

CAROL LATTA, Executive Director, Decision Sciences Institute

### *Darl Bien, 1940-2004* **An Engaged Humanist**

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ON JULY 6TH, just six days before his 64th birthday, Darl Bien passed away. The University of Denver lost a valuable teacher-scholar, the field of decision sciences lost a dedicated researcher, and the world lost an engaged humanist.

Darl Bien was a renaissance scholar. His education was rooted in the rigors of mathematics, operations research, and theoretical statistics, but his heart was deeply devoted to the humanity of mankind. Born in rural South Dakota, he was a citizen of the world, equally comfortable in Colorado, Denmark, Macedonia, Virgin Islands, England, and Thailand.

On his birthday, Darl was scheduled to be in Bangkok, Thailand, to present the findings of his long-term, persistent research on HIV at the 15th International AIDS Conference. He always kept a promise. But this time, cancer had got the better of him. He had devoted his life to making a difference in the lives of others. His teaching, research, service—everything he did, was aimed at improving the lot of humanity. The experience of life was precious to him. He was passionate about teaching and learning, and about traveling as he taught and learned. But when not thus engaged, he jogged, exercised, and most of all, enjoyed the company of his son, Erik, daughter, Christa Milby, and his delightful grandson, Ian Milby—his connection to the future.

Darl Bien taught at the University of Denver for 30 years. During my years there I learned much from him about being a teacher. He had a special way about it. While learning from

him the technicalities of statistics and operations research, his students also learned the skills and the willingness of mind to give of themselves to the society. As their teacher, Darl lived what he taught.

He visited Thailand for the first time about 16 years ago. At the time there were only five known cases of HIV in that country. But he recognized within months that the number of cases was increasing rapidly. He began a sustained investigation of the processes of HIV/AIDS transmission, treatment, and prevention. His objective was to develop a methodology for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of alternative medical therapies for preventing transmission of HIV from mother to child, and through this methodology to help choose among alternatives that vary both in effectiveness and cost of delivery.

Not one to do things half-way, Darl learned Thai. Over the next 15 years he visited Thailand seven times and became known for his work on HIV/AIDS. He discovered that the anti-retroviral combination drug therapy had some disturbing potential side effects. The therapy could disrupt patients' metabolism and result in simultaneous fat gain and lean muscle loss. All this he brought to his students. He made it a point of bringing real-life learning to them.

This July, in Bangkok, Darl was to present his work on mathematical models to track the transmission of AIDS from mothers to their infants, and on a cost-benefit analysis of a screening and treatment program. He had been helping the Thai Red Cross Foundation with their AIDS project, and had designed a system to collect data on approximately 4,000 HIV-positive patients.

None who knew Darl were surprised by the conviction with which he took to improving the lot of Thai women and children plagued by HIV. "He was passionate about helping people," says his son, Erik. He had a long history of community-oriented pursuits. In 1962, he took his B.S. cum laude, in mathematics and physics from Huron College, and joined the NASA Lewis Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio. There he worked on minimizing launch weight for space exploration. From the beginning he dreamed of applying statistics to the benefit of humanity.

He once explained, "I wanted to develop earth-bound applications for what we were doing in space, and I learned that statistical analysis can shed light on almost any social problem. Statistics translate data into information, and information is actionable." He lived his entire life by that code. He went on to study statistics at Case Western Reserve University, earning his Ph.D. in 1970. Informed by his experiences at NASA, his dissertation sought to optimize redundancy. Subsequently, he looked to optimize the trade-offs between reliability and cost. This set the stage for his work on AIDS in Thailand.

Before taking up with his studies on AIDS, Darl had already committed himself to working with the other AIDS—the American Institute of Decision Sciences, the precursor of the Decision Sciences Institute. He was the technical editor of *Decision Sciences* from 1975 to 1977. "Darl reviewed, evaluated and proofed every mathematical equation we published during his three-year tour," said James Sorensen,

NAMES IN NEWS, see page 42

"clinical" faculty and possibly faculty from non-business disciplines.

