

Magnaghi Remembers John X. Jamrich

I arrived at Northern Michigan University in the fall of 1969 and had a front-row seat of the Jamrich administration. In later years I had the privilege of becoming his friend as University Historian. I will share some of my fond memories of him.

During World War II he was stationed in Fairbanks, Alaska as a meteorologist who provided weather information to Soviet pilots ferrying planes from Alaska to the battlefield in Europe. The Army used him for this position because as a youth, although born in Muskegon Heights, Michigan, he grew up in Slovakia and spoke Slovak, a Slavic language like Russian and could give the Soviet pilots technical weather information without use of a translator. In April 1945 Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, V.M. Molotov was flying to San Francisco, California for the first meeting of the United Nations and the signing of the UN Charter. Soviet weatherman told Molotov he would be delayed and couldn't make it to the meeting. Jamrich entered the scene and told the Soviets they had a short weather opportunity and Molotov arrived on time.

The "X" middle initial came about when he needed an initial when he signed up for the US Army. He took "X" as filler with no meaning or connection.

His use of bow ties started after military service. The one he wore, which he was very proud of, to all 45 commencements is in the collection of the Beaumier Heritage Center on campus. He amazingly appeared on campus twice that I know of out of a suit and bow tie. Once he was coming from a tennis match and needed to stop by his office and the other time he was in retirement when he came to campus in the summer.

John Jamrich loved music and was an excellent pianist. For a decade he played concerts five days a week, 11:30-12:20, in the lobby of the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida. He pointed out that he played more concerts than any other musician. Although arthritis brought regular piano playing to an end he continued to play until he was 99 in the rest home. I was a recipient of a special composition that he produced honoring my retirement in 2014.

On a personal note, when he heard we were running in Jacksonville in 2013, he provided me detailed, and I mean detailed weather reports, and even wrote a short song for Emily, my daughter, and I. He and June waited three hours in the cold for me to finish the race and then he invited me to their home for breakfast which he cooked.

It was an honor to be invited to write his biography, *John X. Jamrich: The Man and the University*. He played an important although at times a controversial role in developing the University campus following President Edgar Harden. Harden had been told by state legislators to either expand the campus and its community connection or close it. Jamrich continued to implement Harden's work of building the campus. Buildings went up but he also promoted programs. The Native American studies program was developed and he also funded the *Nishnawbe News* (1971-1983), and, at that time, was one of three national Native newspapers in the United States.

During his administration it was amazing the number of national leaders in a variety of fields who were given honorary degrees. Many of them were Native Americans and Black Americans.

Sometimes he would surprise you with his knowledge of campus life. When former President Gerald R. Ford came to campus, a group of us were waiting for breakfast. Suddenly President Jamrich turns to me as says “Dr. Magnaghi would you tell President Ford about the U.P.?” It was off-the-cuff and I filled in the five minutes without a problem.

After his retirement in 1983, he continued his love for Northern Michigan University. He continuously followed the events on campus.

It is interesting to note that over the years he retained at least one dislike. In one of the last e-mails I received from him in the fall of 2021 he rather boldly complained that the American Association of University Professors was holding up the completion of a contract and not acting in the best interest of the University. So, after some 56 years he still did not like the union and that was his closing remark.

It is little known that he was a religious man and regularly attended services at Messiah Lutheran Church. On a number of occasions that I know of, he intervened and helped faculty members that were having employment problems on campus. When we discussed this, he told me that he was following the golden rule to love your neighbor.

Around 2012 he was on-campus and visited me in my office. He was 92 and I asked him if he planned to come to the dedication of the new Jamrich Hall. He answered in a strong affirmative which surprised me. Then he continued he would be there in person or looking down from Park Cemetery.

For an interesting look into the life of John X. and June Jamrich, I invite you to go to Park Cemetery in Marquette, ask the sexton for the location, and check his rather unique grave stone of he and his wife.

