AUGUST 2010

OnManitoba

CONNECTING ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

ROBERT KIRBYSON

Is Seeing (and Directing) Stars

As accolades pour in for his short film and web-TV work, the L.A.-based director hopes to melt audience hearts with his feature-length debut *Snowmen*

Are Bacteria the Future of Fuel?

U of M researchers are studying the microorganisms' ability to turn waste into energy

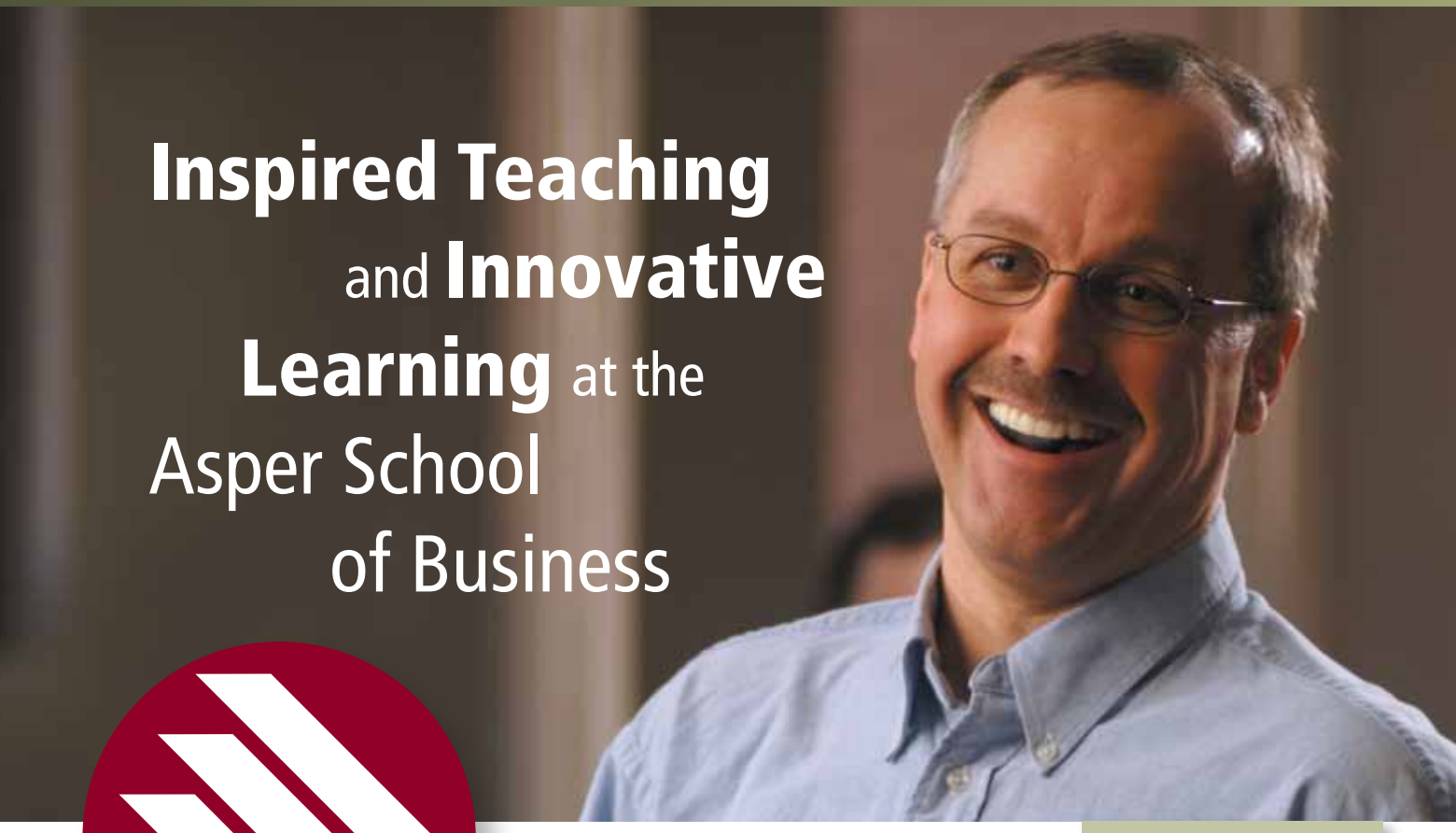
Funny Girl Barbara Gehring

Brings her teenage confessions to center stage

TRY TO KEEP UP

A brisk tour of Boston (on foot) with acclaimed contemporary artist Fred H.C. Liang

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: An Arctic research announcement so huge we gave it its own cover: see reverse | four generations, five doctors, one medical school | hidden gems in Archives and Special Collections |



Inspired Teaching and Innovative Learning at the Asper School of Business

In education, it is usually presumed that students must learn what *is*, what has happened, what has been achieved. But Dr. Reg Litz, Professor of Marketing, teaches outside this standard construct in his course on *Creativity & Entrepreneurship*. "It's an opportunity to explore less structured phenomena and to understand what might have been lost: What is it that we *don't* have because the creative process was interrupted?"

