The beloved Museum of Natural History, with its exhibit section located on the first floor of the LRC at University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, is undergoing exciting changes. Dr. Ray Reser, the new director of the museum, insists that the museum is “an underutilized resource.” Reser follows the exemplary leadership of Edward Marks, who was the guest of honor at a reception in June. Marks was honored for his work as curator of the museum from 1973 to 2007. As the new director, Reser intends to “raise the bar on the research aspect of the museum.” Most of all, Reser is determined to get people involved.

The Museum of Natural History is a living, vibrant thing, thanks to the scientific collections throughout campus. Each of the eleven scientific collections (see above) has its own curator who is responsible for keeping the valuable items and specimen groups organized, catalogued, accessible, and safeguarded—in a word, “curated.”

Reser receives fairly regular calls from the DNR, the National Fish & Wildlife Service, and other agencies, including the Smithsonian, all hoping to access Stevens Point’s scientific research collections. UWSP houses the second largest fish and plant collections in Wisconsin. People from all around the world are interested in the resources these collections provide.

Recognizing the value and depth of the scientific collections, Reser has been working toward restructuring the museum to further integrate the collections. “The goal is to reintegrate the scientific collections with the museum and thus integrate them more closely with current curriculum,” he says. Reser wants the Museum of Natural History to “exhibit the research happening here on campus.” Though upgrading and enhancing aspects of the museum can be a tough process, Reser says he’s had no problem getting volunteers to help. Says Reser, “I’ve had a huge positive response.” A number of students and staff members have signed on to act as docents, presenters, research assistants, and store managers. Members of the Stevens Point community have also been eager to lend a helping hand in preserving and displaying these valuable collections. The museum plans to host an open house sometime this spring to bring together faculty, students, community members, and donors.
Devinder Sandhu, Associate Professor of Biology at University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, was awarded a $1.5 million grant by the National Science Foundation for his part in the global research effort to study and develop dwarf varieties of wheat that are drought resistant. Sandhu is working with scientists in developed and developing nations like India and Pakistan to identify and test the genes in wheat that would ultimately lead to increased yields. In simple terms, the goal of the research is to help feed people around the world.

Not alone in his research at UWSP, Professor Sandhu works very closely with several students including Jon-Paul W. Ciszewski, Joshua Rogers, Eric Wermedal, Jordan Baumbach, Jaydeep Raval, and Alina Ott (winner of the Barry M. Goldwater National Science Scholarship). Says Sandhu, “Sometimes people underestimate undergraduates.” Professor Sandhu goes on to explain how his students “start from scratch” in writing scientific papers for peer-reviewed journals. He works closely with them, helping whenever he can, but never doing the work for them. “The students do everything,” Sandhu says, “But I’m here all the time if they ever need help.”

Sandhu notes that his name is at the very end of the list of authors in a recently published scientific paper. He explains that his students receive all the credit because they deserve it. With a publication like this, a student has a greater chance of finding successful careers after graduating from UWSP. “Almost all my students publish,” says Sandhu, gesturing toward his wall that wall is covered with scientific papers students have written. Not only is Sandhu conducting amazing research that could help feed people all around the world, but he’s also creating a pathway for students to find success in the real world.

Women and Science Day brings future scientists to UWSP

The annual Women and Science Day, held at UWSP, is coordinated by Julie Hellweg, outreach program manager for Continuing Education, sponsors of the event that brings seventh- and eighth-grade girls from Central and Northern Wisconsin to UW-Stevens Point to learn about careers in biology, chemistry, physics/astronomy, engineering and mathematics. The conference includes professional speakers and hands-on workshops. This year Professor of Chemistry Robin Tanke gave the keynote address.

Hellweg joined UWSP in 1987 and began working with Continuing Education in 1991. She believes it’s the mission of continuing education to “promote lifelong learning by providing a variety of innovative, educational programs and activities that focus on professional development and personal enrichment for learners of all ages.” The Women and Science Day program was formed to “expose young girls to the various fields of science and endless possibilities of careers in science,” said Hellweg. It also provides an opportunity to bring young students from surrounding communities to the university. These students are empowered and inspired through Women and Science. For more information, contact Continuing Education at 800-898-9472.

High school students have fun with Women in Science Day activities.