A Moment in NMU History

*Dr. Russell Magnaghi Remembers
Dr. John X. Jamrich*

April 29, 2022

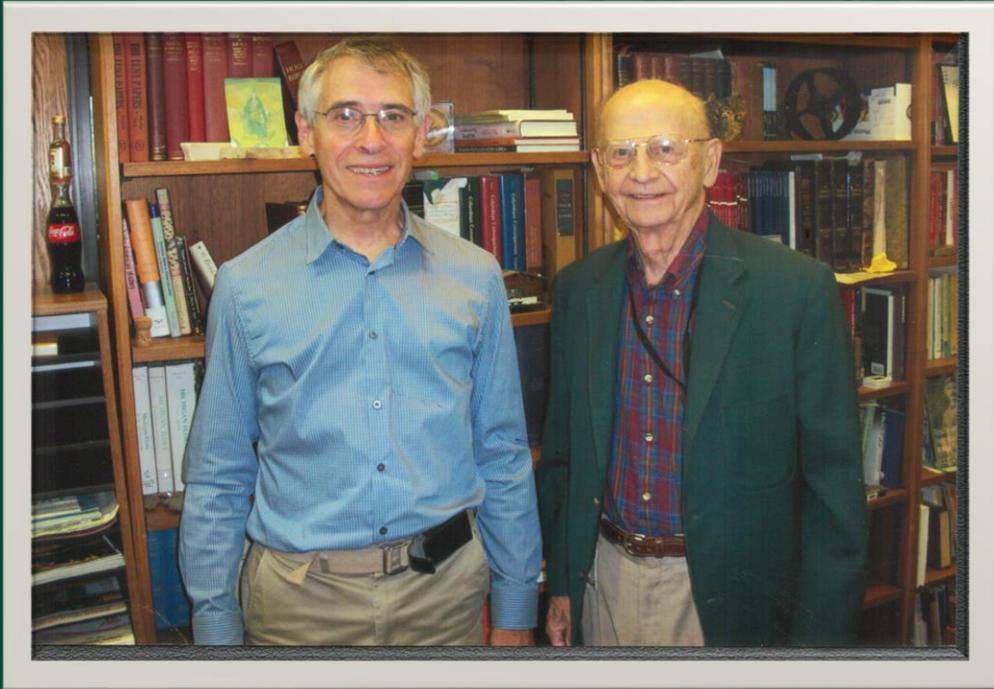




WILL DICKEY/The Times-Union

John Jamrich, 90, played his 1,000th one-hour recital at Mayo Clinic last month. He plays for patients three days a week.







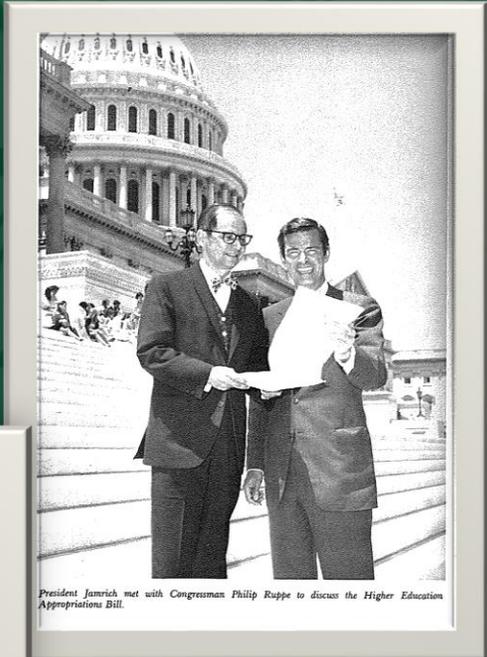
Upper Peninsula political figures pose with President Jamrich and Walter Drevdahl, Northern Board of Control member, during a budget request briefing. (From left) Senator Joseph Mack, Representative Russell Hellman, Mr. Drevdahl, Dr. Jamrich, Representative John Payant, Representative Dominic Jacobetti, and Representative Charles Varnum.



Dr. and Mrs. Jamrich chat with former Senator Eugene McCarthy during his speaking engagement at Northern.



