

Innovation Valley (www.ivalley.org)

Valley Will Miss Innovator from Golden Age

"I really wish we still lived in the golden age of old school engineering. Those guys rocked out loud."

John Michitson

The Merrimack Valley lost an innovator with the passing of my father, Arthur Michitson, who died on August 9th in his hometown of Haverhill after a bout with cancer. He was an innovator in industry, in his community and in his family life.

This is the story about an ordinary person with an extraordinary desire to impact all facets of his life with an innovative spirit and gobs of tenacity. While Frank Sinatra sang "My Way," Arthur Michitson actually did it his way. His wife, Demetra, who Arthur boasted was "the best thing that ever happened to me," contends that he was so ordinary that he was outstanding.



Arthur Michitson

After serving his country during WW II in the Philippines and other places until 1945, he graduated from Northeastern University with a mechanical engineering degree in 1950. Arthur was employed as a mechanical engineer at RCA in Burlington, Mass. for over 20 years. His most notable accomplishment was his contribution to the design, development and testing of the Apollo 11 moon rocket for the

lunar excursion module (LEM) that enabled the first humans to land on the moon and return home safely. A friend of mine at work spent considerable time Googling to find an old NASA test report on the LEM. After reading it, he said: "I really wish we still lived in the golden age of old school engineering. Those guys rocked out loud." The report is located at www.ivalley.org.

This was not merely the design of an iPod to lure consumers, but a breakthrough scientific endeavor to stretch our understanding of and penetration into the great unknown, space, with human lives on the line. The whole world was watching and holding its breath on July 21, 1969 when the first astronaut set foot on the moon. Meanwhile, in an ordinary single-story ranch on 47 Lackey Street in Haverhill, there was a huge sigh of relief that the mission was completed successfully and all of the astronauts returned safely.

Back on the home front in the 1970s, Arthur was trying to take one small step to initiate one giant leap for his community. He was one of the first activists to recognize a negative trend in public education performance in the 1970s. He was an outspoken advocate for higher standards in public education and better management techniques that

he coined "quality control," to try to help students with poor academic results so that they would not fall through the cracks.

He proposed that teachers, administrators, parents and students work together to identify common problems across classrooms and school districts, as well as individual student challenges, and to seek and apply solutions. He referred to the groups as "quality circles," an analogy to the industry best practice at the time that was leveraged to land the first human on the moon. In the 21st century, they call this collaboration and every public and private organization in the world is trying to leverage the collaborative Internet for better results. He was a firm believer that throwing money at the problem alone would not reverse the trend. Better approaches were needed.

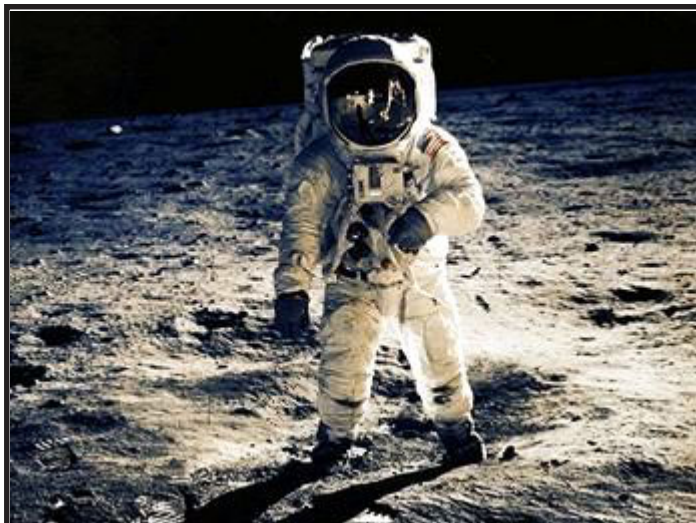
Arthur also suggested that the collaborative teams with the best results be recognized and rewarded for their contributions. This view, along with his recommendation of leveraging "quality control" techniques to help improve student performance, were and are still major points of contention with many educators and school committees. Arthur, who was a Greek from the old school, never shied away from his position or conflict with educators, school committees, or with anyone on any topic for that matter.