An unusual perspective? Maybe.
An inspired approach to teaching? *Definitely!*

Dr. Litz received the University of Manitoba's *Dr. and Mrs. H. H. Saunderson Award for Excellence in Teaching* in June 2010.

asper_info@umanitoba.ca | umanitoba.ca/asper

ASPER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2,780 STUDENTS
WHO GRADUATED AT THE 2010 SPRING CONVOCATION.
There were 104 medicine students in that group, some of them pictured below, and one of those budding doctors is profiled on page 10.

Contents

Photo: Jeremy Brooks

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OnManitoba

VOLUME 70, #2 AUGUST 2010

The Alumni Association Inc. of the University of Manitoba,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

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ALUMNI ASSOCIATION INC.

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The environment…

…has become a staple of daily news coverage; we are constantly being told about new threats. It is my inclination to look to researchers for explanations. Science features heavily in this issue of *On Manitoba* as we profile U of M research teams who are at the fore of what are arguably two of the biggest environmental debates of our age: the current and future state of ice in the Arctic—a widely held predictor of global climate change; and the quest for new and cleaner fuel sources that will power us into the future.

Contrasting this science-heavy subject matter, we offer a trio of alumni profiles that feature U of M-trained artists who, through their skills, make us laugh, entertain us, and invite us to see the world through their eyes.

Helping to capture all of these ideas on the printed page is an ever-expanding group of creative contributors. For the first time since I've been editor, we've dedicated a page to this group; they deserve recognition, beyond bylines or photo credits, for the stories they help bring to life. I encourage you to check out their bios.

With every issue of *On Manitoba* we make it our mission to seek out interesting stories to share with you. Stories about your fellow graduates, stories about your alma mater and its ongoing contribution to higher learning and, as evidenced by the research done on its campuses, the world. And we admit, given we have far more material than pages to fit it, choosing content is a selective process that involves as much gut-feeling and intuition as anything else. One way to know whether we are on the right track is to invite your feedback. It is the single most important gauge of whether the work we're doing here matters to you. We value your insights, your grammar catches, and your suggestions.

Happy reading,

JEREMY BROOKS
Editor

Malaria mistake


Save a life for $6

Hi! I received my copy of *On Manitoba* (April 2010) a couple of days ago. I would like to comment on the article *Save a life for $6* which states that there is no cure for malaria. I have lived in Zambia since 1971 and have had malaria a number of times over the years (including as recently as 3 months ago). Each time I have been cured—thank goodness! Perhaps what was meant was that there is no effective vaccine against malaria and that it has not been eradicated. However, there ARE treatments which are able to cure malaria in most cases. If any of your readers take this statement at face value, it may cause unnecessary worry about family or friends who live in areas where malaria is prevalent.

Thank you for your note, Rosemary Quaye [BA/69, CertEd/71]…you're right—Ed.

Dr. Maryanne Crockett, program director infectious diseases and assistant professor of medical microbiology within the Faculty of Medicine, explains:

There are several treatments available for malaria which can cure the infection if started early enough. There are also several ways to prevent malaria infection including insect precautions such as insecticide-treated bed nets, mosquito repellant, wearing long pants and long-sleeve shirts or medications which are generally used only by travelers to endemic areas. There are malaria vaccines in trial which have partial efficacy for prevention; however, none are currently in clinical use. I agree that it is unlikely that malaria will be eradicated in the foreseeable future (if ever).

contributors


RICHARDS

SARAH RICHARDS is an award-winning writer and radio producer from Winnipeg. On the web: **sarahmrichards.com**.


GERBER

MAX S. GERBER is an editorial and commercial photographer based in Los Angeles. He takes lots of pictures of guys in suits, of doctors and patients, of really smart people in science labs and of ordinary people in often extraordinary circumstances. Sometimes he takes pictures of celebrities and musicians, too. His book, *My Heart vs. the Real World*, was published in 2008 by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press. On the web: **msgphoto.com**.


