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2005 Alma Mater Award

Vince Zehren '48

Cheese. If you're from Wisconsin or if you've lived here more than a week, you have to eat cheese; in fact, you have to love cheese! No one has done more for us cheese lovers than this year's Alma Mater Award recipient, Vince Zehren.

From the time he was a little boy, his family moved from one cheese factory to another. This provided his natural instinct for cheesemaking and, through an academic career in biochemistry and food science, to a career with Schreiber Foods. Vince has devoted his talent and expertise to giving us the finest of cheese products.

When Vince was 13, he had his first job working with cheese in his dad's White Lily Factory near Clintonville. At 19, he was a sophomore at St. Norbert College when WWII began. From December 4, 1942, to January 2, 1946, Vince, like so many other young men then, served in the Army. Assigned to the 328th Regimental Antitank Company of the 26th Infantry Division in General Patton's 3rd Army (the Yankee Division), Vince was in combat in the Battles of Northern France: Ardennes (the Battle of the Bulge), Rhineland and Central Europe. In all, Vince was in combat for 222 days. For his service, he earned numerous awards and medals, including four Bronze Battle Stars and a Purple Heart.

After that, it was cheesemaking again with his father until he returned to St. Norbert College in fall 1946. There, under the tutelage of Fr. Peter Pritzl, he completed his B.A. with a major in chemistry. In his last semester as a senior, Vince was asked by Fr. Pritzl to teach the qualitative analysis course—most of his students were only a year or two younger than Vince! Fr. Anselm Keefe asked Vince to be editor of the 50th anniversary edition of the College's yearbook; it subsequently became an award-winning yearbook. Vince was honored while in college by inclusion in Who's Who Among Students in American Universities, 1947-1948. Of his years at SNC, Vince said, "One of the best decisions of my life was to be a student at St. Norbert. I got a good education, and the teachers and priests were terrific. I had a bunch of pretty bright-eyed classmates, too."

Vince went on to earn an M.S., in Dairy Industry (1950), and a Ph.D. in Food Science and Biochemistry (1954) from The University of Wisconsin-Madison. Vince took a "year out" in 1952-53 as he received a Fulbright Research Scholarship to study at Massey Agricultural College of the University of New Zealand. A mere 44 years later, Vince earned a M.S. in Business Administration from Kentucky Western University. His time as a graduate student in Madison will always remain special to Vince, for it was there that he and a fellow Ph.D. student,

Virginia Mularz, met; following his return from New Zealand they were married.

Vince's long career with Schreiber Foods, the largest private dairy company in the world, began in November 1954, when he was named Technical Director, an assignment that included quality control, manufacturing methods, regulations, research and development. Later (1974-85), he was to serve as Director of Manufacturing Processes, Vice President of Industrial Affairs (1985-89), and a Director of the company. When Mr. Schreiber sold his company in 1962, Vince became one of 13 employee-owners.

In 1992, Vince and David Nusbaum, a founder of Schreibers, wrote and published a classic book in the cheese industry: Process Cheese. Earlier, in 1976, Vince wrote a technical manual for the Uruguayan cheese industry. He also spent considerable time in Uruguay, helping its dairy industry to modernize and upgrade their product quality and facilities. For 10 years, Vince was research chairman for the National Cheese Institute, which provided major policy recommendations to serve the cheese industry of the United States. Locally, he served as chairman of the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce biotechnology subcommittee for Advance, the Chamber's economic development arm.

Vince's achievements and contributions haven't gone unrecognized. In 1977, he became the first recipient of St. Norbert College's Distinguished Achievement Award in Natural Sciences. In 1986, Schreiber Foods established the Vincent L. Zehren Award for Excellence in Applied Technology; Vince was its first recipient. And, in 1989, the National Cheese Institute honored him as the first recipient of its Laureate Award. He also received an award in 1986 from the Green Bay Chamber of Commerce for his "Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture in Brown County." In 1989, he was an "Honored Member" of Who's Who in U.S. Executives. The United States Information Agency honored him in 1997 for his training the Russian Dairy Products Delegation to Wisconsin. He has also been included in the American Catholic Who's Who.

As his late wife, Virginia (the "star of his life"), and their six children would attest, Vince has had a great life, a great career – and, he is certainly a great recipient of St. Norbert College's Alma Mater Award.

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