When Dr. John Scott Dailey departed this world on May 21, 2003, he had succeeded. Scott – as he was called by those close to him – wore so many hats and touched so many lives during his 68 years, it is impossible to say where he had the greatest impact. For our Florida cities and hundreds of municipal officials, Scott was a visionary problem-solver and innovative leader who advanced municipal governments and our ideas. And yet, he was so much more – he was our friend.

From 1981 until his death, he served as executive director of the Florida Institute of Government (IOG), which recently was renamed the John Scott Dailey Florida Institute of Government. The IOG is a state-funded agency that provides research, training and technical assistance to local governments. It was in this professional capacity that we came to know him best. Throughout the years, Scott developed and monitored hundreds of research and training projects that addressed the needs of local governments. Among his many heralded municipal projects was his leadership in the development of Scott’s greatest accomplishments. “In a professional way, I am most proud of the FACC model certification program, that the IOG developed and coordinated over the past two decades, and what it has meant to the professionalism of city clerks throughout the state,” he said in an interview given shortly before his death.

“He continuously went to bat for us and loved us without complaint until the very end. He often said that we were his favorites. He was our biggest champion, our mentor and...
our best friend,” said Sandra Woodall, MMC, city clerk of Dunedin.

“I am also proud to have been involved in the development of such a close and professional working relationship with what I think is the leading statewide association, not only in Florida but abroad, in the Florida League of Cities,” Dailey added.

And the League cherished its relationship with Scott and the Institute. “Under the leadership of Dr. Dailey, the Institute of Government has helped several thousand municipal officials improve the quality of life for their citizens,” said Mike Sittig, League executive director. “He was a wonderful person, a huge supporter of the League and its people... and he was a great public servant. He is already missed.”

These sentiments are shared by a myriad of city officials. “Scott Dailey was intellectual, kind, courageous and funny. He excelled in his professional, political and family life, and I am honored to have been his friend,” said Scott Maddox, a past League president who currently serves as chairman of the Florida Democratic Party.

“No one loved life more than Scott, nor lived it better or more fully. He always came with a smile and left with laughter ringing around him. His combination of intellect, wit and good will is seldom seen – and will be greatly missed,” said Tallahassee City Commissioner Debbie Lightsey.

Scott Dailey’s intellect and humor were legendary, and both were most evident when he led meetings during Tiger Bay. The Capital Tiger Bay Club – a political club – is well known in the Tallahassee community for its irreverent and humorous introductions of political speakers. Scott served as club president and board chairman in the early 1990s, and he continued to have a hand in all club affairs during subsequent years.

He could always be counted on to offer witty phrases, stories and gags. “I can’t tell you how many times it was his jokes that made me look good,” said Janet Hinkle, the current Tiger Bay president. “Scott was a master of intelligent humor, and he was such a mentor to me in so many ways and had such an impact on my level of confidence. I really loved that man.”

Among Tiger Bay favorites was a witty and humorous exchange delivered in a skit titled the “Great Barnac” (a take-off on the old Johnny Carson character the Great Carnac) with long-time friend Charlie Barnes, executive director of the Seminole Boosters. “Scott Dailey was the funniest Democrat I know,” said Barnes. “More’s the pity; politicians should never be taken seriously, and Scott Dailey was one of the last, best defenses against encroaching grayness.”

The following “letter to the editor” was written by Raymond C. Sittig, League executive director emeritus, following Scott Dailey’s decision to drop out of the race for reelection to the Leon County School Board. It was published in the Tallahassee Democrat, on September 25, 2002.

Scott Dailey: A Class Act on the School Board and in Life

Every once in a while, perhaps once or twice in a lifetime, a person comes along who has all the attributes of an outstanding leader, a person of intellectual integrity, a sincere and dedicated sense of public service, an obvious and willing desire to earnestly promote all the beauty of nature and the good side of all human endeavors. This person also has an unshakable moral character, a vision of achievable goals, the talent to promote that vision and, most of all, a sparkling sense of humor to help us all get past our own many shortcomings.