SILVERBERG

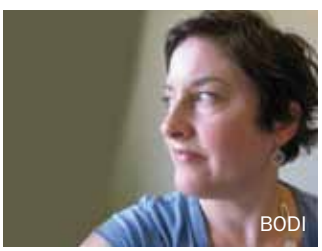
DAVID SILVERBERG is a journalist and editor in Toronto. He is managing editor of citizen media outlet DigitalJournal.com and also writes for *Canadian Business*, *NOW Magazine*, *Broken Pencil*, *Ryerson Alumni Magazine* and many other titles. He is also artistic director of Toronto Poetry Slam, a monthly spoken word competition. Find him at **torontopoetryslam.com**.


FRICKE

THOMAS FRICKE is a Winnipeg-based commercial photographer. For more than 15 years, he's captured images for ad campaigns, and a variety of publications including: *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *Chatelaine*, *Canadian Geographic*, and *Macleans*. Off assignment, Fricke's favourite places to be include: upside down and airborne doing gymnastics; trailblazing on his mountain bike; and hanging out by the campfire with his two daughters, eating smores. On the web: **www.thomasfricke.com**.


FUNK

JOHN FUNK [BFA(Hons)/07] is the owner/operator of Underscorefunk Design, a Winnipeg-based, artisan-style creative services company. Underscorefunk Design specializes in unique, client-centric design, illustration and artistic direction. Visit them online at **underscorefunk.com**.


BODI

TAMARA BODI [BA/90] is an award-winning public relations and social media gal at Winnipeg's largest marketing agency, McKim Cringan George. Visit them online at **mckimcg.ca**.

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AGM 2010

As outgoing Association President Karen Holden passed the symbolic gavel to new President Evan Kuz at the 2010 AGM (pictured) the gesture capped a productive and successful year. Here are some of 2009-10 highlights:

Through the hard work of the adhoc committee on by-law review, and with the help of an external legal consultant, the board completed a major amendment to **By-Law I**. This effort, the results of which are available in the Board of Directors section of our website (umanitoba.ca/alumni), reviewed the purpose of the Alumni Association, the composition of its board, executive and committees, as well as several other governance matters. Reviews of By-Law II and By-Law III are planned for future.

Board and staff came together for a strategic planning exercise in spring. Through this effort, we successfully created **new mission, vision and value statements** as well as a list of our **2010-11 strategic priorities**.

A **pan-campus Alumni Council** was established to better link the association with the various audiences it represents across the University of Manitoba. The Council will meet three times per year. The goal of these gatherings will be to share ideas on how we can better serve and engage our alumni audiences as well as invite feedback on our various communications, partnership and programming activities.

HERE IS YOUR 2010-11 ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Janice Coates *[BSc(Pharm)/73]*, Vice-President
Karen Holden *[BHEcol/92]*, Past-President
Adonia Manaigre *[BComm(Hons)/94]*, Treasurer
Racquel Baert *[BScMaj/89, MSc/94]*, Chair, Editorial Committee
Julie Mikuska *[BA/80, Secretary]*, Ex-Officio

COMMITTEE CHAIRS
Alumni Fund: Evan Kuz
Editorial: Racquel Baert
Executive: Evan Kuz
Finance: Adonia Manaigre
Nominating: Karen Holden

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Evan Kuz *[BFAHons/90]*
Jeffrey Lieberman *[BA/80, BComm(Hons)/83]*
Adonia Manaigre *[BComm(Hons)/94]*
Sara Penner *[BRS/99]*
Erin Romeo *[LLB/04]*
Peri Venkatesh *[MN/91]*

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Richard Sigurdson *[BA/80, MA/83]*
representing the Provost's Council
Heather Laube *[BFA (Hons)/09]*
President, University of Manitoba Students' Union
John Kearsey, Vice-President (External)
representing the University President

ELECTED TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS:
Romel Dhalla *[BA/99, BComm(Hons)/04]*
Gwen Hatch *[LLB/81]*
Rennie Zegalski *[BComm(Hons)/95]*

UNIVERSITY SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM INTRODUCES NEWEST MEMBER

Meet the U of M's new Vice-President (External), John Kearsey. Hailing from Newfoundland and Labrador, John is responsible for several units in this role including **alumni affairs**, development and advancement services, government relations, and public affairs. His most recent post was divisional director, donor, alumni and community relations for Monash University in Australia. Throughout his career, John has focused on building philanthropic support and pursuing purpose-driven stakeholder relations for education and health institutions. He has worked with alumni associations globally. John holds a BA (religious studies and English) as well as a certificate in business administration from Memorial University of Newfoundland.

