

In Memoriam

Dr. Michael A. Barnes

Dr. Michael A. “Mike” Barnes, Blacksburg, Va., 79, longtime professor and dairy cattle judging team coach at Virginia Tech, passed away on October 10, 2021. Barnes also operated Bar-K Jerseys with his wife, Dr. Katharine Knowlton, and registered cattle with the BK prefix. He received the Pioneer Award from National Dairy Shrine in 2019.

Barnes was born on September 6, 1942. Though his impact on the dairy industry was immense, he did not grow up on a farm. Instead, interest in dairy cattle was sparked as a teenager when he worked for a nearby dairy farm.

Mike earned a dairy science degree from the University of Connecticut (UConn) in 1965 and then enlisted in the Marine Corps. After serving his country in Vietnam, he returned home, started a family, and earned advanced degrees in reproductive physiology at UConn. He moved his family to Lakeville, Conn., and, for several years, helped run a dairy farm with a friend.

In 1978, Dr. Barnes was recruited by Clemson University as an assistant professor in the dairy science department. In 1981, he joined the faculty at Virginia Tech, where he taught classes in dairy cattle selection, reproduction and lactation physiology, and reproductive management. During his career at Virginia Tech, he directly impacted more than 2,000 students. His unparalleled commitment to excellence, unrelenting honesty, candor, humility, and great sense of humor made him popular among students.

In 2016, after 35 years of distinguished service, Dr. Barnes was named Professor Emeritus. His ability to teach both “practical” and “theory” earned him numerous teaching awards, including the Alumni Award for Excellence in Academic Advising and the William E. Wine Teaching Award, the school’s highest honor for teachers.

Across four decades, Dr. Barnes coached dairy cattle judging teams at UConn, Clemson, and Virginia Tech, instilling not just the ability to evaluate animals, but to make wise decisions and communicate effectively. He coached five national champion teams and three high individuals. He also served as advisor to the Virginia Tech Dairy Science Club for more than 20 years.

He received the National Teaching Award from Purina Mills, the Student Affiliate Advisor Award from American Dairy Science Association, and the

Outstanding Alumni Award from the UConn College of Agriculture. He was a member of the American Jersey Cattle Association.

He loved his sons, dogs, and students who worked hard and showed up early. He rooted for the Boston Red Sox, UConn basketball, and for any team, really, whose coach was strong, student-oriented, and inclusive. Mike also loved good food, exercising, sailing, and flying.

Above all, Mike made you feel good when you were with him. He was tough, self-disciplined, and up by the bootstraps, but also encouraging. At every turn, he told people to “do good.”

In addition to his wife, Katharine, and son, Mike (Dianna), he is survived by a brother Peter (Linda); and two grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his parents, first wife, Carole, younger brother, Douglas, and son, Doug.

Memorials may be made to the Virginia Tech Foundation in support of the dairy judging team, the Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad, or the University of Connecticut 4-H Foundation.

Brenda Churchill Flint

Brenda Churchill Flint, Brookfield, Vt., 44, passed away doing what she loved—walking—on October 15, 2021, victim of a motor vehicle accident on a road near home.

She was born to Ray and Lora Churchill of Brookfield on July 1, 1977. She grew up on Sky View Farm LLC, a Registered Jersey dairy owned and operated by her family.

Brenda was a four-year member of the National Honor Society at Randolph Union High School and Randolph Area Vocational Center. She received a full-tuition scholarship to Vermont Technical College (VTC), earning an associate degree in business administration. She later received an undergraduate degree in business administration from Johnson State College.

She married Paul Flint in 2000 and gave birth to their daughter, Samantha, in 2005.

Brenda began her career as staff accountant for the civil engineering company Dubois and King. She held that position for 11 years and then assumed duties with the Vermont State Colleges System. She was director of business services and associate controller in the office of the chancellor for five years and staff accountant at VTC for eight years. Shortly before her passing, she had begun a new position as controller for VTC and the Community College of Vermont.

She served the town of Brookfield as auditor for six years and was just

beginning a two-year term as selectboard member of financial controls for the town.

In her spare time, she helped to operate Sky View Farm and a maple sugar business. She enjoyed running, walking, biking, and medaled competitions. Brenda loved working with numbers, believing spreadsheets were the answer to all things requiring organization. She was an avid fan for Duke basketball, the New England Patriots and Tom Brady, cheering him on despite his departure for Tampa Bay.

She donated blood to the Red Cross for 25 years and was an organ donor. She was truly happy, shining in the prime of her life.

In addition to her husband, daughter and parents, she is survived by an older sister, Amy Ferris, and younger sister, Tina Churchill; two brothers-in-law; four nieces or nephews; her grandfather, Kermit (Sandra) LaBounty; and many aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws and friends.

She was preceded in death by her maternal grandmother, Lois LaBounty, and paternal grandparents, Robert and Margaret Churchill.

Memorials may be made to The Brenda Churchill Flint Memorial Scholarship, Vermont Tech, Attn: Development & Alumni Relations Office, P.O. Box 500, Randolph Center, VT 05061, or The Red Cross.

Ela May Hebgen

Ela May Hebgen, De Forest, Wis., 12, passed away tragically on October 24, 2021.

She was born on May 14, 2009, to Adam and Nicki Hebgen, and spent much time at Kessenich Farms LLC in De Forest, owned and operated by her maternal grandparents, Jeff and Robin Krueger Kessenich, Aunt Natalie Kessenich, and Uncle Wade Kessenich.

Ela’s first love was her Jersey cattle—a passion she shared with her three sisters. She began showing at the age of two and exhibited cattle with her family at local, state, and national shows, earning many prizes on the tanbark trail. She earned awards in the Junior All-Wisconsin program and made purchases from the Pot O’Gold Sale. Ela was also very active in dairy judging, coached by her mom, the 2003 National Jersey Queen.

Ela was a beautiful, free-spirited girl, loved by all. She was the leader of any adventure and fearless at any task. She played softball, was a talented gymnast and enjoyed the out-of-doors with her sisters and cousins.

She shared a special bond with each of her siblings. Ela and Ava, being a year apart, were thick as thieves and shared a

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dream of winning competitions at World Dairy Expo. Recently, the two competed on the Columbia County team that won the type analysis questions portion of the state 4-H junior dairy judging contest in August. Ela and Ivy shared a love of gymnastics, competing on the same team and anticipating meets this winter. Ela was a patient, nurturing and kind older sister to Liv. She was the first of the three to hold Liv after she was born.

In addition to her parents, sisters, maternal grandparents and uncle, Wade (Jacey) Kessenich, and aunt, Natalie (Tanner Hughes) Kessenich, she is survived by her paternal grandparents, Pat and Diane Hebgen; uncles Josh (Holly) Hebgen and Zach (Ashley) Hebgen; and 10 cousins. She was preceded in death by her great-grandparents.

In lieu of flowers, donations will be used to create a fund for her sisters.