Until another such person comes along, we are fortunate to have Scott Dailey.

He is a class act. We will miss him on the School Board. We look forward to his ongoing contributions to our community.

Scott also was a politician and served two terms as a Leon County School Board member, from 1994 to 2002 – and was its chairman two of those years. He was praised for his work on the board and his ability to build bridges of consent among members whom were often separated by philosophy, constituency and politics.
“Scott Dailey’s humor was much like music, and music is the universal language. His humor during difficult meetings was a unifying force, because all of us like to laugh – and sometimes laugh at ourselves,” states Georgia “Joy” Bowen, vice chair of the Leon County School Board. “I discovered, as I got to know him, that our philosophies were more similar than dissimilar about doing the right thing because it was the right thing to do.”

Leon County School Superintendent Bill Montford expressed his thoughts this way: “Dr. Dailey had a deep and thorough understanding and appreciation for the needs of our students and how we as a school district could help them achieve their maximum potential. Scott had great intellect and could articulate his message very clearly. He was a great friend of our entire community.”

More than anything, on a professional level, Scott said he was “tremendously proud of the development, growth, and professional capacity of the IOG and in particular, the staff that I have assembled.” And they, too, loved Scott Dailey.

“I had the privilege of working with Scott Dailey for 21 years. Scott’s sense of humor was only matched by his intelligence and his great compassion,” said Marilyn Crotty, IOG director at the University of Central Florida. “The governmental community is greatly diminished by Scott’s death, but his legacy lives on in the Institute and, more importantly, in the people whose lives he touched.”

“While I had the opportunity to learn so much from him professionally and was inspired by his desire and commitment to build a model Institute, I will always treasure most the many conversations we shared about our families. . . . I will remember him most for making me a better husband, father and friend,” says Jeff Hendry, assistant director of the Florida Institute of Government and executive director of the Northwest Florida League of Cities.

In one of Scott’s last interviews, he emphasized that he wanted people to remember him “as a man that was truly happy and was proud of his family.” His influence on family and friends was never more evident than at the beautiful and moving service that celebrated his life. When Scott died after a lengthy battle with pancreatic cancer, a standing-room only crowd of almost 800 people filled Tallahassee’s Faith Presbyterian Church.

The life Scott had lived was telling in the diversity of those attending and sentiments expressed by clergy of varying denominations. In tribute to Scott, there was an abundance of humorous anecdotes about his life. However, the most moving tribute was given by his children, sons Charlie and John and daughter Scottie Boyd.

Later, son John, a former Florida League of Cities employee who now works with the National League of Cities, said of his dad: “Scott Dailey makes me proud. Not only was he a successful community leader, he was the best father and the best friend you could ever hope for. We are all so lucky to have had Dad in our lives.”

I will always be touched by how Scott Dailey conducted himself, both personally and professionally. And I will never forget the courageous manner in which he and his family fought and lived with his illness. I will always remember how they imparted strength to those of us who knew and cared about Scott, when the family themselves were in the midst of a storm. And I will always be moved by the poignant, humorous and heartfelt e-mails sent by the Dailey family to colleagues and friends during the months of Scott’s treatment and ultimate demise.

Following his death, Sarah Ann Dailey, Scott’s wife of 39 years, sent another e-mail:

“Scott Dailey had a great respect for the League of Cities and the work that the League does in our state. The municipalities in Florida are very fortunate to have an advocate as strong and as courageous as the Florida League of Cities. The leadership and friendship of Mike Sittig and his staff were very special to Scott. We will miss Scott Dailey so very much. Our family wants all of you to know how much he is loved and treasured by all of you.”

Scott Dailey was a great man who found and cultivated greatness in others. Our League is a better organization because of his contributions.

Sharon Berrian is the associate director for public affairs at the Florida League of Cities.