DID YOU PLAY ON A BISONS SPORT SQUAD?
We are updating our records with the hopes of organizing Bisons team reunions. Email: alumni@umalumni.mb.ca with your name/sport/year.

2010 Distinguished Alumni Award

Lila Goodspeed [BScHEc/64, CertEd/68, BEd/79] is the 2010 DAA recipient. Goodspeed is an educator who's taught at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. She is an author and a staunch advocate for volunteerism in Manitoba. In addition to her membership and leadership roles with several prominent boards and committees, which range in scope from Winnipeg and Manitoba to all of Canada, Goodspeed is also a founding member of youth volunteerism initiative Manitoba A.L.I.V.E., and the former Junior League of Winnipeg.

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

O'DONNELL

Dustin O'Donnell joined our staff in May to fill in for Leslie Vlahos [BHEcol/96] who is away on maternity leave...

On that note, Leslie, husband Peter, and their dog, George, welcomed baby Kiki to their family on June 1.

ALUMNI DISCOUNT FOR MAMMA MIA

MAMMA MIA! is the ultimate feel-good show that has audiences coming back again and again. This smash-hit musical combines ABBA's greatest hits, including "Dancing Queen," "S.O.S.," "Super Trouper," "Take A Chance on Me" and "The Winner Takes It All," with an enchanting tale of love, laughter and friendship. Tickets are on sale now. Visit: **umanitoba.ca/alumni to find the Ticketmaster link.** The password is **UofManitoba**.

Alumni Nights with Bisons Sports

Join us for these fun-filled Alumni Nights during the 2010-11 Bisons season. Visit **gobisons.ca** for ticket information.

FOOTBALL: The Homecoming football game (Saturday, Sept. 25,) pits our squad against the Calgary Dinos.

MEN'S and WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL: It's the Duckworth Challenge (Friday, Dec. 3) and home town pride on the line as our teams battle the University of Winnipeg.

MEN'S HOCKEY: Cheer on our men (Saturday, Feb. 26) as they try to ice their University of Saskatchewan opponents.

EVENTS

September 22-26, 2010

HOMECOMING 2010

Whether you are in Winnipeg or around the world, Homecoming is your opportunity to come home to reconnect with your alma mater, former classmates, and friends from the University of Manitoba.

University of Manitoba
Alumni Association Inc.

HOMECOMING 2010 EVENTS

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VISIT UMANITOBA.CA/ALUMNI FOR MORE INFORMATION.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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2010 MANITOBA HOMECOMING

Bisons score new high-tech equipment

A new video editing system may not be as visible as a new stadium, but the difference it will make to the Bisons football program is just as important, says assistant head coach and defensive coordinator Stan Pierre.

Made possible by a $25,000 donation from Bison Football Alumni and Friends Inc., the advanced software will help make the team more nimble and efficient, and better equip players to dance past their opponents. Strategy is paramount in football and video is king, says Pierre [BA/94, BComm (Hons)/97], who played five seasons with the Herd before becoming a coach.

"Video analysis is a major part of the coaching process. It's unique from other sports in that there is a start and stop to every play and we need to watch every play as it develops," he says.

Head coach Brian Dobie shares Pierre's enthusiasm for the new tool and its potential to free up a lot of their time. "(It) takes us out of the disco era," he quips.

Pierre says before he would spend upwards of 20 hours a week editing video and then analyzing, sorting, and presenting the right mix of plays to help his athletes get a handle on their opponents. Not so with the new system, which does a lot of the prep work automatically. The result? Coaches spend less time preparing and analyzing video and more time producing game plans or planning practices. According to Pierre, "This will change the lives of players and coaches…especially the volunteer coaches who don't have a lot of time."

Players watch about one to two hours of video on their own each night in addition to reviewing tape with the team. According to quarterback Kevin Hayes, they are already seeing improvements as a result of the new software. He says video is available much sooner after a game and it is of better quality.

