

James Kemmerling was born in Monroe, Michigan to Del and Margene Kemmerling. He earned a B.A. Degree in Speech and Theatre from Adrian College in Michigan, an M.S. Degree in Theatre from Kansas State Teachers College, and the M.F.A. degree from the University of Southern Mississippi in Theatrical Scene and Light Design.

After teaching at the College of Emporia in Kansas for a couple of years, he joined the Theatre Faculty at WTAMU as Scene and Light Designer, Technical Director and professor in 1968 where he remained until his retirement in 2008. During his 40-year tenure at W.T., he designed over 200 set and light designs for the Branding Iron Theatre for plays, musicals, and, for many years, operas. For seven years, he served as Technical Director and Set Designer for “Texas” Musical Drama in Palo Duro Canyon, and later served as Light Designer for one year.

Throughout his design and teaching career, he won 9 design awards from the American College Theatre Festival. His set design for “The Homage that Follows” was staged at the Kennedy center in Washington D.C. in 1997. He was inducted into the BIT Hall of Fame at WT in 2010. He has a scholarship and classroom named in his honor at WT for the many years he contributed to the arts. In 2004, his theatrical art exhibit of his set and light designs was named one of the top ten exhibits in Amarillo and the Texas Panhandle.

It was during his earlier years teaching at WT that he met his wife, Sarah, who at the time was on the piano faculty at WT. They married on December 29, 1973, and he always said that he felt she was a “gift from God.”

He served as elder and deacon in the Presbyterian Church and was a member of the Downtown Kiwanis Club. At the time of his death, he and his wife were members of the First Presbyterian Church of Amarillo.

Survivors include his wife, Sarah; sister, Martha Sokolis; a brother-in-law, Frank Moore, and several nephews and nieces.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests memorials be made to the James D. Kemmerling Theatre Scholarship at WTAMU Art, Communication, and Theater Department, WTAMU Box 60747, Canyon, Texas, 79115; or The Alzheimer’s Association—P.O. Box 96011, Washington, DC 20090-6011.



Celebrating The Life Of



JAMES DELBERT KEMMERLING

November 29, 1941 ~ May 14, 2026