



WISCONSIN CHEESE MAKERS ASSOCIATION

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News Release

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WCMA Announces Nine Cheese Industry Leaders to be Recognized with Awards at 2021 CheeseExpo Global Online

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) Board of Directors has selected nine individuals to be recognized next year at CheeseExpo Global Online for their outstanding work in the dairy processing industry.

In 2021, Mark Schleitwiler will receive the Association's highest honor: the WCMA Life Member Award. WCMA has offered the Life Member Award since 1918, and Schleitwiler will be the 90th recipient. The award recognizes people who have played a significant role in the success of the Association through leadership, support, and service to the institution and its activities.

Mark Schleitwiler now serves as an industry consultant, most recently having worked as Director for Wohlt Cheese, now a division of Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery. From 1988-2017, he worked at BelGioioso Cheese, first as Operations Manager, then Vice President of Operations, Vice President of Finance, and finally as Vice President of External Relations. He launched his career as an accountant and administrator at Churny Company, a cheese manufacturer and importer.

Schleitwiler is a longtime and active member of WCMA, having served several terms on the Association's Board of Directors, including as President from 2010-2012 and as Treasurer from 2009-10. Mark also participates in WCMA's Technology and Policy Committees and continues to support WCMA outreach efforts.

John Jeter and Don Menzner will be recognized as the 2021 WCMA Cheese Industry Champions, awards that are given to industry leaders who, through their everyday business decisions, have created tremendous opportunity for others.

John Jeter served as CEO of Hilmar Cheese Company for 31 years. From his start in 1984, Hilmar Cheese grew exponentially, with Jeter focusing on research, the latest technology, and staff excellence. Before his retirement in 2015, Jeter completed construction of a second production plant in Texas, and established Hilmar Cheese as a major dairy exporter.



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Don Menzner joined Marathon Cheese Corporation in 1960 as a packaging line worker, later advancing to the position of Director of Purchasing. By the early 1980s, Menzner became Vice President of Operations. In 1990, he was named President, and in 1996 accepted the position of CEO. He also served as a Board Member for the National Cheese Institute and National Cheese Exchange. Before his retirement from Marathon Cheese Corporation in 2001, Menzner received the National Cheese Institute Laureate Award. Menzner is credited with innovative cheese shredding and packaging methods that transformed the way cheese was sold throughout the country.

The WCMA Distinguished Service Award, reserved for respected and highly-valued supplier partners to the cheese manufacturing industry, is unique in that the Association allows members to vote on prospective honorees. Craig Linz and Jerry Lippert have been selected for the honor in 2021.

Prior to his passing in July 2020, Craig Linz was known and respected across the dairy industry for his service and integrity. Linz served the industry in numerous roles, while rising through the ranks at Tetra Pak Inc., and its predecessors Carlisle Process Systems and Scherping Systems. Linz served four years as a member on the WCMA Board of Directors, and was active in the WCMA Recognition and Contest Committees. Linz earned the Eggebrecht Award in 2020 for his service to WCMA's Championship Cheese Contests.

Jerry Lippert started his 17-year career in paper distribution with roles including sales and purchasing and general management with Great Northern Nekoosa Corporation and Georgia Pacific. Since 1992, Lippert has held several important roles with Nelson-Jameson, Inc. before becoming President in 2002. Lippert continues to focus on growing Nelson-Jameson, and mentoring the next generation of leadership. Lippert is an active member of the WCMA Recognition Committee.

The WCMA Babcock Award, named for Stephen Babcock, the famed agricultural chemist and University of Wisconsin professor, recognizes the contributions of those in education or affiliate organizations partnering with cheesemakers in the pursuit of dairy industry innovation and excellence, and will be given to Dr. Bob Cropp and Marianne Smukowski in 2021.

Dr. Bob Cropp is a Professor Emeritus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. Prior to retirement, Dr. Cropp was the Dairy Marketing and Policy Extension Specialist and Director of the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, and has been with the University of Wisconsin System since August 1966. While retired, he remains active in dairy marketing, dairy policy and cooperative issues.



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Marianne Smukowski worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Land O'Lakes, Inc. before creating her own unique position at the Center for Dairy Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she was Dairy Safety and Quality Coordinator. A guardian of food safety and quality for the dairy industry, Smukowski worked with producers in Wisconsin and beyond. She is also the technical adviser for the Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker program, and the 2019-20 President of the American Cheese Society. Smukowski has also served as a judge for the WCMA World and U.S. Championship Cheese Contests.

The WCMA Vanguard Award is intended to recognize cheesemakers or cheese manufacturing employees whose work helped to blaze new trails in dairy operations. In 2021, this award will be given to Steve Buholzer and Ray Palubicki.

Third-generation cheesemaker Steve Buholzer grew up at Klondike Cheese Company. Along with his brothers Ron and Dave, Buholzer took over the family business in 1972. Buholzer is a Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker, with certifications in feta and muenster. He is credited with bringing Klondike Cheese Company to new levels with state-of-the-art equipment, specially crafted recipes and by honoring the great traditions of cheesemaking.

Ray Palubicki started working in the cheese industry as a teenager in 1950. Less than a decade later, he became the head cheesemaker at the Outagamie Producers Cooperative. Palubicki served as Production Manager from 1967-1990, and as Plant Manager until his retirement in 1999. In addition to creating several award-winning cheese recipes, Palubicki led his plant through an acquisition by Alto Dairy, and transitioned it to fully automated cheddar cheese production, the first facility of its kind in the Midwest.

Awards will be presented to honorees at CheeseExpo Global Online in April 2021. 2020 honorees will also be recognized at this time. For more information and to register to attend CheeseExpo Global Online, please visit CheeseExpoGO.org.

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