



## Donald L. Bemis

February 6, 1935 - February 13, 2024

Donald L. Bemis was born on February 6, 1935 in Detroit, Michigan. Donald was the son of John and Lucy Bemis and younger brother of Dorothy Scripter. He is survived by his children John Bemis (Michelle), Kathryn Bemis, Paul Bemis (Kristin), and Jennifer Bemis-Leathers (Michael) along with 13 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren.

Donald spent his life serving his community. He enlisted in the army and served during the Korean War repairing telephone lines in Germany. Once he came home, he continued his education and earned his bachelor's degree in Education from Wayne State University. Don married the love of his life Chelsie and started their life together in Warren, Michigan. He and Chelsie owned a women's dress shop and soon after was hired by Utica Community Schools. He began his teaching career at Sterling Junior High in 1960 teaching history and English. Furthering his education, he headed back to school earning his Masters in Educational Administration at the University of Michigan. This afforded him the opportunity to move into the role of counselor at the junior high, assistant superintendent of personnel, and finally named Superintendent of Utica Community Schools where he served for 18 years. During this time, Don and Chelsie raised four children: John, Kathryn, Paul and Jennifer. They loved their children dearly and they took great pride in raising them on Grant Park Blvd in Utica. Don loved helping people, but he particularly loved improving the lives of others. He put the community in Utica Community Schools. He blended education, business, and community service

into a seamless operation to improve the lives and education of all the children in UCS.

After 18 years as Superintendent of UCS, he was appointed Michigan State Superintendent of Public Instruction. After retiring from public service, he moved into the private sector as an investment banker. Don enjoyed working with communities to help them pass bond issues. His vast knowledge and innovative thinking helped to improve the lives of children in schools throughout the country.

To the outside world, he was "The Don," but to his family he was simply "Dad" and "Grandpa." While he had a passion for his community, nothing could surpass his love and commitment for his family. Don spent his later years travelling with his friends, visiting his children and grandchildren across the country, as well as attending many of his grandchildren's school events. He was an active member of Trinity Lutheran Church and a decades long member of the Trinity board of directors.

Don created a lasting legacy for his community and his family. He will be greatly missed, but his love lives on.

Visitation Sunday February 18th from 12:00p.m - 7:00 pm at the Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Home, 8459 Hall Road (3 Blks E. of Van Dyke)

Utica. Instate Monday February 19th from 10:00 am until the time of the Funeral Service 11:00 am at Trinity Lutheran Church, 45160 Van Dyke Ave, Utica. To watch a Don's funeral service live online please follow this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQL4-tdH2EI>

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Utica Community Schools Foundation, 7600 18 Mile Rd, Sterling Heights, MI 48314, or at <https://ucsfoundation.org/donations/>. Please leave a tribute or share a memory at [www.SullivanFuneralDirectors.com](http://www.SullivanFuneralDirectors.com)

# Cemetery Details

## Utica Cemetery

46325 Shelby Road  
Utica, MI 48317

# Previous Events

## Visitation

FEB 18. 12:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Wm Sullivan and Son Funeral Home  
8459 Hall Road  
Utica, MI 48317  
(586) 731-2411  
utica@sullivanfh.com  
<https://www.sullivanfuneraldirectors.com/>

## Instate

FEB 19. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Trinity Lutheran Church  
45160 Van Dyke  
Utica, MI 48317

## Funeral Services

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FEB **19**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Trinity Lutheran Church  
45160 Van Dyke  
Utica, MI 48317

# Tribute Wall

RN

“ He was a good union man that knew how to leverage that influence for the ends he desired.

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**R Paul Nordquist** - February 02, 2025 at 02:55 PM

MF

“ I just learned of Don's passing in Denise Elliot's Christmas card. Don was such a wonderful man and great leader. I learned so much from him...especially when I became state sup't after he served in that capacity. Condolences to the family...his true legacy.  
mike flanagan

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**Mike Flanagan** - December 18, 2024 at 03:58 PM

MW

“ Our family was next door neighbors when the Bemis family lived on Cadillac Street in Warren, MI in the 60's. Was this a 'car country' neighborhood? - you bet! The adjacent streets were Packard, Studebaker, and Dodge Ave. “Buddy” and “Aunt Lu” couldn't have been kinder and more concerned neighbors. They were the grandparents that everyone should have.