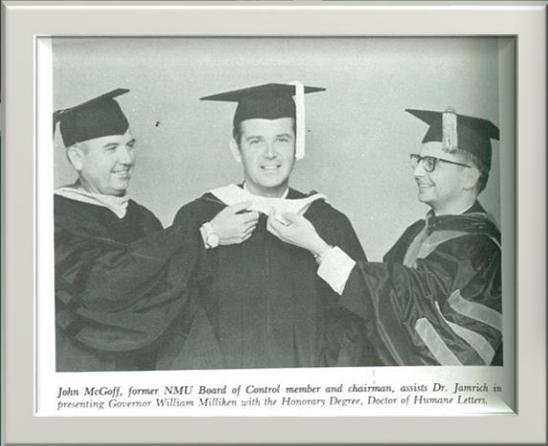
Mrs. G. Katherine Wright, Board of Control member (back to camera), Mrs. June Jamrich and Dr. Jamrich greet Governor William G. Milliken during one of his visits to Northern.



President Jamrich met with Congressman Philip Ruppe to discuss the Higher Education Appropriations Bill.



Representative Dominic Jacobetti (left) with former Senator Garland Lane, then Chairman of the Joint Capital Outlay Committee, and President Jamrich during a tour of campus.

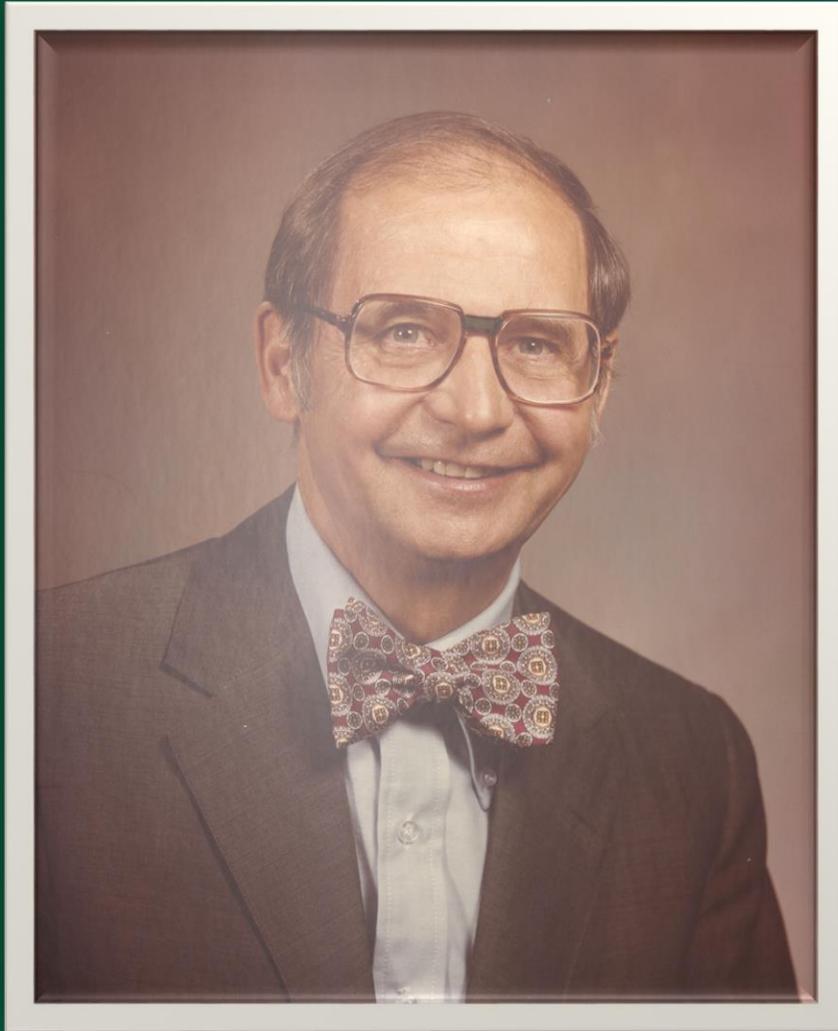


John McGoff, former NMU Board of Control member and chairman, assists Dr. Jamrich in presenting Governor William Milliken with the Honorary Degree, Doctor of Humane Letters.



To Dr. John Jamrich - with high
 esteem and warm personal regards.
 Mimi G. Milliken





John X. Jamrich
1920 – February 20, 2022

