

Phil Magee tribute:

I honestly cannot recall when I first met Phil – it seems like we were friends forever. I imagine it was at an MDL Scientific Advisor's meeting, or as John Block described, at a QSAR Gordon Conference. When I first moved to the Bay Area to work at MDL, there was keen interest in QSAR and modeling; MDL was marketing Hopfinger's Chemlab, Jur's ADAPT, and Allinger's MM2 programs, and we were "ooh'ing and aah'ing" at the first raster displays of molecules on Envision terminals. PC's and even SGI's were just twinkles in designers' eyes. Yet, as impressive as molecular graphics and sophisticated data displays eventually became, Phil always remained resolutely unimpressed. It was not because he was old-fashioned (he had a computer lab with a Linux and three PC machines networked) – rather it was because he knew that the best answers to QSAR problems lay in understanding mechanism and reactivity – no doubt a legacy of his study under Saul Winstein.

Phil was both a valued colleague and a trusted friend. Traditional QSAR analysis was always his deepest interest – he felt you could always learn something from it. The industry moved on to molecular modeling and dynamics, and interest at MDL moved the company into chemical information management, but I could always find a comfortable QSAR problem waiting for me at Phil's on the weekend. That and a nice bottle of Rasmussen Petit Syrah – Phil and his wife Zee were the consummate hosts for any occasion. Those times are gone, but fondly remembered.

After he retired from Chevron, Phil's life became more hectic than ever. He started his own consulting and education business (BioSAR), worked as a chemist and consultant for Bay Area pharmaceutical firms, took an academic appointment in Dermatology at UCSF, and assumed an adjunct appointment at OSU School of Pharmacy. He was still going strong, publishing and presenting regularly and attending QSAR and ACS meetings, when he suffered his stroke six years ago. With the same dogged resolve that had built his life and career, Phil analyzed, then tackled his new situation, convinced that he would not become a burden to his family and friends. John mentioned that he had to relearn reading – from scratch; his four year-old grandson was his tutor. Phil often remarked that he liked FarSide cartoons the best, because if he laughed, he knew he had read it correctly. I doubt that many of us could have bounced back from such a life-changing event as that stroke, as Phil did – it was the biggest miracle, and the most inspiring example I have ever witnessed.

In the end, brain cancer claimed Phil. He was grateful to the finish that he could retain his dignity and most of all, his mind. I was thankful that almost to the day he died, we could walk out and sit on the porch behind his house, look out on the broad waterway that his home overlooks, and watch the shadow of the setting sun creep out along the lawn. I feel that Phil cast a similar shadow over all those who knew and respected him, and will always remember him.

Doug Henry, PhD