Sandhu Works with Students on $1.5 million Research Grant

By Shane Stricker

Devinder Sandhu, Associate Professor of Biology at University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, was awarded a $1.5 million grant by the National Science Foundation for his part in the global research effort to study and develop dwarf varieties of wheat that are drought resistant. Sandhu is working with scientists in developed and developing nations like India and Pakistan to identify and test the genes in wheat that would ultimately lead to increased yields. In simple terms, the goal of the research is to help feed people around the world.

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The College Highlights Its Manifest Resources in the Sciences

from the desk of Dean Chris Cirmo

Not only is the UWSP College of Letters and Science the place on campus where we develop the core knowledge bases necessary for a successful and fulfilling professional life, but we happen to have in our midst resources in the basic natural sciences that make the university a very special place for students choosing a life as a professional scientist. This issue of the College of Letters and Science Newsletter focuses on accomplishments and opportunities we take for granted here, but deserve recognition for their excellence within the UW System. In fact, our science departments send more students on to doctoral programs than any other member of the UW System campuses (outside of Madison). Our Museum of Natural History is undergoing something of a renaissance with the appointment of archaeologist Ray Reser. There will be plenty of opportunities for viewing, contributing time and making donations during our planned growth phase of the museum. The work of Devinder Sandhu and Robert Rosenfield are samples of the kind of undergraduate research experiences which our students rave about as being “life-changing.” UWSP faculty insist on involving students in their work and strive to give them opportunities for real-life research challenges and field/laboratory experiences. The Goldwater Scholarships awarded to two of our science students attest to the success of this mentor/mentee relationship. I remember in my own background the opportunity to do undergraduate research and travel to New Mexico (I had not left the State of New York except to go to Canada, just across the border!) as an experience which changed my focus from observer to “doer.” Our popular “Women and Science Day” contributes not only to an expansion of the presence of women scientists in underrepresented STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics] fields, but contributes to the UWSP mission of Inclusive Excellence. It is testament to the work of a former science colleague, Stephen Bondeson, that we seek to establish a scholarship in his honor. Finally, in an effort to make our Letters and Science Lecture Series more community-based, it was renamed the “Community Lecture Series.” It is the goal of the College to integrate community learning with the university, and our presentation of these lectures at both the Stevens Point Public Library, and the Stevens Point Area Senior High School, has that goal in mind. With fall showing its colors and the winds of winter starting to rustle the fallen leaves, we celebrate the sciences here in the College of Letters and Science, and are excited about our role in mentoring a new generation of scientists who will face challenges my generation has yet to even dream of. While we celebrate the natural sciences at UWSP in this issue, look for future newsletters focusing on the social sciences and humanities.

The Stephen Bondeson Research Scholarship

In 2009 UWSP lost a dear colleague, mentor and friend in Stephen Bondeson. The Department of Chemistry is seeking a lead donor to honor Steve and create a new student scholarship. The Stephen Bondeson Research Scholarship would be awarded to a junior-level chemistry or biochemistry major who excels in the classroom and the research laboratory and who intends to pursue graduate studies in science. Steve was a positive influence on so many students, faculty, and staff members and friends at UWSP and in Central Wisconsin. “Our goal is to establish and award an annual scholarship in tribute to his many contributions to UWSP and to promote his passion for teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom and research laboratory,” says James Brummer, chair of the chemistry department. Perhaps you or someone you know feels strongly about this opportunity to help our students in memory of Steve, and can create this remarkable tribute. For additional information please contact Mark Williams in the L&S Dean’s office at 715-346-4211 or e-mail mark.williams@uwsp.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Students to Research in Alaska with UWSP Alumnus

This summer, Professor of Biology and Wildlife Robert Rosenfield took ten students to Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. They teamed up with UWSP alumnus Travis Booms in studying gyrfalcons. Booms is a biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Diversity Program. Aided by Booms, Rosenfield and the students studied golden eagle and rough-legged hawks in their habitats, taking a close look at their nests and feathers.

Check out the new College of Letters & Sciences website!

www.uwsp.edu/cols/
Goldwater Scholarships Awarded to UWSP Students

Biology and biochemistry major Alina Ott (left) and physics major Michelle Stevens (right) were awarded Goldwater National Science Scholarships. The science scholarships carry stipends of $7,500 a year. Aside from Ott and Stevens, six other students from UWSP have won the award since 2004. Ott is working with Associate Professor of Biology Devinder Sandhu on soybean breeding research. Stevens is working in the Department of Physics and Astronomy on the behavior of atoms when they reach a temperature close to absolute zero.

www.uwsp.edu/cols/lectureseries/