

Still Keeping The Beat

One Of The Greatest Generation Gives Yet Again (And His Story Becomes The Most Viewed NMM Facebook Post Ever)

VERMILLION — There wasn't a dry eye in the exhibit hall at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, on June 3, 2015, as 90-year-old World War II vet and life-long drum enthusiast Roger L. Kehm sat down to skillfully play, one last time, on his vintage 1942 Slingerland "Radio King" drum set, before donating it to the NMM.

It was an understandably emotional moment for Mr. Kehm. "This drum set was really special to me. I have so many great memories of playing," he said. Kehm has played since he was 17 (which would seem to confirm popular claims about drumming's long-term cardiovascular and intellectual benefits).

A Sioux Falls native, Kehm purchased his Radio King drum set from the John Sampson Drum shop in Sioux Falls before he graduated from high school in 1942. While anticipating being drafted, Kehm and some of his buddies organized a small dance band, playing for dances at the Sioux Falls USO. He also played with the Varsity Club dance band at South Dakota School of Agricultural and Mechan-



PHOTO: DARA LOHNES
Roger Kehm donating his beloved 1942 "Radio King" drum set to the National Music Museum, Vermillion

ical Arts (now South Dakota State University) in Brookings, before being drafted in 1943. Kehm served in the U.S. Coast Guard, stationed on the South Pacific islet of Atafu, working on the then-secret Loran (Long Range Aids to Navigation) program.

After the war, Kehm enrolled at the South Dakota

School of Mines, Rapid City, where he played with the Clyde Keyes Combo and the Sophisticated Swingsters. As a veteran, Kehm continued to play his drums professionally for several decades at American Legion Clubs, VFW halls, and other regional venues. He performed for many years with the Milt Askew Orches-

tra at the Arkota Ballroom in Sioux Falls.

Introduced between 1936 and 1937, the "Radio King" was Slingerland's flagship product. Unlike other drums of the era that were built with layers of wood, the "Radio King" sported drumshells made of steam-bent maple. Kehm's drum set includes a bass drum/footpedal/spurs, a snare drum, two cymbals, wood block, cow bells, two tom-toms and a Hi-Hat cymbal stand. The Radio King was Slingerland's most famous product line through the mid-1950s.

Until Labor Day 2015, Kehm's beloved rare drum set will be part of the World War II section of the NMM's special summer exhibit "Band Together: The American Soldiers' Musical Arsenal." After the exhibit comes down, the drum will take its place in the NMM's outstanding antique and vintage drum collection.

At press-release time, the NMM's post about Mr. Kehm's drum donation had surpassed 63,100 Facebook views.

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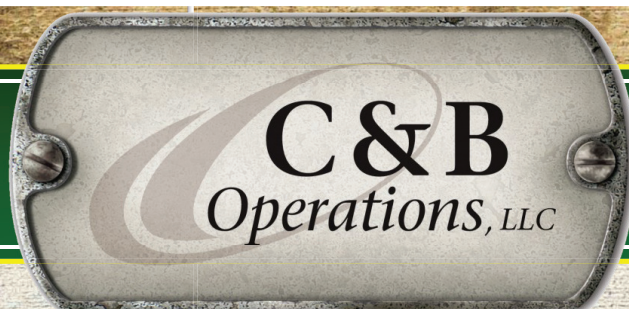
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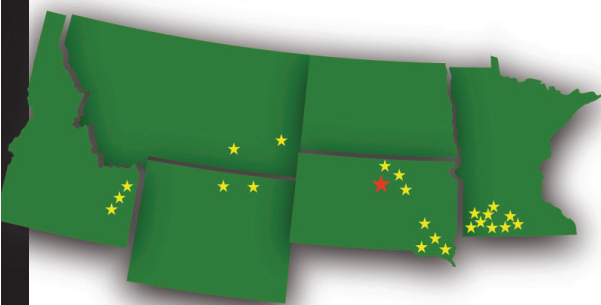
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