

A Tribute To Professor Shaevel

Michael Lobb

Over Christmas break, the students, staff and faculty of the Hazleton campus experienced the loss of one of our most special professors; M. Leonard Shaevel, associate professor of Physics.

Professor Shaevel was a member of the faculty here at Hazleton since 1966 and has done more for the campus than any other single person. He was elected "Teacher of the Year" twice by the student body, in 1970 and 1977. In 1981, our university formally recognized his many achievements in the classroom by presenting him with the AMOCO Foundation Teaching Award. Probably one of Professor Shaevel's highest honors was the title of "Master Teacher".

Professor Shaevel not only taught Physics well, but he also had many other varied talents. He played the piano, and while in college, he played in bars to make money for school. He had a terrific sense of humor and a few years ago was a key figure in coming up with a show called "Comeriety" in which the faculty and staff spoofed themselves. The show which was done every year and stopped about five years ago, was presented again last spring. He thought he would try his hand at being an artist, so he started painting at the beginning of last summer.

He earned his bachelor of science and master of science degrees at Lowell Technical Institute (Mass.). He co-authored three widely-used textbooks and had designed

microcomputer programs to enhance classroom demonstrations. These teaching aids have been adapted throughout the Penn State campuses.

Here at Hazleton, he was in charge of the honors program. He created, co-authored, and co-produced a television quiz show called "Science Countdown" for high school students which aired for four years on Channel 44. A recent project of his was a series of programs to represent the concepts of Physics to elementary school students. He developed a program called "Color, Perception and Optical Illusion" for fifth graders and a second program, "The Physics Around Us" for sixth graders. Also Professor Shaevel was scheduled to appear before the January meeting of the American Association of Physics Teachers in New York City to present a paper on the Doppler Effect.

"Teachers must learn from their teaching," he said "and they can't be afraid to experiment." He believed that the teacher's enthusiasm - expressing a genuine concern for the student contributed most to the desire to learn. "Teachers can confuse enthusiasm with showmanship. There is a place in the classroom for the spectacular demonstration or the occasional joke, but we can't forget that we are educators and not entertainers."

I talked to four of the many close friends of Professor Shaevel here on campus and in doing so I realized just how much I missed

out by now knowing him better. Students were constantly going to him for advice and he always had time to listen. "Many times we would have coffee breaks," says Dr. Harriet Rudolph, who lives in the same apartment building as Professor Shaevel, "and the phone would ring and it would be a brother or friend of a student who he had wanted to talk about some kind of problem." He always had time for everyone. She remembers a time when "we were having coffee and a girl called about a problem or something and when she was finished, she wished him and I a Merry Christmas. He was Jewish. He never burdened others with his problems;

He only listened. "Once in a great while" Dr. Rudolph says he would break down and come to her. He also helped Dr. Rudolph in getting her first two articles published. Sometimes he would spend seven or eight hours looking them over. He never thought he was above anyone. He was the perfect gentleman. "He was old worldish in ways we think of as dating back to the early 1900's. He had a great respect for woman and he loved children."

Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to be taught by Professor Shaevel, where he was at his best. But, like all freshmen, I did have a chance to see him in action in the Summer Counseling and Orientation program. Upon leaving the session, I and everyone else there, left feeling very optimistic about coming to college. He had us psyched about coming to this campus, and filled with confidence that we had what it took to make it. He impressed upon everyone that we were going to come here and be successes, if we tried our best. Dr. Santulli remembers a time last year when the two of them spent two days looking for golf clubs. They went to Scranton, Wilkes Barre, and everywhere you could imagine to find these clubs. Finally, they found them in Herman's in the Lehigh Valley Mall. Professor Shaevel talked the salesman into giving the clubs to them for the sale price that was not going to take effect for two weeks! Then he talked him down even lower. Dr.

Santulli states that he was a "model for everyone on campus...He was an example of the best of what people can be and what this university represents."

I also talked with Dr. Staudenmeier, and he said that Professor Shaevel did so much that he "cannot be replaced by one man." He also told me that he remembers that Professor Shaevel was constantly being asked by many students to send letters of recommendation. "There were very little student, faculty or campus activities in general that he was not involved in."

When I asked Dr. Staudenmeier about the content of the "Comeriety" shows he replied, "Nothing on campus was sacred." According to Dr. Staudenmeier and his secretary, a few years ago Professor Shaevel started a dance band called "M. Lenny and the Shovels" which was going to perform in the Commons but somehow fell through.

Michelle Jais' fondest memories of Professor Shaevel were from the three to four months they would spend together in the summer counselling program. They spent afternoons putting the slide presentations together. She feels that his best at-

tribute was that he made one feel like he belonged no matter where he was. Also, that he always had time to help. "No matter who it was, whether a faculty member, staff member, student or perfect stranger, he would always make time to talk and help out." Mrs. Jais declared that he was a very obstinate man at times. "He loved a good argument." He was open-minded about some things, but he had certain beliefs and he stuck to them. One in particular that Mrs. Jais remembers was, "If a man and a woman reached a door at the same time, he would always make her go first. He was a true gentleman." She feels that the reason why he was in so many things was probably because "he could never say no."

To me, those five words sum up the man that was M. Leonard Shaevel. He was never too busy for anyone, to listen to their problem and help out, to write a letter of recommendation, to help a friend get an article published, to counsel a confused student, to go looking for golf clubs with a friend, to make a person feel extra special, or to just be there. He never said no. Dr. Rudolph said it best, "...that was a man with class."

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