

Michael Distaso Memorial Fund

by Rick Marshall

The MTA is pleased to announce a new direction for the Michael Distaso Memorial Fund, organized in 1990 in memory of this outstanding international leader in M Technology.

About Michael

Michael was instrumental in the creation and development of the VA's groundbreaking national computer system, DHCP (the Decentralized Hospital Computer Program). He began working with DHCP back in 1979 during the days of the VA Underground, when DHCP's development was hidden from VA computer systems management, which sought its destruction. With his brilliant exuberance and fierce loyalty, Michael gradually became a DHCP design and implementation guru known especially for his work as a Radiology developer, FileMan programmer, MTA Board member, teacher, and passionate advocate for DHCP.

But those of us who knew Michael well remember him best for who he was. Michael packed more intensity into every moment than anyone we have ever known, and his enthusiasm seemed to spill over into everyone he touched. He would have made a fine Shakespearean character, with the vitality and wit of Falstaff joined to Hamlet's relentless sense of purpose. Whether throwing ice cubes during a staff meeting, raging against shortsightedness during a technical meeting, or gently reassuring a worried programmer while he fixed a FileMan bug,

his uncompromising authenticity may have meant even more to DHCP's success than all his technical achievements put together.

About the Fund

On November 26, 1989, Michael and his partner Keith Orner (of InterSystems Corporation) died in a hiking accident at the Point Reyes National Seashore in California. The loss of Michael to the M language and community cannot be measured, and the subsequent outpouring of grief on the VA's Forum email system led to the creation of this fund, to which so many people have contributed over the years.

Together, we can keep Michael's dream alive: to foster continuing advancements in M and FileMan. For several years, the Fund supported an annual student competition for innovative research in M. We now plan to use the Fund to promote research with FileMan.

If you would like to donate to the Fund, please send a check, payable to the Michael Distaso Memorial Fund, to the M Technology Association, Suite 205, 1738 Elton Road, Silver Spring, MD, 20903-1725. Donors will be listed in M Computing.

Most recently, contributions were received from Kirt Walker of Kirt Walker & Associates and Marianne Follingstad of MF Enterprises. **M**

Rick Marshall is a Hardhat (www.hardhats.org) and member of the MTA Board of Directors; he works for the VA Medical Center in Seattle.

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