WISCONSIN MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME

2005

Elmer Fechner
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For nearly four decades, Elmer Fechner served and promoted the Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors, guiding it to the forefront of state processing associations nationwide. Fechner was born in 1898 in Merrill, Wis. During World War I, he served in the U. S. Army, including a campaign in France. After being discharged from the army, Fechner attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in business administration. Fechner grew up working alongside his father and other family members in the family business: a meat market and sausage operation in Merrill. In the 1940s he took over the sausage operation, added a locker plant and called the business Fechner’s Food Products.

In 1947, at the annual meeting of the Wisconsin Frozen Food Locker Association, which later became the Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors (WAMP), Fechner was voted a director of the association. He served in that capacity until 1951, when he was elected president. In 1953 he became Association Executive Secretary, serving in that position until 1984. Fechner’s leadership, organization and enthusiasm helped contribute to the organization’s success. Jim Hewitt, appointed Executive Secretary of WAMP in 1984, said, “Fechner was really the person most responsible for the growth of our association and instrumental in developing many of our state laws pertaining to the meat industry.” Fechner also served as the editor of “News and Views,” the WAMP newsletter, a position he held for decades. Fechner reported not only on meat industry issues but also on societal issues as well. Fechner borrowed a motto from Goethe and had it printed on the letterhead of the newsletter, where it remains to this day. It reads: “There is nothing more frightening than ignorance in action.” Fechner was a well-read man and strove to keep the WAMP membership informed on a variety of issues.

Fechner was not afraid to use the newsletter as a forum for politics. When he retired in 1984, Bob Bray, his successor as WAMP newsletter editor, said, “Somehow I don’t have the knack that he did for getting after our politicians. He really raked them over the coals—especially those having reputations as big spenders.”

Fechner was active in the community, serving as a city alderman and county supervisor, and on the boards of the American Legion and Trinity Lutheran Church. In 1983 WAMP established a scholarship fund in his honor for the meat technology program at the Southwest Wisconsin Vocational Technical Institute in Fennimore. In 1983 at its annual convention in Portland, Ore., the American Association of Meat Processors conferred on him the Honorary Lifetime Member award for his 35 years of service to the industry. Fechner was married to his high school sweetheart, Margaret, who he originally met in first grade. She not only worked with him in the plant, but was a key element of all the administrative work done to put on a major association convention. They have four children: Elmer James, William, Marjorie and John. Fechner died in 1991 at the age of 93.

Elmer Fechner was a Wisconsin meat processor who for four decades provided dedicated service to the smaller-scale processing industry of Wisconsin and to the Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors, as association director, president, executive secretary and newsletter editor. Much of the growth and success of the association during that time can be attributed to this man. For those very significant contributions, Elmer Fechner is highly deserving of induction into the Wisconsin Meat Industry Hall of Fame.