

Al Levitt Tribute

By John Umhoefer, executive director, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association

If, at any point in your life, you had the fortune to know Al Levitt, then you knew every good thing there was to know about Al. Because I knew Al for 36 years and his qualities never wavered.

Al was a thinker. Many know him through the data analysis he excelled at in his work at *Dairy Foods* magazine, or working in consultancy with Jerry Dryer, or his own practice, or finally with U.S. Dairy Export Council. His skill with facts and data, and their intersection with forecasting and politics, merely reflected his natural curiosity and intelligence. The dairy industry was lucky to have that great mind.

Al was humble and fearless in his honesty. Al Levitt never offered conjecture on something he didn't understand. He didn't strive to be the most "important" man in the room, and as such, he often was the most important man in the room. Al explained the facts for what they were, not what people wished they were. This honesty, based in a deep understanding of his craft, is what people valued in Al.

Al loved family and friends above all else. I saw and heard him express his love for Angie and his children and grandchildren with passion reserved for nothing else. He was a loyal, patient and empathetic friend, kind enough to be the sort who would take up the conversation of our friendship like we had spoken the day before, even if I hadn't seen him in a year.

Al Levitt was funny. And while that doesn't help define his career in dairy, it does reveal his intelligence, his energetic soul and his desire to connect, every time, on a real, human level. Al didn't small talk. And there is nothing better than seeing an old friend and finding yourself laughing ten seconds after you start to talk.

Al Levitt could have taken his intellect, his skill with information, his rare ability to communicate clearly, and his devotion to facts into any number of successful careers. He gave his gifts to the dairy industry, and helped move it into a modern era of electronic markets, global product movement, intuitive databases and the intersection of food security and international politics. We lost a great man too early.