Arthur was a doer. He didn't allow the contentious issues to dent his primary mission, to help students. Recently, state Representative Brian Dempsey recalled Arthur's candid participation in the state's education reform hearings that took place in the early 1990s that led to higher standards

for public schools in Massachusetts. What is still missing is the safety net for the less fortunate (i.e., quality control), collaborative problem solving (i.e., team approach) and success recognition and reward. Public school systems generate scores of test data, but new ways of applying the information may lead to better results. Unfortunately, today's remaining limitations are mired in a bureaucracy that too few are willing to challenge.

Arthur also became a teacher; he worked at Minuteman Vo-Tech in Lexington and Whittier

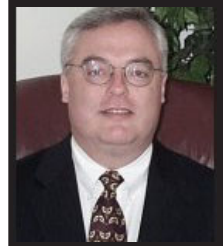
Vo-Tech in Haverhill. He also served a short term on the Whittier Vo-Tech's School Committee. Arthur participated in Northeastern University's outreach program that shared best practices in math and science with public schools and he often participated in the Nettle Middle School's annual science fair. My father and I initiated a "one-on-one" homework help program at the Haverhill Boy's Club, and together we founded Danny's Friends mentoring program for Haverhill's youth, which is in its 12th year and is being capably run by Children's Friend, Inc.



Photograph above is Astronaut Buzz Aldrin, Lunar Module pilot, on the lunar surface by Astronaut Neil A. Armstrong, commander of the Apollo 11 mission, 1969. (www.NASA.gov)



Seth Itzkan is president of Planet-TECH Associates, a consulting agency identifying innovations in economic development. Recently, Mr. Itzkan helped The Boston Foundation to conceptualize and implement its Hub of Innovations tool. You can email him at seth.itzkan@gmail.com.



John Michitson served as a Haverhill city councilor for 10 years; the last two as president. He is a manager and electrical engineer at the MITRE Corporation in Bedford, Mass. John and his wife, Heidi, are enjoying the childhood of their 4-year-old daughter and 6 year-old son. jmichitson@mva.net.

The Innovation Valley initiative seeks to help stimulate economic growth and quality-of-life enhancements in the Merrimack Valley. Every month we will report on innovative businesses, practices, and ideas that are helping to make Merrimack Valley the place to be. Look for our article in print media and online at www.ivalley.org.

Arthur continued to innovate on behalf of his community. While in his seventies, he and his best friend, Edmond Daly (they graduated from Haverhill High School together), organized the Haverhill Taxpayer's Association to oversee the city tax structure on behalf of residential homeowners, including seniors on a fixed income.

Early on, Arthur went door to door and recruited several hundred members. In recent years, Arthur and Ed would carry the load and call upon a couple of dozen long term members when they needed support. As always, Arthur and Ed would not shy away from the contentious issues, such as tax overrides and tax classification, which occasionally pitted them against their son and daughter respectively, who served on the City Council together.

Arthur demonstrated his innovative spirit for his family. It was crucial because it underscored the importance and value of a sound education for his two sons, my brother Jim and I. Arthur and our mother worked hard to finance our college educations, so that we would have a solid foundation for our futures.

They also emphasized the need to participate in our community. Jim is a chemist for the city and is Haverhill's first emergency management director, which is a very serious matter in the 21st century. He is very innovative in trying to meet critical safety needs with few resources.

Due in large part to my top campaign helper, my father, I had the honor to serve on the Haverhill City Council for 10 years, including my last two years as president. It is also no surprise that my current job in electrical engineering for the MITRE Corporation is to help extend the Internet to space using future satellite networking technology.

It is an honor and privilege that Arthur Michitson is my Dad. We miss him every day.

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