**Pioneer Award: Michael Late Benedum**

“The Great Wildcatter”

(July 16, 1869 – July 30, 1959)

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***“Michael Benedum started in the oil business at the age of 20 with $500 in cash and a million dollars’ worth of nerve.”*** – TIME Magazine, 1948.

Michael Late Benedum, namesake of the AAPL’s own Michael Late Benedum Chapter (“MLBC”), was born to humble beginnings in Bridgeport, West Virginia on July 16, 1869. As a young adult, Mr. Benedum worked at various local flour mills and also in sales. At age 20, Mr. Benedum had a chance encounter with John Worthington, Superintendent of the South Penn Oil Company, during an early morning train ride through the hills of West Virginia. This casual conversation led to an on-the-spot job offer for Mr. Benedum to work as a landman for the South Penn Oil Company - and changed the trajectory of his life dramatically.

Mr. Benedum rapidly found success with South Penn and later branched out to form the Benedum–Trees Oil Company with Joseph Trees, who would become his lifelong business partner, on September 17, 1900. In 1907, Mr. Benedum moved his offices to what is now known as the Benedum-Trees Building in downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There, his oil and gas empire continued to flourish with oil fields developed across the United States and beyond. He drilled his first well in the Cow Run Sands of West Virginia and made his first big oil strike in Illinois. He proved the Louisiana Caddo field, discovered Colombia’s “Tropical” field, was the first to probe Romania’s Ploesti fields and is also credited with finds in Canada and the Philippines. In Texas, he discovered or developed the Desdemona, Big Lake, Yates, East White Point, Susan Peak and Benavides. In fact, the pioneering vision which conceived the possibilities of the Permian was Michael Benedum. In 1950, the Texas Railroad Commission named a field 50 miles southeast of Midland, the Benedum Oil Field, in his honor.

Mr. Benedum developed companies and corporate holdings including Transcontinental Oil Co. (1919), Plymouth Oil Co. (1923), Hiawatha Oil and Gas Co. (1926), Big Lake Oilfield, (1926) and Bentex Oil Corp. (1936). His storage, transportation, marketing, refining, and conservation practices led to the Interstate Oil Compact Commission in 1933. His businesses were so successful that he even appeared in Fortune Magazine’s list of wealthiest Americans during his time. Mr. Benedum never retired and reportedly worked seven days a week late into his life.

Mr. Benedum’s philanthropic endeavors are perhaps equally impressive as his professional accomplishments. He always retained an affinity for his hometown of Bridgeport, West Virginia. He was responsible for the restoration and beautification of the Bridgeport Cemeteries, constructed a Methodist Church, which is known as one of the most beautiful stone churches in the country and had a Civic Center constructed for the citizens of his hometown, located at the site of the home where he was born and raised. In 1944, Mr. Benedum and his wife Sarah established the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, a memorial to his only child who died in 1918 at age 20, for the purpose of grantmaking focused in West Virginia and Pittsburgh, their native and adopted homes. The Foundation, headquartered in the Benedum-Trees Building in Pittsburgh, funds education, economic and community development efforts. To date, the Foundation has authorized grants totaling over $410 million dollars.

The greatest wildcatter of them all, Michael Late Benedum, died on July 30, 1959 at age 90. Mr. Benedum’s Last Will and Testament, written just two years before his death, perhaps best summaries the reflections of the man himself, his thoughts on his incredible life and his intention in giving back to his community. “Life has been sweet to me…sweet in the loved ones that have been mine, sweet in the friends who have surrounded me & rewarding in the opportunities that have come my way. I could not leave this earth with any degree of happiness and satisfaction if I felt that I had not tried to bring some of these joys to those less fortunate than I have been.” *Excerpt from the Fifth Codicil to the Last Will and Testament of Michael L. Benedum.*