

Alumni in action

Changing the World, One Family at a Time

By Rebecca Tavernini

In a tiny village in Nepal, Meena Karki shared a bed and blanket and a pair of shoes with her two sisters, bathed in the river, and could expect to soon be married off to a husband of her parents' choosing. In Nepal, where only 12 percent of women can read and write, her future was likely working in the fields. But from the roof of the brick house her parents had built, Meena would look up at the stars bridging the world, and dream of a different future.

Her family had been host to a number of study-abroad students from America, and after getting to know these girls and the opportunities they had ahead of them, Meena knew she wanted an education. She wanted to go to America and learn skills that could help other women, young and old, in her country. She shared this



Meena and Suman, in Marquette. At right, Amma doing homework. Learning numbers has allowed her to use a phone.

with a student who was staying with them, Svea, who wrote home to her parents **Sally '72 MAE and Bruce '67 BA Closser**. Sally would share with her PEO (philanthropic educational organization) group Svea's letters describing the warmth of the family but the meager living conditions of the village residents. The group decided to send a bit of money

for shoes. When Meena's father agreed she could get an education if she could find a way to pay for it, the group raised a little more money so Meena could attend school. When Meena wanted to continue beyond the 10th grade (the highest grade a woman can go to in Nepal, where all education must be paid for) and come to America, the group wrote letters of support for a visa, which was miraculously granted. The Clossers opened their home to her while she attended Marquette Senior High School.

It's probably no surprise that when Meena decided to attend NMU, the group stood right behind her.

While coming to the U.S. was no easy feat (Nepali women never travel alone; Meena had never ridden a bike much less an airplane; and the family had no suitcase—when her father purchased one, Meena had only one outfit to pack), **Meena '06 BSN** excelled at her studies, and was named the outstanding graduate in nursing, receiving a standing ovation at the pinning ceremony.

Now a registered nurse at a hospital in Dearborn, Meena is channeling her own income and accomplishments back to her family to support their education and future. She pays for her brother Suman to attend NMU. He is in his third semester, majoring in computer science.

The PEO group has formed a new, independent committee dedicat-



EDIN members: (front, l to r) Sally Closser, Nancy Peterson, Tina Ostwald '71 BS '82 MA; (back) June Schaefer '67 BS '68 MA, Jill Nelson, and Nancy Lutey '74 MAE '87 EDS. Contact EDIN, c/o June Schaefer, 131 W. Prospect St., Marquette, 49855.

ed to partnering with Meena to ensure that other family members can meet their educational goals. Education in Nepal (EDIN) is helping Meena's mother, Amma, to go to school for the first time in her life. She travels three hours each day, five days a week, to the nearest school for adults, in Katmandu. She is learning to read and write. When Meena's parents came to celebrate her graduation, "Amma saw that women could do more than just work in the fields or wash clothes in the river," says committee member **Jill Nelson '80 MAE**. "She saw what Meena had accomplished, the things that women are able to do and how much people in Marquette care." Nelson adds that many in the community have supported this cause, both financially or by doing things like buying Meena a prom dress so she could also realize that dream.

EDIN also is supporting Meena's cousin Pramila, the first girl in her village to go to college; and nephew Sumit, age 10, who wants to stay in school, but his family makes only \$35 per month.

"What a difference education will mean in their lives," says Nelson. "We're not going to achieve peace through war, but through people helping people, and education is key—to understanding options, to having hope." ■

Globetrotters

NMU alums doing business internationally

By Kristi Evans



David Sablan with his wife, Connie.

David Sablan Growing Guam

More NMU students are realizing the value of educational travel outside the country to supplement traditional instruction and heighten their cultural awareness. **David Sablan '75 BS** achieved the same horizon-expanding benefits in reverse. He left his native Guam for NMU with the ultimate goal of returning home to apply what he learned to Guam's tourism and economic development.

As a youth in Saipan during WWII, Sablan's father had helped and befriended a U.S. Army supply lieutenant from St. Claire Shores, Mich. The two kept in touch and the man offered to provide for any Sablan children who wanted to attend college in Michigan.

"When I came of age, I took out an encyclopedia, looked at the state and ended up choosing Northern," David says. "Little did I know it was 600 miles from Joseph Sowerby's home. He laughed, wondering how he would help take care of me from that distance. I only visited his family during the holidays, but being farther away allowed me to develop my own independence, so it was a blessing in disguise."

In pursuit of an NMU education, Sablan left behind the love of his life in Saipan. Maintaining a long-distance

romance was especially challenging in an era preceding cell phones and e-mail. Sablan sent frequent letters, splurged on a rare \$3-per-minute phone call and went home each summer. The two married during the holiday break of his senior year and settled in Guam after he earned his degree in business administration.

