

Joe Domecq Receives UDIM Excellence in Dairy Promotion Award

Dr. Joseph J. Domecq, coordinator of the Institute of Agricultural Technology Dairy Management Program and the State Extension Dairy Youth Specialist at Michigan State University (MSU), was recently named this year's winner of the United Dairy Industry of Michigan (UDIM) Excellence in Dairy Promotion Award. The award, sponsored by the UDIM Dairy Diplomats of Michigan, was presented at the annual UDIM Dairy Product Promotion Seminar February 15 in Lansing.

"They really surprised me with this award," Joe says of the annual award that recognizes a person's commitment and dedication to promoting dairy products and the dairy industry. "They even tricked me into getting me to this meeting."

Individuals considered for the award possess extensive dairy promotion accomplishments and perform volunteer service to the state's dairy industry and his/her local community.

In presenting the award, Sara Long, Clinton County dairy diplomat, said that Joe embraces and embodies what it means to promote the dairy industry, though his efforts extend far beyond what most define as typical dairy "promotion."

"Though product promotion is a key component of this person's activities, Joe focuses on the core of it all – the people," Sara says. "If we were to count each person, farm family and industry colleague that Joe has touched professionally or personally in the 17 years that he has called Michigan home, it would be an awesome task."

Joe was cited for his leadership involvement with Michigan Dairy Expo, the largest dairy event in the



Joe, middle, helps Levi Westendorp, son of MMPA members Doug and Louisa Westendorp measure a heifer during the Michigan 4-H Dairy Conference which was held in Sebawaing in late April. Looking on are MMPA members Eric and Darwin Sneller.

state, which includes opportunities for producers and more than 200 4-H members and other dairy youth from across Michigan. In addition to his faculty commitments in the MSU Department of Animal Science and the Institute of Agricultural Technology, he also coaches the Michigan 4-H, MSU Ag Tech and MSU collegiate dairy judging teams.

"This is a tremendous honor," Joe says. "But there are a lot of people – my wife, my parents, people at MSU – that helped form me into what I am and give me the opportunity to do what I do. It is not just me getting the award, it's them, too."

In his formative years, Joe thought he had it all planned out. He was going to farm with his father on the family farm in California or work for other dairy producers as a herd manager. His plans changed at

age 19 when he was badly hurt in a vehicle accident. After 9 months of hospitalization, he was finally able to come home only to discover his injuries were so bad that he could no longer physically do many of the jobs commonly found on dairy farms.

"Two things in life shaped me – everything that happened before I was hurt, and everything that happened after I got hurt," Joe says. "Being in the hospital all that time taught me patience, how to communicate and work with people because I depend and ultimately trust them in order for the simplest things in life."

As a result of the accident, Joe was left with several physical disabilities. Joe decided that he needed to develop his mind and utilize all the experiences he had before his accident; combined with the



Joe was presented with the UDIM Lifetime Achievement Award during the Dairy Diplomat Seminar in February.

things he learned recovering from the accident, to stay with the dairy industry he loved. Teaching seemed a natural fit. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Dairy Science from California Polytechnic State University, continued his education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and finally received his Doctorate at Michigan State University.

Those students who have taken Joe's classes, been involved with him through 4-H activities or MSU judging opportunities often refer to "Dr. Joe" as a friend and mentor – someone who cares and takes the extra effort to help a young person out.

"Since my junior year in high school Joe has been a great help in showing my potential and guiding me along my path in the dairy industry," says Ashley Messing, this year's Michigan Dairy Ambassador. "He is always there when I need to talk or when I have a question. No one is more deserving of this honor."

Joe recalls that the first time he met Ashley, he wondered if he would be able to get the shy high school junior off her family's dairy farm and into the Ag Tech dairy

program. Ashley remembers Joe's strong encouragement to attend MMPA's 4-H Milk Marketing Tour and taking the competitive test that could earn her a free trip to the National 4-H Dairy Conference.

"I told him I wasn't going to take the test because I had to be somewhere else early the morning of the test," Ashley says. "After much deliberation I agreed to take it. I won the trip to the National 4-H Dairy Conference and by the end of the conference I knew that the dairy industry was where I wanted to be."

Ashley is just one example of the hundreds of young people Joe has taken the time to encourage their involvement and excitement in the dairy industry. He says he loves to see his students excel and really gets "a charge" when he sees a student really comprehend why something happens.

"When a 4-H'er or student finally understands something they've seen on the farm, that is great," Joe says. "I love to see the light go on in their heads. It is great to watch a kid that started out in 4-H at 9 or 10 years old who is now graduating from Michigan State."

Joe's philosophy that everyone gets a chance, and sometimes multiple chances, have helped some less academically focused students become assets to their families and the dairy industry. He jokes that other educators give him flack that nearly every one gets a chance in the dairy

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portion of the Ag Tech program.

"Everybody deserves a chance," Joe says. "What you do with that chance is what makes a difference."

His willingness to give everyone a chance stemmed from a formative 4-H experience when, at 12 years old, Joe and several other dairy exhibitors were eliminated from a large 4-H showmanship class by a judge who closed the gate without even looking at the group Joe was in.

"From that point on, I swore that I would always give people the opportunity – the gate was never going to be closed without giving them a chance," Joe says.

In a day and time where people are mainly interested in their own agendas, "Dr. Joe" teaches everyone who meets him the importance of selflessness for others and great enthusiasm for the dairy industry. His academic accomplishments are many and his industry efforts impressive, but what really makes a difference to Joe and those who know him is his encouragement and dedication to the youth of the dairy industry.

"I believe the way you are going to effect change is to get the young people involved in the dairy industry," Joe says. "I think this is my calling – I get a charge out of watching other people excel and I really like what I do. This is what I set out to do so many years ago – educate people."