

Remembering Bill Keene

Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division (PHD) lost a dear friend and inimitable colleague on December 1, 2013. Bill Keene, PhD, MPH, an epidemiologist in the division's Acute and Communicable Disease Prevention section for 23 years, died after a brief illness. His work in foodborne illness investigations was known and respected internationally as well as in our community.



Bill was a Seattle native who graduated from Yale and the University of California-Berkeley. He contributed mightily to public health in Oregon, nationally, and even internationally. He investigated and published the first outbreaks of *E. coli* O157 infection associated with swimming and with consumption of contaminated deer meat. He pioneered novel methods of solving foodborne outbreaks, including development and refinement of Oregon's so-called "shotgun" questionnaire, novel uses of the binomial statistic, and database development. These methods were instrumental in solving other outbreaks, including a raw milk-associated outbreak of *E. coli* O157 infection and salmonellosis associated with contamination of the outsides of milk cartons.

Bill was a recognized authority during discussions of multi-state foodborne outbreaks and contributed to the solution of many of them. He was instrumental in the development of guidelines for outbreak investigations published by the Council of State & Territorial Epidemiologists. In addition to investigating foodborne outbreaks, Bill made notable contributions in investigating waterborne cryptosporidiosis, outbreaks associated with petting zoos and an outbreak of external ear infections following ear piercing. His sense of public health history led him to create a little "Outbreak Museum" within the confines of his office, memorializing famous disease outbreaks with products implicated over the past two decades.

Bill's work was anything but commonplace: it was beautiful. Shortly after his arrival at PHD he became editor of the CD Summary, the public health newsletter sent biweekly to licensed physicians and other interested parties in Oregon. He completely reformatted it, added a conversational tone sprinkled with literary references and dry humor, and made it PHD's banner publication.

Bill held himself as well as others to high standards. He had an eagle eye for unsupported assertions, faulty reasoning, vague recommendations, even trivial mistakes in punctuation. He had a habit of stating the truth as he saw it, often bluntly, whether it was welcome or not. But Bill was also tremendously personable. He was ever-available and he shared his expertise with numerous epidemiologists. He seemed always to have a hot pot of tea ready for a visitor. He hosted at his home irregular meetings of the "Portland Film Society," inviting all who were interested to view a film and share each other's company. He was known to loan his car and his home to visitors from out of state.

"Bill exemplified determination and stamina when he investigated outbreaks. He made Oregon a healthier place to live," says Lillian Shirley, director of PHD. "Our outbreak investigations will stand on his shoulders as we continue the excellent work he pioneered."

In April, 2014, Bill Keene was posthumously awarded the 2014 NSF Food Safety Leadership Lifetime Achievement Award by NSF International.