The U.S. island territory in the Western Pacific has a tropical marine climate. Tourists—primarily from Japan, Korea and Taiwan—drive the economy, generating \$1 billion in annual revenue. Sablan spent six years promoting the destination as chair of the Guam Visitors Bureau's Asia Marketing Committee.

"I would travel to the countries and hold meetings with their airlines and travel industry companies encouraging them to send travelers to Guam," he adds. "My most significant achievement was getting China Airlines, the national airline for Taiwan, to begin a new route to the island. It continues to this day."

Sablan now is an independent consultant for companies wanting to establish operations in the region. He offers advice on corporate setups, business approaches, government relations, marketing and staffing.

"I assist them in working through the maze of requirements to set up on Guam. I introduce them to key industry leaders and associations, get them to be part of the business community as quickly as possible and help establish and manage their budgets in the initial years as they set up their operations."

He left his native Guam for NMU with the ultimate goal of returning home to apply what he learned to Guam's tourism and economic development.

His client list is likely to increase in the near future. About 17,000 U.S. Marines and family members will relocate to Guam from Okinawa, Japan, bringing with them another 25,000 support personnel. Sablan conducted the interview for this article in an airport as he was en route from meetings in Washington, D.C., to Hawaii, advising small businesses of the impending opportunities.

“Because of its strategic position in the Pacific, Guam is going to see a tremendous military buildup in the next decade and beyond. This is a tremendous boon for the people of Guam, particularly in construction activity. But because the population is only 170,000 right now, there are some concerns related to the impact on the infrastructure.”

Sablan’s other activities include serving as project coordinator for a government-sponsored waste-to-energy project, and as the developer of a private landfill. He also works with Guam Community College to develop training programs locally and in partnership with Japanese factories that manufacture high-tech building frames.

He attributes his professional success in part to his Northern education.

“NMU broadened my perspective beyond life on the island and created a dynamic that enabled me to apply myself effectively. I have a strong affinity for Mr. Sowerby, who has passed on, but I remain grateful for his generous offer and I think I made the most of my opportunity at NMU.”



Reed Grimes Shaping spaces

In the past three decades, **Reed Grimes** ’76 BS has held 16 positions and physically relocated nine times for assignments in various U.S. cities and in London—all during his career in the oil industry.

After a brief stint as an insurance adjuster after graduating with a degree in business, Grimes accepted a marketing position with Heritage Mobil. He served in various training and management capacities, later shifting to real estate on both the corporate and global levels. He

continued on that track when the company merged with Heritage Exxon in 2000.

Because moving has become second nature to Grimes, perhaps it’s only fitting that he now assists in accommodating and relocating others as manager of ExxonMobil’s Global Real Estate department.

“Change can be hard for some, particularly in certain cultures. I’ve found that living and working overseas has taught me a lot about diversity and helped me anticipate cultural issues that might surface.”

“My group develops strategies for acquiring or divesting office space in ninety-some countries around the world,” Grimes says. “We work with affiliates on the acquisitions process, from lease negotiations to fit-outs [construction of interior space] to move-ins. On the other side, we also manage dispositions if there’s a surplus of space or if those holdings are no longer necessary. It’s a cradle-to-grave value proposition service where we drive general-interest business solutions for all eleven operating business divisions in ExxonMobil.”

Grimes cites an example of a general-interest solution that was implemented in Singapore at the time of the merger. Personnel representing different organizational disciplines were spread across nine office buildings. His group developed a strategy to consolidate all of the business groups into one facility, introducing a new workplace design that he said reduced the office footprint dramatically and resulted in considerable savings that went right back to the organizations occupying space there.

“We sit with each department and discuss their needs and requirements,” he adds. “Once we agree on a final strategy, we calculate the most economic solution—whether it’s doing nothing or relocating. Change can be hard for some, particularly in certain cultures. I’ve found that living and working overseas has taught me a lot about diversity and helped me anticipate cultural issues that might surface.”

Grimes is based in Houston, Texas, but spends about a third of his time visiting affiliates in Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and South America. He considers it somewhat ironic that a Wakefield High School graduate who never ventured out of the Upper Peninsula for college is now a Platinum Elite frequent flier.

“I certainly did not envision all of this when I attended NMU,” Grimes explains. “Getting an education from a reputable institution and graduating with honors

were very important to me and I managed to accomplish those objectives while still having fun in Marquette. Beyond that, I've just been an extremely lucky individual who's made the most of the opportunities presented him and hasn't shied away from new adventures in other parts of the world. I've also been fortunate to be married for 30 years to a wonderful woman who has been more than supportive and accommodating throughout my career.