The task force also sees the business world changing more rapidly than our business curricula and pedagogical approaches. They find curricula to be too "siloeed," where business issues tend to be cross-functional. Among other suggestions, the report calls for more attention to current, practical business issues in our curricula, better use of technology to enhance pedagogy, and more cross-disciplinary programs.

The Decision Sciences Institute has been a leader in addressing many of the issues that the AACSB report raises. A cross-functional or cross-disciplinary orientation is really a part of how the Institute has defined itself. Innovation in pedagogy and in curricula has been a key focus of the organization since its inception. We were one of the first professional associations in business to publish a journal specifically oriented toward educational innovation, and sharing of best practices and instructional innovation have been a prominent part of our annual meetings for many years. The Institute also has a long record of promoting doctoral education and development of new faculty.

I think many of the ideas that the AACSB task force is promoting are well aligned with the Institute's goals and objectives. There are also, however, a number of specific ideas that are a bit more radical and deserve further critical evaluation and debate. I encourage you to take a look at the report and start a conversation with your colleagues about its ideas.

### Planning for Boston in November

We're at that point in late summer when many of us are thinking about our travel plans for the annual meeting in November. As I mentioned in my last "President's Letter," Ken Kendall and his Program Committee have generated a great deal of enthusiasm for the Boston meeting. With the large number of submissions, we have a full four-day schedule. As you prepare to make your travel plans, please take time to check out the preliminary program, which you can access through the DSI home page. There are sessions scheduled from early Saturday morning through late Tuesday afternoon. Please make your plans so that you can participate in the entire program.

Also, as you plan your trip to Boston, I want to encourage you to make reservations at the conference hotel, the Boston Marriott Copley Place. Staying at the conference hotel is the most convenient option for meeting and networking with colleagues at the conference, and it also helps defray the cost of the conference. At each of the hotels where we hold the annual meeting, we make a "room-night guarantee" to the hotel. In exchange for hotel room rentals, the hotel will make meeting rooms, audio-visual equipment, refreshment breaks, and various other amenities available at reduced cost or no cost to the Institute. If we are unable to meet our guarantee, the hotel will add charges that, depending on how far we miss our guarantee, can run into tens of thousands of dollars. The Institute has negotiated very competitive rates at the Marriott, so please, plan to attend the annual meeting in Boston, and plan to stay at the conference hotel. I look forward to seeing you there!

*Web link:* AACSB's Management Education Task Force "Management Education at Risk," [www.aacsb.edu/metf](http://www.aacsb.edu/metf) ■

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### NAMES IN NEWS, from page 21

the editor of the journal during these years. "We never had to print a retraction or correction when Darl was our technical editor!"

"Darl was a decision scientist," Sorensen continued. "He approached his work and his play as a series of decisions. He was one of the best scholars our journal has ever seen." Darl remained thoroughly engaged with DSI, and regularly attended international, national, and Western meetings. He brought many qualities to our Institute: a sage mentor, a colleague, a teacher's teacher, a gentleman professor, and a loyal friend.

A special memorial service was held on the campus of the University of

Denver on July 17, with hundreds in attendance. The theme of the service was "Honor . . . Courage . . . Commitment," the motto of the U.S. Naval Academy, where Darl began his undergraduate education, and so appropriate to Darl's entire being. His family and dozens of his friends and colleagues spoke at the service about the special ways in which Darl had touched their lives.

We will not see Darl's smiling charismatic face anymore or hear his calming voice. At the University of Denver, the gym will seem empty without him. His friends at the Thai Red Cross AIDS Research Center will wonder how to proceed with the evaluation of the anti-retroviral combination drug therapy

without Darl's advice. His collaborators engaged in summer research at the Southern Denmark Business School in Sonderborg will miss his mentoring. At the Decision Sciences Institute, his absence will leave a void in the hearts of all those who were enriched by his association.

Darl Bien, farewell dear friend! ■

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