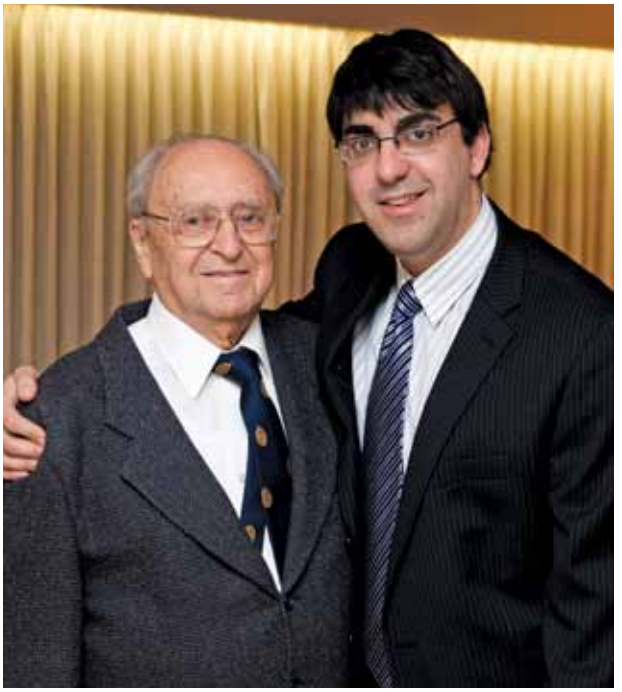
"If we have a Saturday game, on Sunday we can see the film. It's similar information but a lot more detailed so it makes the work we have to do easier," says Hayes. "We can spend more time practising."

Dale Driedger [BA/89], former Bison offensive lineman and president of Bison Football Alumni & Friends Inc., says it feels good knowing his group is helping out the team. And he is encouraged by their success both on the field and off. "The football program is doing a fabulous job of developing good young men for our community," says Driedger.

Stephanie Fehr

Family Medicine

Dr. Albert Rosenberg sits at the living room table of his South River Heights home and ponders aloud the question he's just been asked. "How can I describe the elation of having a grandson graduate from the same medical school I attended? The fourth generation (of our family) from the same school?" Old habits die hard as the 91-year-old former physician weighs his reply, as though in consultation with a patient. A polite interjection from grandson Dr. Jeremy Rose—"How did it make you feel?" — redirects Rosenberg's thoughts from his head to his heart, where his grandparent-gushing-with-pride feelings lie: "I guess, weepy."



There are many doctors in this house: Rosenberg [MD/52] and grandson Rose [MD/10, BSc(Med)/10].

He has good reason to get emotional; his family connection to the Faculty of Medicine goes back nine decades.

It was then, in 1917, that Rosenberg's uncle Dr. Bernard J. Ginsburg [MD/17] earned his degree. The 1950s delivered the next two doctors from the family, Rosenberg himself who, upon returning from service in the Second World War followed in Ginsburg's footsteps. "After the war, I was able to go to the University of Manitoba through the department of veteran affairs," recalls Rosenberg. "My first year was in 1946 at Broadway; my second was out on (Fort Garry) campus in a Quonset hut." And his brother, Mervin, in '55.

As Rosenberg embarked on a marathon family medicine career—he didn't retire until he was 80—he and wife Lily [BComm/44] had three children of their own. Looking and sounding more like someone in his 70s than his 90s, Rosenberg jokes about the secret to his longevity: "I smoked until I was in my late 40s and worked long hours," before praising Lily for his continued good health, "I'm probably alive today because of her good care." He insists he never pushed a medicine career on any of his children and that youngest son Joseph eventually caught the bug on his own, completing his MD in 1989. Joseph works in Toronto and, fittingly, is married to a physician.

Jeremy, 28, walked across the stage at the Faculty of Medicine's May 16 convocation to become doctor number five from the med-dedicated Rosenberg clan. He was born in Texas, where he lived until he was nine. Rose recalls the fateful chat with uncle Joseph that convinced him the U of M was the place to go to pursue his MD. "He told me, 'If you go back to Winnipeg and go to the U of M, you'll be well prepared.'" Grandpa Rosenberg echoes son Joseph's sentiments calling the U of M's Faculty of Medicine "second to none". Both he and Jeremy agree it owes in part to the immediacy of contact doctors-in-training have with their superiors. "There's more attention paid to the students," says Rosenberg. "They're in direct contact with their teachers." The next step for Jeremy is a five-year emergency residence program at the University of Toronto.

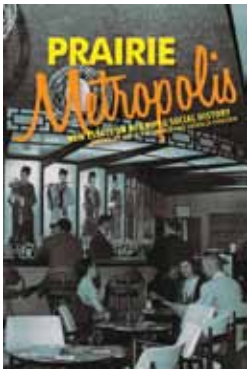
ENGINEERING DEAN ANNOUNCEMENT Douglas Buchanan [BSc(EE)/81, MSc/82] was appointed acting dean, Faculty of Engineering for a term of one year effective July 1, 2010. Following his studies at the U of M, Buchanan earned his PhD from the University of Durham, England in 1986. He spent the next 16 years (1986-2002) at IBM's prestigious Thomas J. Watson Research Center before joining the U of M's faculty. Buchanan, who's also Canada Research Chair in Microelectronic Materials, holds 27 U.S. patents, has contributed to dozens of peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations, and has guest lectured at international conferences around the world.

