

# Obituaries

## Delos A. Eilers 1941–2015



**D**el was born on August 10, 1941 in Marshalltown, Iowa. He graduated from Dubuque Senior High School in 1959.

Del graduated from Iowa State University in May of 1963 with a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering. He married Karen Shahan on June 27, 1964. He has three daughters: Kathryn Eilers, Elizabeth Cronin, and Margaret Eilers. He has six grandchildren: Nicole Cronin, Marinna Smallidge, Matthew Cronin, AJ Cronin, Kyra Smallidge and Elijah Butwinick. A wonderful, quiet, gentle person where family was as important as his work at 3M.

Del began working for 3M shortly after graduating from Iowa State. Del spent his entire career there. He worked almost exclusively as a technical service engineer where he always felt he represented the customer inside 3M. He grew in his position in Technical Service for magnetic tape, advancing from engineer through manager to senior specialist.

During his tenure he was involved with nearly every audio recording tape developed

and released by 3M from 1963 onward. He worked directly with customers to both understand the customer needs and to investigate problems uncovered by the customer. In 1986 Del received a platinum record for Boston's *Third Stage* album. He was thanked in other record liner notes as well.

Del was a highly professional, carefully deliberate individual, except for possibly one time as related by Aaron Berg from 3M's sales staff: "I will always cherish the time Del and I were visiting Bruce Swedien, (Michael Jackson's engineer and producer), at Record One Studios. We were talking with Bruce about the new 996 tape that Del developed. All of the sudden, Michael Jackson walked into the control room and Bruce introduced Del and me (I had met Jackson previously). Del was very calm and professional, saying hello to Michael. At the end of our meeting, Del and I headed out the front door, and just as the door closed, Del went NUTS! Swinging his arms and saying, "O-M-G, that was Michael Jackson! I can't believe it! My daughter is going to kill me!" This very calm, gentle and professional technical engineer completely lost it in the parking lot and I could not stop beaming for the rest of our visit together. I still smile whenever I think about Del meeting Michael Jackson."

Del retired from 3M in 2001. In retirement, he contributed to the AES Historical Committee website with a complete sum-

mary of the 3M audio tape products, in the "Canonical Tables of 3M Audio Open Reel Tape Types, with Technical Data"; and he and his wife completed and published Charlie Alden's book *Magnetic Media Maker* highlighting the first four decades of 3M's magnetic media history. The book is available for purchase from Karen Eilers <karenmeilers@embarqmail.com>. Karen and the family will forward information via email on how to obtain a copy.

Del's crowning achievement came in 1990 when his own research yielded the oxide and the chemistry which produced the 996 family of tapes: (996, 997, 986, 987, 908, 909). The need for these tapes was twofold. First was to produce a tape that was bias and equalization compatible with previous formulas, yet yielded higher output. Second was changing the chemistry to eliminate the possibility of "sticky shed syndrome." He led the team that developed the baking process. This allowed tapes with "sticky shed" to be baked, to a specific formula. The process permitted these "sticky shed" tapes to be played back normally on tape machines. The 996 family of tapes manufactured by 3M (now 25 years later) have yet to exhibit any evidence of "sticky shed."

Few people knew more about audio recording tape, its manufacture, and use than Del. He was a giant in his field.

Bill Lund  
3M audio technical service engineer (ret)