Ours were still In Germany. I remember when Aunt Lu got a new sewing machine that allowed her to embroider interesting designs. One Christmas, Aunt Lu gave us four kids baby red felt Christmas stockings that each held a candy cane ... one for each of us! With our names done with sewing machine embroidery on them. I still remember that to this day, and I was probably 8 or 9. They were the best neighbors, Buddy was always in his garage ... his “shop” and always had time for us kids to visit —

Don was already older and out of the house by then, he and his wife Chelsie would come to visit his Mom and Dad often and was always so nice to us, the 'kid' neighbors. He was 23 years older than me, but I remember he was always interested in what kids had to say. We lived at 8-1/2 mile ... he was all the way in Utica north of 20 mile. . Things changed after 1967 and Buddy and Aunt Lu then moved to Utica, and so did our family ... I attended several schools in the UCS system, graduating Eisenhower HS in 1975. I'm glad to see he was honored with a UCS school named after him ...Its a befitting honor for a man who cared about kids.

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Michael Wrusch - February 20, 2024 at 04:44 PM

LP

“ Mr. Bemis has been and always will be one of the names mentioned in our favorite memories (because of the friendship between our families over the past 60 years, as well as his legacy in our school district and community). Sending condolences and much love from our family to yours.

Love, Lisa (Smith) Prestininzi, Joan, Mark and Brad💙

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Lisa Prestininzi - February 18, 2024 at 08:14 PM

TG

“ *Don Bemis was a "man for all seasons" because of his ability to bring harmony and healing to discord. He believed in educational excellence for every student no matter what their career path. His legacy still benefits everyone! Tony Guzdial*

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**Tony Guzdial** - February 18, 2024 at 12:58 PM



“ *Crystal Cross Bouquet was purchased for the family of Donald L. Bemis.*



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February 18, 2024 at 10:22 AM

NM

“ Dear Mr. Bemis' family

*I'm Naofumi Matsuoka from Shiga, Japan. I worked at Henry Ford II High School as an exchange teacher in 1986-87.*

*The other day my friend told me Mr. Bemis had passed away. I feel so sorry and sad that I sincerely express my deepest regret.*

*If he had not been a superintendent then, I could not have come to UCS and not have met many wonderful people. I thank him for giving me a great chance, which brought me many unforgettable experiences and memories. He was so kind and friendly that he supported my life and teaching in Utica.*

*I learned a lot from his personality and his leadership.*

*About ten years ago, right after my retirement, when I visited my friends in Michigan, he came to see me again. He smiled and talked to me just like before.*

*I'll never forget `my great boss` and I miss him a lot.*

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**Naofumi Matsuoka** - February 18, 2024 at 08:55 AM

CA

“ *I recall meeting Don nearly 50 years ago at a grass roots residents' meeting to organize one of many successful millage campaigns during his tenure. He was a great leader and communicator, and a very warm sincere human being. He put kids first! He was the icon of UCS. His legacy will live on forever.*

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**Clark Andrews** - February 18, 2024 at 07:46 AM

MC

“ Don was instrumental in the development of a solid foundation of educational excellence and of financial stability with the passage of bond issues when he was superintendent of UCS. He left a great legacy for UCS to build upon and children today are still benefiting from his outstanding accomplishments. It was a pleasure to work with Don when I was a member of the UCS Board of Education.

Don was also instrumental in saving the historic Octagon House. He was an officer of the "Save the Octagon House" non-profit organization and had a crucial role in fund raising and securing a matching grant from the State of Michigan that enabled the Octagon House to be purchased. The house serves as an historical legacy in the community.

Don was a wonderful humanitarian. He cared greatly about all children and about providing them with an outstanding education. Don touched the lives of many people, helping them in many ways.

With deepest sympathy to the Bemis family,  
Marietta Crabtree

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**Marietta Crabtree** - February 18, 2024 at 05:56 AM

NR

“ On a rainy Thursday afternoon I received a call from some named don bemis who introduced himself as the personnel director of Utica community school..living in oak park and never new their was civilization east of Woodward said I don't know where it was...he asked me if I would like to interviewi for a job .. I said yes and how do u get there... he responded ..take 9 mile to van dyne and make a left. I drive and finally reached the board office located in some strip mall. ...filled out an application he interviewed me and on Saturday am received a call from a dr, uktri h to came to work Monday that was in the fall of 1969...years later I see don in the halls of Stevenson after he was no longer superintendent. And asked if my husband was still at Wayne state. And how were my twins? Every one including students knew who he was..don and Phil runkle. Put Utica on the map and you were proud to work there...after 38 years I saw many superintendent come and go ...none of them could hold a candle to don bemis..it was my honor to know him...my warmest condolences to his passing..he will be missed...natie reinstein

natie reinstein - February 17, 2024 at 02:54 PM

RP

“ One day when I was teaching Kindergarten at Auburshire, I saw Don at my door with that beautiful smile of his whenever he was around children. I asked him if he wanted to hear my children read to him. He came right in and sat down among my children and with that continuing smile, showed my children how special they were to be able to read. This is an example of how Don would show his love for others, making them feel so special. This love continued throughout his life as he served others. I felt honored to have been a teacher experiencing how he showed his love, not only for the students, but also for the teachers. Thank you, Don, for making me feel loved and important throughout the time I shared my career with you.  
Rose Pikor

