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Barnes to Receive National Dairy Shrine’s Pioneer Award

Five outstanding individuals are being honored with National Dairy Shrine’s Pioneer Award this year in recognition of their longtime service and contributions to the dairy cattle industry. The five join an elite group of industry leaders whose stories and portraits are part of Dairy Shrine’s National Dairy Hall of Fame and Museum in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

Dr. Michael A. Barnes of Blacksburg, Virginia, a longtime Dairy Science Department professor and dairy cattle judging team coach at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, is among this year’s Pioneer honorees.

Mike Barnes’s interest in dairy cattle was sparked when this small town boy went to work on a nearby Connecticut dairy farm as a teenager. After graduating with a degree in dairy science from the University of Connecticut in 1965, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and served his country in Vietnam. Upon returning home, he completed both Master’s and Ph.D. degrees in reproductive physiology at UConn. After running a dairy farm with a friend for a few years, he was recruited in 1978 by Clemson University as an Assistant Professor for their Dairy Science Department. In 1981, he moved to Virginia Tech where he was a highly regarded Dairy Science Department professor, advisor and judging team coach and later Professor Emeritus. Barnes retired in 2016 after 35 distinguished years at Virginia Tech.

One of Virginia Tech’s most effective and well-respected instructors, Barnes taught classes in dairy cattle selection, reproductive and lactation physiology, and reproductive management. He conducted research and wrote many scientific papers on the physiology of reproduction and lactation. His ability to teach both the “practical” and the “theory” earned him many outstanding teaching awards. In 1989, he received the prestigious William E. Wine Teaching Award, the highest teaching accolade given at Virginia Tech, regardless of discipline. He has also received the Purina Mills National Teaching Award and Virginia Tech’s Alumni Award for Excellence in Academic Advising.

Barnes, however, was more than a gifted teacher say his former students. “He was a highly effective academic advisor, judging coach and mentor that impacted decades of students who branched out into all corners of the dairy industry,” says Tom Harkenrider of ABS Global. Barnes served as an academic advisor to over 500 Virginia Tech Dairy Science students during his career. His “everyman” quality enabled him to “connect and motivate students from all backgrounds and ability levels and bring out the best in them as students and industry leaders,” says Douglas McCullough of Johnson & Johnson. “Dr. Barnes was universally revered by his students because he spent the time to understand each individual
and develop their own strengths and interests, while making it clear he wanted to graduate well-rounded adults” says Jacob Pieper of Phibro Animal Health. As Angie Coburn of AgSource Dairy says of her former teacher, “Dr. Barnes didn’t consider his job done until a student graduated WITH a job.”

Barnes spent over 40 years as a dairy cattle judging team coach, coaching teams at UConn, Clemson and Virginia Tech. He instilled in his teams not only the ability to evaluate animals, but to develop strong decision-making and communication skills. During Barnes’s years at Virginia Tech, he coached five National Champion judging teams (1984, 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2013) and three High Individuals (1991, 2005 and 2013).

Barnes’s unparalleled commitment to excellence, his unflinching honesty, humility, and great sense of humor made him popular among his students. He never hesitated, however, to have hard conversations with his students if he felt they weren’t delivering their best. In addition to coaching, he was also an advisor to Virginia Tech’s Dairy Science Club for over 20 years.

During his years at Virginia Tech, and now in retirement, Barnes has also done international dairy management consulting in South America, the Middle East, Europe and Japan.

Dr. Mike Barnes will be recognized with the Pioneer Award at the 2019 National Dairy Shrine Awards Banquet on Thursday, October 3rd in Madison, Wisconsin. For more information about the banquet, or the students, producers and dairy industry individuals being recognized by National Dairy Shrine, contact National Dairy Shrine’s office at info@dairyshrine.org. To learn more about Dairy Shrine and how to become a member, visit www.dairyshrine.org.

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Pictures of the honorees are available upon request by contacting info@dairyshrine.org.