U OF M PRESS

...took home two 2010 Manitoba Book Awards. *All our Changes: Images from the Sixties Generation* by Gerry Kopelow won the Best Illustrated Book of the Year Award. Their other winning title, *Prairie Metropolis* netted an award for a pair of U of M faculty members (see below left).

Choice Words

The following U of M faculty and staff fared well at the 2010 Manitoba Book Awards:



>> *Prairie Metropolis: New Essays on Winnipeg Social History*, edited by associate professor Esyllt Jones [MA/97, PhD/03] and distinguished professor Gerald Friesen (history), won the Carol Shields Winnipeg Book Award.

>> *Dead on Arrival: Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba Journal 2009*, edited by associate professor Eduardo Aquino (architecture) won the Manuela Dias Book Design of the Year Award.

>> *Mama Dada: Songs of the Baroness's Dog*, by poet Jan Horner [BA/73, MA/85], who is also a librarian and acting associate director (Collections) at Elizabeth Dafoe Library, won the Aqua Lansdowne Prize for Poetry.

Rising Stars of Research

Money is probably the last thing a student wants to worry about when gearing up to dive into some intense studies.

The issue just got a lot less pressing for a trio of young researchers at the University of Manitoba who were recently awarded Vanier Graduate Scholarships to support their PhD research. Renee El-Gabalawy (whose older sister, Nadia, is featured on page 15), Julia Gamble, and Oleksandr Maizlish will each receive $50,000 annually for up to three years. The award is given to 174 students across the country and is considered the Canadian equivalent of the United Kingdom's Rhodes Scholarship.

El-Gabalawy will investigate whether physical health conditions such as arthritis and cardiovascular disease trigger anxiety disorders in seniors; Gamble will analyze the enamel on the teeth of the remains of a large Danish medieval population to better understand if and how our health in childhood affects our health as adults; and Maizlish will aim to find methods that allow for the efficient mathematical processing of images.

Photo: Katie Chalmers-Brooks

From left: Julia Gamble, Oleksandr Maizlish [MSc/08] and Renee El-Gabalawy [BSc(Hons)/08]

A New Place to Live, Learn & Grow

More than 35,000 students have called Taché Hall home during its 100-year history, including Alastair McFadden, who will be among the last to do so.

The aging building will close April 2011 for renovation and transform into the brand new Taché Arts Complex, housing the School of Art and the Marcel A. Desautels Faculty of Music. Meanwhile, a 10-storey, glass-encased student residence is being built on the south side of campus overtop Pembina Hall—the university's student dining facility. The 360-bed high rise, which boasts views of the Red River to the south and Fort Garry campus to the north, will be ready to welcome new national and international students in September 2011.

Alastair, who comes from three generations of Taché Hall residents including his grandfather Don McFadden [BSA/49], says he's glad students will soon have a new home. "It's sad to see Taché Hall change but at the same time it's exciting that the university is going ahead with the new project," he says. "I appreciate the fact that they are blending the old with the new. The new residence sounds like a stand-out project."

Many alumni, including Don, are feeling a bit nostalgic about the transformation of their old stomping grounds, but are also pleased that future students will be able to live in such a modern facility.

"It has been 64 years since I started university and a lot has changed," says Don, who called Taché Hall home in the 1940s. "A residence is essential for a university where students come from a large geographical area. If they need a replacement for Taché and space is limited, the plan to go to a high-rise is feasible."

Gwen Parker [BScHEc/48] says she built life-long friendships during the three years she lived in Taché Hall from 1945 to '48. She too recognizes the university's need to build for the future. "You have to let go of the past," Parker says, adding, "I'm glad the old residence is going to be used (for Music and Art)."

Parker still sees her fellow residents regularly and remembers the close-knit nature of the Taché Hall community. "As soon as we got out of class we were home, and we were never alone."

Students at the new residence will have the chance to fuel friendships in the many common areas being planned for the building. But they will also enjoy a new level of privacy as each suite comes with its own washroom. And unlike the old dorm, high-speed Internet, including wi-fi capability, will be available.

Associate Vice-President (Administration) Alan Simms says the new residence will "change the Fort Garry campus skyline" and be a welcome departure from Taché Hall's century-old, dormitory-style accommodation.

A capital campaign is underway to help raise funds for the new residence, which is expected to cost about $42 million. The Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Company has committed $400,000 to Project Domino to help with the construction of both the residence and the Taché Arts Complex.

