

# One in a *Ver* Million Meet Rennae O'Connor

**By David Lias**  
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There perhaps is no one who knows her way around SESDAC, Inc. in Vermillion as well as Rennae O'Connor.

Rennae began her career there as a part-time work study student assisting in the case management area during her senior year in college. She graduated from USD with a degree in social work with a minor in special education in 1982.

During her 30 years of service at SESDAC, Inc., she has served as direct support professional,

residential, day services and vocational supervisor, service coordinator, and has twice served as interim executive director.

She is currently service director for the organization.

Rennae was honored May 22 for her years of caring service at SESDAC, Inc. She was presented the 2012 Community Health Service Award by the Dakota Hospital Foundation at the foundation's annual Community Leadership Dinner held at the Muenster University

Center on the USD campus.

Rennae is a guest lecturer at USD, and has worked with the faculty and students in the medical school, health sciences, social work, special education and dental hygiene departments. She provides students in these areas of study information about individuals with disabilities and their rights as citizens, students, consumers and patients.

She also serves on the advisory committee for the USD Social Work



Department.

Rennae is a member of St. Agnes Catholic Church in Vermillion and the Vermillion Rotary Club. She has served as president of the St. Agnes School Board, as a board member of the Rotary

Club and Vermillion High School Athletic Booster Club, and has been a member of the Vermillion Music Boosters.

Rennae's husband, Larry, of 29 years, is a fifth generation farmer.

Larry and Rennae have three adult children. Her hobbies include reading, traveling, sampling wine and spending time with her children and grandchild.

# Book tells harrowing tale of musician's spy mission

**By Travis Gulbrandson**  
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Along with the collection of Eddie Peabody's instruments, there is a new book at the National Music Museum that recounts one of the most exciting, dangerous moments in his career – which saw him acting as a U.S. spy in Nazi Germany.

Although George Peabody considers "Man

with the Banjo" a novel because there was no way to recreate conversations that took place, he said that "everything that is written there is true."

President Franklin D. Roosevelt had completed his first term in office before he began to receive disconcerting information about what was happening in Germany.

"Roosevelt was under-secretary of the Navy

during World War I," Peabody said. "He was very concerned, because those wolf packs were devastating in those days. He said, 'We need some on-the-ground intelligence. By the way, did you hear that guy Eddie

Peabody on the radio last night? Isn't he something? Do a background check on him.'"

When it was discovered that Peabody had served in the Navy during World War

I – including time on submarines – it was decided that he should be utilized in some way.

"(Eleanor Roosevelt) had a garden party," Peabody said. "They coerced my father into playing at the garden party, then they strong-armed him in the White House and said, 'We want you back serving your country.'"

Peabody was secretly commissioned as a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve in 1935 and received training over the next three years.

In 1938, he was scheduled for a European tour that included stops in Germany.

"He had a contact in Germany whose name was Greg Ziemer, who is really the hero of that story and many other stories that

were never told," Peabody said. "He was a professor at an American university in Berlin, but basically to the State Department, he was giving some very influential and highly-educated Jewish people out of Germany at the time.

"He was my father's contact, and sure enough, they found the Germans making a submarine in secret, floating it down the River Elbe, and my father got a photograph of it," Peabody said. "He got some photographs of some of the installations the Germans had built in Holland and Denmark, and he thought his job was over."

Then he received a call to play at a private party. For Adolf Hitler. And the rest of the higher-ups of the Third Reich.

"At the same time, no one knew how extensive the German intelligence network was in this country," Peabody said. "Sure enough, they had infiltrated the State Department and found a photograph of him in his uniform. That information they radioed from New York to Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. Those folks were analyzing what they were reading as

the plane was landing back in Berlin after my father had entertained Hitler, Goering, Himmler."

Fortunately, Ziemer had a contact in the Gestapo, who told him that the jig was up.

"My father had to get out on a fast car out of Berlin, through Germany into France on the rail system, into Spain with the Gestapo hot on his trail, finally making it to Gibraltar, where the Brits got him onto a submarine over to England," Peabody said.

Although he was proud of his service, Peabody said his father didn't discuss it, and he himself only learned much about it after reading "The Eddie Peabody Story," by Lowell Schreyer.

"My father kept no scrapbooks. He never looked back. He always looked forward," Peabody said. "Lowell did a remarkable job, a yeoman's job, 10 years of his life researching all this. Once I read his book, all those little snippets (of this I had heard) began to fall into place."

Peabody's novel, "Man with the Banjo," is available online and at the National Music Museum.

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Shiela R. Beermann, Vermillion School District Business Manager

May 22nd & May 29th