

**Tribute to Tom Casperson
President Fritz Erickson
NMU Board of Trustees Meeting
Friday, December 10, 2020**

Before I begin my President's report, I'd like to take a moment to celebrate the life of Senator Tom Casperson and recognize his support of Northern Michigan University.

Tom was a true friend to our University and a passionate advocate for education and U.P. students.

Tom passed away on Nov. 29 after a courageous battle with lung cancer for two and half years. Our thoughts and prayers are with Tom's wife Diane, their four children and all of Tom's family and friends.

Since becoming president of Northern Michigan University, I've had many, many opportunities to engage with Tom – sometimes over matters that concerned Northern, sometimes over matters that had a broader Upper Peninsula or statewide perspective. There were so many times when we collaborated for the greater good of the U.P. In all of those experiences, I truly enjoyed working with this man of great integrity and compassion, and who quite simply had a daily desire to do the right thing, to help people, especially the people of the U.P.

Tom never hesitated in his support of Northern. He took our meetings. He attended meetings when he thought his presence could help. He attended Northern and other higher education events. Over his tenure in the state's Legislature, first as a Representative and then as a Senator, he took a true interest in learning about the U.P.'s colleges and universities. He became well versed in what our institutions needed to better serve students and to increase our role in improving the quality of life in the Upper Peninsula.

Tom assisted Northern on many projects and initiatives over the years – in fact, too many to name in the short amount of time available this morning. But let me highlight two for which I, as Northern's president, owe him the most gratitude.

The first is for Senate Bill 119. This land conveyance legislation that he sponsored allowed the Department of Corrections to transfer a small piece of property that would become key to Northern being able to create the Forensic Research Outdoor Station – better known as our FROST lab. This lab is the first such site in a cold weather location in the world. For his help in sponsoring that bill and for getting all the right people who needed to be involved to support FROST, Northern remains deeply appreciative to Tom.

The second example of Tom's strong support of Northern and willingness to get involved came on the final night of then-Governor Rick Snyder's tenure and the last hours of that lame duck session – and I do mean final hours. In the wee hours of the morning as political maneuvering was going back and forth and capital outlay projects and other initiatives were being traded in and out of the final state appropriations legislation, Northern suddenly found our Career-Tech & Engineering Facility project – a massive renovation of the current Jacobetti Complex – out of the bill. At 3 a.m., Tom Casperson rushed over to from his office to Governor Snyder's office. He walked in to talk to the governor and a short time later he walked out with a promise that the project would be funded. I will never forget the craziness of that night and the effectiveness of Tom's appearance near dawn to literally save the day.

I know for a fact that what purpose the capital outlay project was specifically for would not have altered Tom's willingness to work all night to help Northern retain the approved funding, but it was extra special that the work was to save a facility that will advance career-tech and engineering programs in the Upper Peninsula as Tom had a special soft spot for skilled trades programs, which he saw as absolutely critical to the economic development of the region.

That is why it is so fitting that Tom's family established a memorial fund in Tom's honor to benefit Northern's CDL truck driving program. This gift to support students of this program is really quite perfect as it honors Tom's significant body of work for skilled trades educational opportunities, as well as the family's longtime logging business, Casperson & Sons Logging. Tom would become the third generation to own and operate that family business. Anyone who spent much time with Tom would get to hear about how he drove his first Mack log truck at age 11 when he could barely reach the pedals. In Mack log trucks is where Tom spent many of his early years in the logging industry, so the Casperson family's memorial fund to honor the life and accomplishments of Senator Tom Casperson through support of future big rig drivers, possibly logging truck drivers, I think would really please Tom.

As president of Northern Michigan University, I want you to help me celebrate Tom Casperson's life and thank his family for their continued support of Northern.

At this time, please join me in a moment of silence for Senator Tom Casperson.