



Northern
HORIZONS

FALL 2001

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH AND
DISCOVERY

What's all the excitement about?

I don't remember much about the science courses I've taken over the years. Not so much because the passage of time has dimmed their memory, but rather because I've found that sometimes it's best to block out the more painful memories of youth. Science courses did more than intimidate me — they outright frightened me. The compounds of chemistry danced around my mind like Japanese alphabet soup. Images (not to mention the smell) of frogs and fetal pigs were enough to make me swear off biology. And then of course there was physics. I dreaded physics most of all. Not only was physics science, but it combined my second weakest subject — math.

And yet, of all the courses I have blocked out of my mind or simply forgotten, there is one particular day in my high school physics class that does stick out in my memory. At the beginning of class, my teacher handed each lab team a small, metal ball and an empty tin can. A ramp had been placed on each lab table. The assignment was to calculate where to place the tin can on the floor so when we rolled the ball down the ramp and off the table, it would land inside the can.

What a cool thing to be able to figure out, I thought. How unfortunate that I wouldn't be among those to do it. While it's not in my nature to simply give up on a particular task, I was prepared to make an exception for this assignment. My lab partner was absent that day, and I knew I couldn't complete the assignment without help. I didn't know where to begin, so, simply put, I didn't. Let the Fs fall where they may.

Unfortunately, my physics teacher didn't share my fatalistic view. When class was over, he called me to his desk and told me that I would be staying after school to complete the assignment. End of discussion.

I grudgingly reported for my after-school punishment, and my teacher explained how to perform the experiment one more time. I tried to proclaim my ignorance, but he simply said, "You *can* do this." And — much to my surprise — I did. I had done that very cool thing — the metal ball had dropped squarely into the tin can.

On October 5, Northern officially dedicated the Seaborg Science Complex, which is named for two science visionaries — Luther S. West and Glenn T. Seaborg. No doubt that it's that same sense of excitement I experienced that afternoon — that moment of 'aha' — that motivated these men to pursue their own scientific endeavors and to promote the benefits and necessity of science and mathematics education. And if either man could see the Seaborg Science Complex today and hear about all of the projects going on inside, I'm sure they would be incredibly proud.

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FEATURES



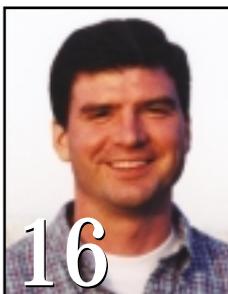
Breaking ground

After more than two years of construction and renovation, NMU science and mathematics departments have a new home in the Seaborg Science Complex. Read about just a few of the exciting research projects going on inside Northern's newest learning facility.



What's happening up there?

Northern's research on the Aurora Borealis may have uncovered something unexpected leaving researchers with more questions than they had when they started.



Bay Area biotech

Marc Knepper '96 MA has explored the bounds of biotechnology and its application in pharmaceutical development. Now this Bay Area researcher is putting those drugs to the test by monitoring human clinical trials.

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