"Working for ExxonMobil has allowed me to leverage their training programs, work for outstanding leaders and embrace the cultural mindset of a global company to drive functional excellence while developing employees to their full potential. Someone told me once to treat every job as if it's your last and to do it the very best you can. I've taken that advice to heart."



Steve Gulis receiving an honorary doctor of business degree at NMU's spring 2007 commencement

Steve Gulis

Making a global footprint

Steve Gulis '79 BS has witnessed and facilitated significant global expansion in his two decades with Wolverine World Wide Inc. The Michigan-based company adopted its brand name in 1919 to describe durable, horsehide leather footwear known as "1,000 mile shoes." Wolverine has since logged many more miles to establish an international market for its portfolio of eight shoe and apparel brands. These include Hush Puppies, Merrell, Cat, Harley-Davidson and Patagonia.

"We sell our brands in close to 200 countries around the world," Gulis says. "When I joined, the profit base was 80 percent domestic and 20 percent international. Now that ratio is 40-60. The growth outside the U.S. has swung dramatically. When we bought Hush Puppies in

the United Kingdom and both Merrell and Cat in Europe, that really was a launching pad for increasing our presence and revenue base in that region of the world.

"Now we're focused on developing more strategic initiatives and determining the best way to market our brands internationally. In this global economy, you really have to diversify your entire business model, whether it's where you sell or where your products are sourced from."

Wolverine now sources 80 percent of its product from the Far East, compared with 20 percent when Gulis started. This means the company doesn't own the factories, but exclusively subcontracts with them to source products that only Wolverine can market and distribute internationally.

Gulis joined Wolverine in 1985 as corporate finance manager. Three years later, he was promoted to vice president of finance and administration for the Hush Puppies Co. His responsibilities included working closely with Puerto Rican and Dominican Republic facilities, Far East operations and U.S. factories. Gulis has held various positions of increased responsibility since then, including chief financial officer. He recently transitioned to president of the Global Operations Group for Wolverine World Wide Inc.

"People shop the world today," he said. "They might be in Santiago, Chile, this week and Miami the next. A challenge is maintaining a consistent brand image so that our brands will mean the same thing to people no matter where they go. Another challenge is the local and global economies. You get hyper-inflation in the Latin American markets, so you have to manage that and control the risks. Or in Russia, there's a huge opportunity, but having liquidity in the currency is not always possible. And in China or Vietnam, you don't have the structured legal environment where you know the rules like you do in the U.S."

Because he understands the importance of global expansion, Gulis said Northern is right to rank internationalization as a top priority.

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"I joke with my daughter that the extent of my international experience in college was driving to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, to buy cheap beer. But seriously, it's great that students today have more opportunities to study abroad, learn a foreign language and understand cultural

differences. It's all critically important if you hope to excel in corporate America. As students go through their educational and career development, I would encourage them to be flexible—to look at experiences outside the U.S. as growth opportunities and take full advantage of them. You can't do too much of it because too much business is being done outside of the U.S.”



Liam Hughes and Corey Taratuta at Ladies' View, County Kerry, Ireland

Corey Taratuta Seeing Green

Corey Taratuta '96 BFA has turned his fascination with Ireland into a part-time career. He co-hosts a top-rated travel podcast, *Irish Fireside*, produces an e-newsletter by the same name and uses his graphic design skills to create walking tours and itineraries. Taratuta also visits the Emerald Isle at least two times per year, posting his activities and photos on a blog and Web site (www.irishfireside.com).

He may have ventured into this vocation “by accident,” but Taratuta’s worldly interests were cultivated at a young age. He was in second grade when his parents hosted the first of several foreign exchange students at their Posen, Mich., home.

“They were much older than me and I’ve only kept in touch with one, but the experience itself absolutely shaped me,” he says. “Having the students around and hearing the conversations made me hungry to see what else was out there and to learn more about other countries and cultures. I knew I was going to be traveling at some point after that.”

Ireland has been his destination of choice for the past decade. Taratuta made his first trip shortly before graduating from NMU. He spent the summer there at the invitation of fellow student **Liam Hughes '97**, who was

raised on tea and scones in the Upper Peninsula and has relatives in County Tipperary. Taratuta was quickly embraced by the locals and captivated by the scenery. He and

Taratuta grew frustrated with poorly designed travel books. He combined his graphic design training and love of Ireland to experiment and create his own walking tour of Kilkenny. Other Ireland tours and itineraries followed.

Hughes became partners in life and—unexpectedly—work.