Rose Chianetta Pikor - February 17, 2024 at 01:24 PM

AF

“ All our Love, Tom & Stacy Fields planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Donald L. Bemis.

All our Love, Tom & Stacy Fields - February 16, 2024 at 06:48 PM

AF

“ All our Love, Tom & Stacy Fields purchased the Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet for the family of Donald L. Bemis.



All our Love, Tom & Stacy Fields - February 16, 2024 at 06:48 PM

YF

“ Your Dohrn Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Donald L. Bemis.

Your Dohrn Family - February 16, 2024 at 04:35 PM

YF

“ Your Dohrn Family purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Donald L. Bemis.



Your Dohrn Family - February 16, 2024 at 04:35 PM

LF

“ We were so sad to hear of Don’s passing. Our prayers go out to the family that the Lord would hold and comfort them.

Don Bemis was always just the man who brought his kids over to “Grandma Lou’s” house which just happened to be next door to ours. “Grandma Lou” was his mother, Grandmother to his kids, adopted Grandmother for us. We had no idea that this would link our families with a lifelong friendship.

Even as he moved up in his career, he always made time to visit. He was always kind and interested in anything that we were doing, asking about our families and careers. He found dad a job after he had lost his and helped him out after our mother passed. He came to visit just a few weeks before our dad passed. Even though our dad had no idea he was there, Don stayed and talked to Dad and visited with us. It was such a beautiful and respectful gesture.

We thank the Lord for this very special man and family.

We pray the family finds comfort knowing they are all united once again in health and happiness!

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**Lysse Family** - February 16, 2024 at 02:49 PM

CH

“ Hugging him a week ago and saying "I love you" to one another is a comforting memory at the moment. He is and always will be a treasure.

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**Cory Hubbs** - February 16, 2024 at 12:00 PM

BK

“ I am greatly saddened to hear of Don's passing. He was a great educator and a wonderful mentor to so many. He never forgot a friend, and neither will I.

*Bruce Kefgen, Former Superintendent, East Detroit*

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**Bruce Kefgen** - February 16, 2024 at 11:52 AM

LP

“ *Laura & Vito Polizzi purchased the Beautiful Heart Bouquet for the family of Donald L. Bemis.*



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**Laura & Vito Polizzi** - February 16, 2024 at 10:54 AM

BH

“ *John, Paul, Jennifer and Kathryn and your entire family, I am so sorry to hear of your Father passing! I had the pleasure of being on the School Board for eleven years. Your father was instrumental in my running for the Board. I worked on the "Do It Renew It" millage campaign and have a wonderful picture of Don with my small son Mike and me.*

*Your Father was amazing! He was so kind, caring and loving and as you know he adored all children. If you were talking to Don, he had a hand on your shoulder or his arm around your shoulders. He made every person he met feel special. Don was Utica Community Schools and every child benefited from his time as Superintendent.*

*He was the best and I am privileged to have known him and Chelsie and to have worked with Don as a board member and with Chelsie as a Picture Lady. They made our schools better. Don enriched the education of each and every child in the district. He will be missed tremendously by so many of us who loved him, and I will never forget him!*

*Much Love to all of you!  
Becky Higbie*

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**Becky Higbie** - February 16, 2024 at 06:55 AM

CA

*Well said, Becky. I remember him putting his hand on my shoulder when talking to me. He was one of the best communicators I've ever met. And such a sincere genuine guy, despite all his accomplishments. He will be missed but his legacy will live on.*

Clark Andrews - February 18, 2024 at 07:40 AM



“ *Gracious Lavender Basket was purchased for the family of Donald L. Bemis.*



February 15, 2024 at 11:02 PM

CL

“ *We were so sorry to learn of Don's passing. He was a special man who served his state, city and community with dedication. He will be missed by so many, but he leaves a wonderful legacy of which his family can be proud.*

