



Don't Get Around Much Anymore?

July 16, 2014 by [David Williams](#)
Photography by Sarah Lemke

Peony Park closed 20 years ago. A wrecking ball followed shortly after to make way for a Hy-Vee grocery store.

Arlene and Dave Beber don't miss the roller coaster. And they don't much think about the cotton candy, arcades, and corn dogs. They do, however, long for the days of dancing under the stars at the park's alfresco band shell, The Royal Grove.

But it doesn't mean that the couple who have been married for 62 years have given up on cutting a rug. The pair dubbed "Fred and Ginger" for their dancing prowess can be spotted most every Monday night at the Ozone Lounge at Anthony's Steakhouse. That's when Mike Gurciullo and His Las Vegas Big Band hit the stage.



A recent visit to the Ozone found Dave and Arlene at their table, the one closest to stage right.

"Life is too short and too many people take it too seriously," Dave says.

"Dancing is a great way to lighten up, feel young, and have fun."

"We're here to dance," adds Arlene, "but there's more to it than that.

Everybody here, including the staff, is like family to us. The people are warm and welcoming."

Bandleader Mike Gurciullo is a virtuoso trumpet man who goes by the handle of Gooch. He's toured extensively, including, as his band's name suggests, gigs in Las Vegas. Gooch was also featured earlier this year in accompanying Kathy Tyree in her title role of Ella at the Omaha Community Playhouse.



“It’s great to see the same faces every week,” Gooch says. “It’s an honor to play for them. It’s almost a spiritual experience to be able to play here,” he adds, before also complimenting the staff of the club. “Everybody knows everybody. And Dave and Arlene are crowd favorites. They are an elegant couple and beautiful dancers.”

Gooch, who announces every song title played by his 16-piece band, engages the audience with more than just his tunes. A night at the Ozone is chock full of friendly banter from the stage. He addresses most of the dancers by name in his little asides, and even included a shout-out that night to the table known affectionately as “The Wine Ladies.”

While most of the crowd is middle-aged or well beyond—the Bebers politely demurred when asked how old they were—youth is also served on big band night.



Eric and Diana Powell, now of Lisle, Illinois, are 25-year-old Omaha natives who are self-described “band nerds.” They met in jazz band while at Millard West High School.

“I played keyboards,” Eric says, “and Diana played the trumpet,” just like Gooch.

“We love this music,” Diana adds. “We’d be here every Monday night if we could.”

The Bebers say they love all kinds of music. “Even Hip Hop,” says Dave before Arlene jumps in with “Polka? Not so much anymore.” And the Beber’s favorite dance number? “Oh, too many to mention,” Arlene says as Dave puts his two cents in by crooning the lyrics of Nat King Cole’s “Unforgettable.” Arlene nods in agreement. “At Last” [Etta James] is another one,” Arlene continues. “We have so many favorites. And we had so many favorite places to dance. Do you remember the Red Lion? Or the Leopard Lounge? And the Music Box?”

The lifelong Omahans who worked together in operating their own medical billing company while raising six boys were the first on the dance floor that recent Monday night as Gooch and his boys opened their first set with Duke Ellington’s “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore.”

But the irony of it all is that the Bebers still do get around. Quite a lot, as a matter of fact. The hopelessly romantic couple even return on occasion to the Royal Grove, or at least to the slab of parking lot concrete on the site where they danced so many nights away over the decades,

“We’ll park the car, roll down the windows, and turn up the radio,” Dave explains.

“And then we dance,” Arlene adds. “We don’t care who sees us or what they think. We get out of the car and dance right there in the parking lot.”