“We recorded our first podcast for some friends who were traveling to Ireland,” Taratuta explained. “We didn’t realize that when you put something on iTunes, there’s immediate international access. Suddenly we were getting e-mails from people all over the world. We realized there was a huge demand for that kind of information.

Through the powers of the Internet, within a month we had established ourselves as Ireland travel experts and had a loyal audience. The podcasts usually revolve around a topic, like gardens or music, or a particular region. Some have interviews from experts in the U.S. and Ireland; others are just stories of our experiences.”

The duo is based in Milwaukee. Aside from the *Irish Fireside* podcasts, Taratuta works part-time as a freelance writer and designer. Hughes has a studio where he creates jewelry made from shards of broken and discarded china. He also purchased a “derelict property” down the road from family in Ireland, transformed it into a cottage and offers it as a guesthouse. Taratuta stays at the cottage or with friends when he is overseas.

One of Taratuta’s post-NMU graduation goals was to live and work in another country. He spent six months of 2004 in Australia, where he grew frustrated with poorly designed travel books. Taratuta combined his graphic design training and love of Ireland to experiment and create his own walking tour of Kilkenny, a medieval city that captured his imagination. Other Ireland tours and itineraries followed.

“It’s an absolutely beautiful country and it’s amazing to think that hundreds of years of cultural history are encapsulated in a geographic area smaller than Michigan.”

Taratuta may have no ancestral link to the Emerald Isle, but he has found a way to strengthen his personal connection to the place and its people while creating a high-tech niche for sharing his insight with a receptive audience.

“There is no fireside like your own fireside.”

— Irish proverb



Nicholas Kilduff

Preparing to take on the world

Most of the business representatives profiled in the previous pages did not intentionally pursue careers with a global component; they more or less fell into them through a series of previously unanticipated opportunities. But **Nicholas Kilduff '06 BS** is not relying on fate or circumstance. He is deliberately plotting a career overseas.

A psychology major at NMU, Kilduff's experience as vice president of the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity and founder of the former Italian Student Union convinced him to apply his academic interest in a business setting and seek an advanced degree in human resources. "At the time, it seemed like a great mix of business, psychology and internal consulting," he says.

Two events early in his graduate studies in Minnesota combined to solidify Kilduff's future worldly ambitions: a summer internship with General Electric that required him to work with a United Kingdom team, expanding his scope; and a first-ever recruiting visit by Abbott Laboratories' human resources professional development program—one of few training rotations that guarantee international work experience.

"That's very important to me because, quite frankly, the United States is no longer the hub of all business," Kilduff says. "I want to be skilled and capable of working with people from different countries and I don't believe a domestic classroom or international teleconferences can replace actually living and working abroad; at least not for me. I also enjoy the idea of working for a healthcare company with a strong reputation and portfolio that treats its employees well and has won awards for its HR practices."

Believing that the best way to train for overseas

employment is to study abroad, Kilduff completed the final semester of his master's program at ESADE Business School in Barcelona, Spain. *The Wall Street Journal* ranked ESADE the top international business institution in 2006 and 2007. Kilduff found himself in the company of peers from Europe, Singapore, China, South America, Nigeria and Canada.

"It was a lesson in worldwide diversity of thought and culture that I couldn't get in the U.S.," wrote Kilduff via e-mail, shortly after completing his degree. "ESADE helped me make the leap from analytical theory to applied skills; from simply saying, 'I know how to do XYZ' to actually doing it. The school is also known for producing students who work well in teams. Professors set forth specific guidelines on how group members should work together."

Kilduff traveled from Barcelona to Chicago, the headquarters of Abbott Laboratories. He will go through training designed to "harness and grow my strengths and identify and improve my weaknesses as a manager and leader" before spending two to three years rotating between various assignments. While his European destination hasn't been finalized, Kilduff could return to Spain to work at Abbott's Madrid location.

"I want to be skilled and capable of working with people from different countries and I don't believe a domestic classroom or international teleconferences can replace actually living and working abroad; at least not for me."

When asked about Northern's emphasis on internationalization, both in terms of incorporating global issues into the curriculum and giving students more educational opportunities abroad, Kilduff offered a candid and enthusiastic reply:

"Where do I send a donation? That's how strongly I support it. Internationalizing programs will encourage students to learn another language, which is a valuable skill in the workplace and respected by managers at foreign companies.

"Secondly, I can sum it up in four words: the world is flat. We can no longer afford to isolate ourselves if we hope to succeed. Internationalizing higher education will show students how important it is to embrace this change. Studying in one country limits our cultural awareness, adaptability to the world economy and our ability to be truly globally-minded." ■