IN MEMORY OF ROBERT J. LALONDE (1958-2018)

Robert J. Lalonde, professor at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, was a passionate scholar who cared about the effects that his work could have on people’s lives. He was an important contributor to research focusing on workplace issues, education, and the economic effects of immigration, as well as many other workforce-related subjects. His work will continue to have transformative impact.

"Bob’s work changed the way we all approach research and how we understand the world. But more than that, he was the type of decent and kind person that parents want their kids to be when they grow up,” said BFI Director Michael Greenstone, the Milton Friedman Professor in Economics for the College and the Harris School.

Lalonde touched the lives of many in the UChicago community and throughout the broader economics community. In her note to the Harris Policy School community, Dean Katherine Baicker recalled Bob’s many contributions: “Bob left an indelible mark on this institution and the lives of so many people over the decades he spent at the university. Today, we grieve a beloved colleague, mentor, teacher, and adviser.”

Lalonde personified the mission of Harris and the University of Chicago economics community, bringing the rigor of science to the goal of social impact. “Bob was an integral part of the labor economics community at the University of Chicago. His work on the earnings losses of displaced workers has been hugely influential to both academics and policy makers,” said Erik Hurst, the V. Duane Rath Professor of Economics at Booth and BFI Deputy Director.

However, there was more to Lalonde than his academic work, noted Hurst. “Bob was also an integral member of the Hyde Park community. Bob and I spent many evenings and weekends on the little league fields watching our boys play baseball. He will be greatly missed,” Hurst said. Lalonde’s commitment to community issues was reflected in his service on the board of Public/Private Ventures, a national nonprofit working to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs, and community initiatives.

For those who worked closely with Lalonde, the loss is keenly felt. “Bob Lalonde was my colleague, coauthor and loyal friend for over 30 years,” said Robert Topel, the Sidore Brown and Gladys J. Brown Distinguished Service Professor at Booth. “He was an outstanding economist, with a number of important contributions, but an even better husband and father. His service to the University, which became a struggle in later years, was unsurpassed. I was awed by the courage with which Bob faced his disease. He was an inspiration. I shall miss him terribly.”

Lalonde will also be missed in the classroom, where his students found inspiration from his dedication and passion, according to Orley Ashenfielder, Professor of Economics at Princeton University and former thesis advisor to Lalonde. “Bob Lalonde was a fine scholar, whose impact on his students (and advisors!) was profound,” Ashenfielder said.

To honor Bob’s many contributions to the economics profession, a conference was held in Lalonde’s honor two years ago at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. He will be deeply missed by those who connected with him, either personally or professionally, throughout his life.