Renée Barclay

KEY FEATURES OF NEW RESIDENCE

- It's the first of several buildings to be constructed or rejuvenated under Project Domino—a multi-year and multi-million dollar plan to retrofit facilities on the Fort Garry Campus for the 21st century
- It's a 360-bed high rise climbing 10 storeys with 36 units on each of its floors
- Its construction budget is $42 million
- It's being built on the south side of campus and overlooks the river
- It encompasses 120,000 square feet
- Its design includes one room per student with ensuite washroom
- It's a wi-fi 'hot spot' no matter what floor you're on with full wireless access through the entire complex
- It connects to the dining hall
- It boasts wall-to-wall, ceiling-high windows
- It includes a west-facing lounge on every floor
- It will have three high-speed elevators, two with glassed-in views
- It will be eligible for a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification with features such as an energy-conserving, triple-paned glass wall

PROJECT DOMINO: WHAT'S WITH THE NAME?

Project Domino is the largest and most ambitious redevelopment project in the university's 133-year history. It will address major space and infrastructure challenges on campus so that, like dominoes falling, as one building is complete it opens up the door for the next project to begin.

other campus development news...

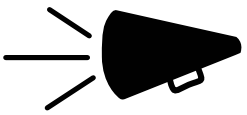
ABOVE: A trio of diggers set the stage as a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Bomber stadium was held on Fort Garry Campus. Blue Bombers and Bisons players were there, as were many of Manitoba's young amateur football players who may one day follow in their footsteps.

The 33,000-seat facility, which will play home field for both football teams, is scheduled to open for the 2012 CFL and CIS seasons.

BELOW: As Bisons athletes delight in the new stadium project underway, and students await a new abode and activity space over Pembina Hall, the something-for-everyone vibe of Project Domino extends to the arts as well. Construction is underway on the $30-million new home for fine arts at the U of M—the Art Research Technology Lab (ARTLab for short). The Lab will face onto Dafoe Road, across from the Tier Building.

Reason to cheer

Photo: Thomas Fricke



PREPARE TO FLY

The Bisons Cheerleading Team's season runs from September through April and there are tryout camps in June, July and August. In addition to taking part in two annual competitions—one national, one international—they support the Bisons football team and perform at special campus events upon request.

A sneaker hovers above the young man's head as teammates guide the position of his wrist and hand. His focus is tack sharp as he listens to their input. He's called a 'base' and for good reason. In the sneaker he holds there will momentarily be a cheerleader—a 'flyer'—who will perform feats of balance and acrobatics (like those on the facing page) from that precarious perch.

Watching the Bison Cheerleading team practice makes one thing perfectly clear: this squad is not just a bunch of sideline pep-pushers, who smile and dance at Bisons football or Winnipeg Blue Bomber games.

Led by a duo of cheerleaders-turned-coaches, Carrie Robson [BEnvD/06] and Nadia El-Gabalawy [BSc/07], these competitive athletes take their job seriously, practicing their skills with power and purpose. They're tough too. Flyers digging deep into their repertoire of stunts inevitably crash land onto their teammate bases during a marathon Saturday morning training session held in June. A laugh or a quick chat about positioning and it's back on the proverbial horse in pursuit of the next, nailed routine.

Since their inception in 2003, nailing routines in national and North America-wide competitions is precisely what this group has done.

During the past few seasons, when the squad wasn't out cheering on their Bisons brethren, they've steadily climbed from top three finisher to back-to-back division champs (2007-08 and 2008-09) at the Sea to Sky International Cheerleading Championships. They're coming off a successful 2009-10 campaign as well, which saw them collect a pair of first place finishes at two separate national competitions, good enough for a third-in-the-nation rank among the large coed collegiate division of cheer squads.

On Manitoba spoke with coaches Robson and El-Gabalawy, as well as flyer Kathryne White [BSc(Maj)/09], to learn more about their sport and their team.

What is the history of cheerleading at the University of Manitoba?

Carrie: Cheerleading was re-established (by Amy Tuckett) in 2003. I think there may have been a spirit squad in the past. Amy promoted me to assistant coach in 2004; she stepped down in 2005 to focus on her all-star program. I asked Nadia to join me in 2005 and here we are now.

Is cheerleading growing in popularity among Canadian universities?

Nadia: Cheerleading has made big steps in the past few years and we're hoping it will soon be an Olympic sport. Last year was the first, true World Championships of cheering where (several) countries faced off against each other. Provincial sport organizations throughout Canada have formed affiliations with the sport of cheerleading and we are hoping for the same in Manitoba.