Cam Liebold - February 15, 2024 at 07:55 PM



“ *Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of Donald L. Bemis.*



February 15, 2024 at 07:48 PM



“ *Treasured Lilies Spray was purchased for the family of Donald L. Bemis.*



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February 15, 2024 at 07:21 PM



“ *My sister, Peggy Socha Upton, and I were UCS students from kindergarten through the 12th grade. Mr. Bemis was the force behind the great Utica school system! I have often told my husband that they need him back at the "helm". My husband and I were acquainted with your parents and grandmother as we are members of Trinity. The world has lost a great person! Rest in Peace, Mr. Bemis. Our deepest condolences to your family.*

*Vincent & Gail Socha Minauro*

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**Gail L. Minauro** - February 15, 2024 at 07:06 PM



“ *I met Don after I reunited with his cousin Michal Garrison. He was very grateful and generous to Michal when she helped out with Aunt Lou. I was honored to get to know him and have him speak at Michals memorial and the world has lost a great man.*

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**tim waller** - February 15, 2024 at 05:23 PM



“ 17 files added to the album Donald Bemis



Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors - February 15, 2024 at 04:31 PM



“ I have such fond memories of Don and growing up around the the whole Bemis family. Don leaves and incredible legacy and I am proud to have known him. One of my most grateful memories of Don was actually at my own fathers funeral, I had really wanted to speak at my dad's service but was too emotional that day to bring myself up to it. Don took up the mic and delivered an incredible tribute to my father. I was so thankful and honored. He will be missed.

David Rewalt - February 15, 2024 at 04:01 PM



“ When I was hired, Don Bemis was the Superintendent! Whether it was educational events or school related social events, he was active and always interested in improving education and the workplace! He was respected by the whole community! Definitely, a unique individual who understood the work ethic and encouraged all whose life he touched! RIP Don! You were one of a kind and will be sorely missed! In sympathy, Dr.Catherine Gillespie

Catherine Gillespie - February 15, 2024 at 03:40 PM

JB

“ 1 file added to the album Donald Bemis



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**Jennifer Bemis-Leathers** - February 15, 2024 at 03:00 PM

FS

“ *I was hired to teach at Eppler when Mr. Bemis was our super, and had the pleasure to work with both Paul and Jennifer while they were students there.*

*It was always enjoyable to speak to both Don and Chelsie when they would stop by, or to have a beer with Don at the Shamrock. What a great guy!*

*He will be missed. My condolences to his family.*

*Fred Strauss*

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**Fred Strauss** - February 15, 2024 at 02:55 PM

BL

“ †. *The Lozen family have great memories of Don and Chelsie. John Kathryn Paul and Jennifer, we are sorry for your loss and will for you and the Grand Children.*

*BERT LOZEN*

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**Bert Lozen** - February 15, 2024 at 01:55 PM

RF

“ Ray & Kelly Kramer and family purchased the Pr  
etty Please for the family of Donald L. Bemis.



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**Ray & Kelly Kramer and family** - February 15, 2024 at 01:28 PM

WF

“ With Love, The Heath Family purchased the End  
uring Grace for the family of Donald L. Bemis.



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**With Love, The Heath Family** - February 15, 2024 at 12:46 PM



“ Serene Reflections Bouquet was purchased for  
the family of Donald L. Bemis.



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February 15, 2024 at 11:25 AM

GF

“ Greg, Colleen & the Maloney Family planted a <a  
href="/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518">Memorial Tree</a> in  
honor of Donald L. Bemis.

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**Greg, Colleen & the Maloney Family** - February 15, 2024 at 11:25 AM

LF

“ I'm sorry for the loss of this wonderful man. Your dad and my dad worked closely together for many years and became friends. I had the pleasure to meet your dad on many occasions. Whether it was UCS related, at sporting events for his grandchildren, or even around town. He was a well loved man who loved his community! God Bless him.

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**Lisa Fromm** - February 15, 2024 at 11:01 AM

KP

“ The Mac Donald family would like to extend our condolences. We grew up with the Bemis family all through school! Mr and Mrs Bemis were like the President and First Lady to us. Thank you for your endless contributions to education and serving the future generations! Rest easy!

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**kelly postek** - February 15, 2024 at 10:42 AM

LF

“ Lysse family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Donald L. Bemis.

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**Lysse family** - February 15, 2024 at 10:17 AM



“ Ocean Breeze Spray was purchased for the family of Donald L. Bemis.



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February 15, 2024 at 10:17 AM



“ *Care and Compassion Spray was purchased for the family of Donald L. Bemis.*



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February 15, 2024 at 09:27 AM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Donald L. Bemis.*



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February 15, 2024 at 09:05 AM