape the economy and environment in Latin America and the Caribbean this decade.”)

2014 USAID Meritorious Group Honor Award - Feed the Future Central American Policy Workshop Team

Further, while an employee of USDA (1993-2012), working with USAID as my client, I rose from GS-14 to GS-15 (the highest level on the Civil Service Schedule) with consistently high performance ratings: Superior (FY 95); Outstanding (FY 96); Superior (FY 97); and High Superior (FYs 1998-2000). Over the ensuing twelve-year period (FY 2001 to 2012), I received the Outstanding rating in 11 of those 12 rating periods (and High Superior in only one year of that period).

On retiring from USAID in September 2014, the Agency honored me with its second highest award, the USAID Administrator’s Outstanding Career Achievement Award “for a career marked by exemplary contributions in the fields of agricultural development and trade capacity building in Latin America and the Caribbean.”



Kerry Receiving USAID Administrator’s Outstanding Career Achievement Award

Along the way, over the years, some additional honors came my way:

- Phi Kappa Phi
- Gamma Sigma Delta (Agriculture)
- Alpha Kappa Delta (Sociology)
- America’s Registry of Outstanding Professionals (2008 - 8th edition)

- Strathmore's Who's Who
- Worldwide Who's Who (formerly: Cambridge Who's Who): VIP Member (2008-2009) and Professional of the Year in Agricultural Development & Consulting (2010-2011)

Looking Back – Over the span of my professional career from the late 1960s to 2014, I carried out 170 short-term assignments in 37 countries, including developing countries in West Africa, East Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. I developed and applied problem-solving expertise in multiple areas, working on development-related challenges in fertilizer use development; agricultural research, extension, and education; farming systems research and extension; non-traditional agricultural export development and trade-led agricultural diversification; training in management communication for development and NGO institutional strengthening; trade capacity building; and food security.

While comfortable working on desk studies (a task not far from doing research for a high school term paper or a post-graduate M.A. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation), I most enjoyed working with developing country counterparts in the field or participants in the Organizational Management Sustainability workshops. In such field- or classroom-based settings, working directly with counterparts gave me a sense that I was actually “doing development” – not just sitting at a desk “doing research on” or “writing about” development.



Kerry in the Field in Guatemala: 1978 (L) and 2013 (R)

My professional memberships have included the Rural Sociology Society (RSS), Association for International Agriculture and Rural Development (AIARD), and USAID Alumni Association.

I also have been a member of the Society for the Preservation for Film Music (SPFM) that is now the Film Music Society (FMS).

Personal Passions – As I neared and moved into retirement, I began focusing on various writing projects, including a first memoir ([*Giants in Their Realms: Close Encounters of the Celebrity Kind*](#)) now posted on the [Okemos High School Alumni](#) website. A second memoir ([*Hooked on Gigabytes: Confessions of a Gadget Junkie*](#)) is also posted on that website. A third memoir (*On*

Assignment with Kerry: Memorable Moments from 40+ Years of Travel to the Developing World) is near completion and will be posted to the OAA site. These memoirs go into greater detail on my life and details about my professional career after Okemos High School.

Further, I currently am working on a book-length chronicle of “The Chieftain Twelve” – the twelve Okemos High School basketball players who, after high school, played basketball for Michigan State University. In addition, I have been actively supporting the development of the OAA website, not only contributing “memoir” content but also providing some financial support. I also serve as co-editor for the Class of ’63 on the site, to date recruiting 35 ’63 classmates to register as Okemos Alumni Association members.

Going back to my days as a student at MSU, I have had a passion for film music, in part as I often went to see films across from the MSU campus at the State or Campus theaters (which, sadly, no longer exist). Over the years I amassed a large collection of nearly 2000 soundtrack LPs, then, then much to the relief of my wife, selling them off via mail order or eBay. Along the way I also amassed a large collection of film soundtrack CDs. Then, in the summer of 2018, I donated this film soundtrack CD collection (over 2100 CDs) to the Michigan State University Library to support the College of Music in developing instructional curricula on film music composition. I have proposed that this initiative, in the spirit of the “Spartans Will” brand, be branded as the “Spartans Score” initiative.

Back in the 1990s, I began writing about film music, various pieces being published as follows:

- “Martin Denny and the Sounds of Exotica,” *Film Score Monthly*, Vol. 2, Number 4, pp. 34-36; available online at: http://www.filmscoremonthly.com/backissues/issue_detail.cfm?issID=13
- “Next Stop...Willoughby: Film Music Voyages in the Soundtrack Zone,” posted August, 1998, on the *Film Score Monthly* website (<http://www.filmscoremonthly.com/features/timetravel0.asp> - link no longer active)
- “Duel of the Restless Fates: Scoring ‘Spaghetti’” (<http://www.grymm.tv/Pages/Spaghetti/BarnesReview.html> - link no longer active)
- “Paging Mr. Cook – Film Music’s Mystery Man: A divided look at the still-controversial film music critic,” *FSM Online*, Vol. 19, No 1, January 2014 (<http://www.filmscoremonthly.com/fsmonline/story.cfm?maID=4492&issueID=109>)
- Various film music-related chapters in “Giants in Their Realms: Close Encounters of the Celebrity Kind (CECK) (<http://www.okemosalumni.org/Kerry-J.-Byrnes.htm>)

I’m now working on another film music research and writing project titled: “Deep, Deep Down: Scoring the Fathoms of the Soundtrack Zone” (a project that I’ve worked on from time to time since 1999)...though no completion date in sight I struggle to wrap it up with a final chapter.

Personal Life – While working with Michigan State in Colombia on the PIMUR project (1968-69), I married Sonia Gomez Naranjo, a lawyer who also was working on the same project—she

was that young woman sitting at the desk behind me in the photo shared earlier. Shannon, our only child, teaches sixth grade science and is assistant varsity basketball coach at his former high school. Our nine-year old grandson (Braden) excels as a student and in basketball and soccer.



Sonia and Kerry Celebrating His 72nd Birthday in Waikiki, Hawaii

Looking Back – In 1999, I had my first opportunity to attend an OHS Class of '63 class reunion. While I had my ups and downs during my years studying at Okemos High, I was struck in a very positive way about the beautiful building in which today's OHS students are blessed to have the opportunity to attend each day for their classes and extracurricular activities. Our Class of '63 was the last freshman class to start high school at the old OHS building at the corner of Okemos Road and Mt. Hope Road – and the first sophomore class to attend the new OHS campus-style facility further south on Okemos Road. Oh how I remember having to go from one class to another “across campus” in the middle of those cold and snowy Michigan winters.

Perhaps that experience toughened me up for the next five years of trudging across the Michigan State campus on any number of cold and snowy winter days. On another front, the diversity in caliber of teaching at OHS was a good training ground to prepare me to face similar diversity in teaching calibers at Michigan State and later at Iowa State. Indeed, eventually while a graduate student at Iowa State, I was able to raise that 3.2 GPA I had at Okemos up to nearly a 4.0 GPA at Iowa State. While I never really excelled in track or cross country (i.e., I wasn't the Chieftain's #1 runner – that accolade goes to classmates Jim Somers and Hans Wiegand), participating in those sports helped me to become more of competitor in my later professional life as well as improving my sense of the importance of being a “team player.”

Thus, on reflection, I owe much of the success I had in life to the various things I experienced at OHS. My years as a student and sometimes athlete at OHS led to graduating and further study at Michigan State and Iowa State, and this in turn to graduate degrees, travel to the developing world, and a lifelong career working in agricultural and rural development, always trying in my own small way to make this world a better place, especially for those who unfortunately yet live in poverty in the developing world.