Has your squad's success increased the respect your Bisons sport peers have for you or has that always existed?

Nadia: I think respect between all Bisons athletes has always existed, but I do think the cheerleading program has made big steps in the past few years to feel more connected with other Bisons athletes.

Favourite moment since you've been with the team?

Carrie: I would say our trip to Toronto to cheer on the Bisons (football team) at the Vanier Cup in 2007. Being on the field of the SkyDome was a great experience, and probably the best game performance we've had to date.

Who is the gold-standard squad as far as cheerleading in Canada is concerned?

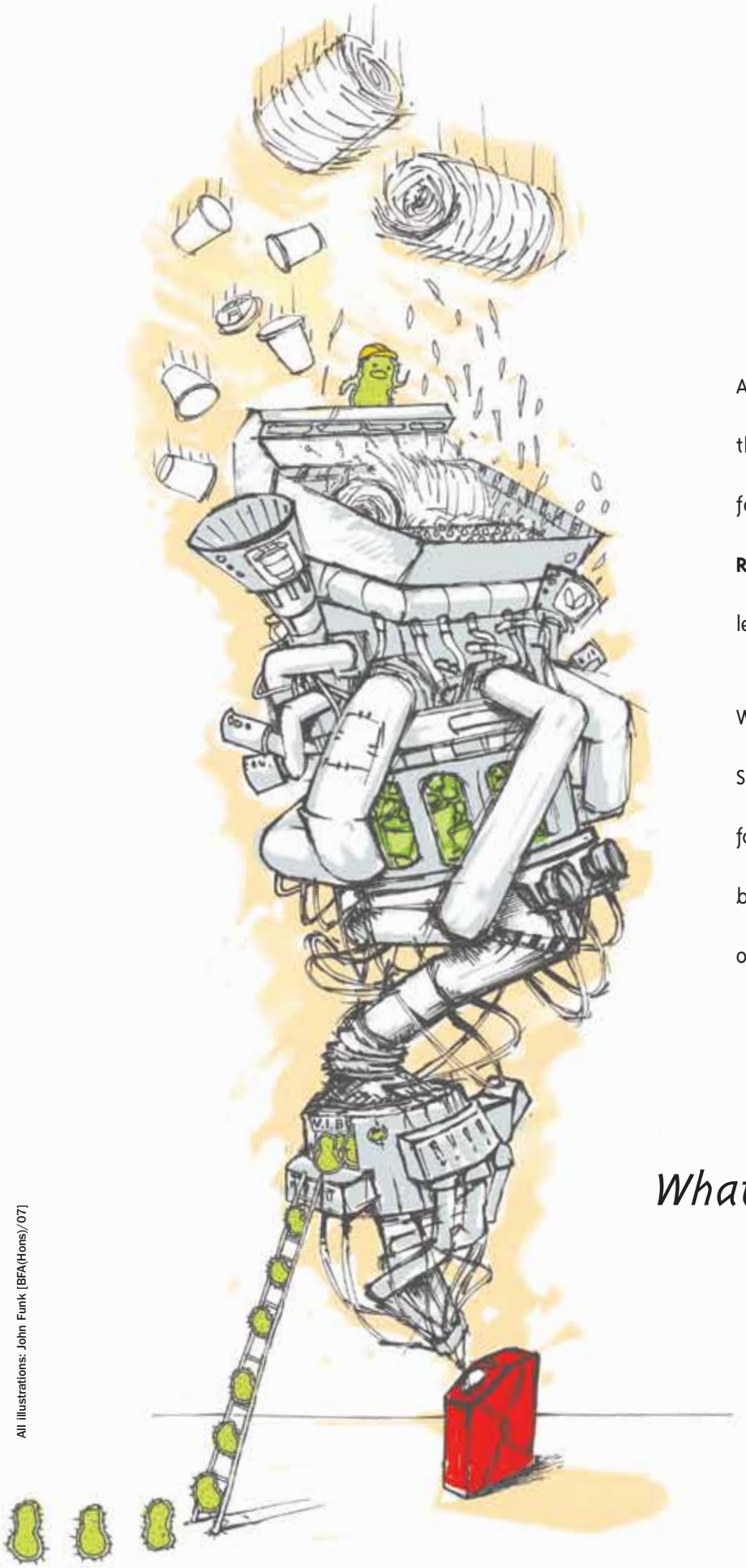
Nadia: University of Western Ontario, no doubt about it. National champions for 23 years straight. They are an excellent team.

What makes your squad gel so well, and win?

Kathryn: The high level of respect and positivity both among teammates and towards our coaches.

What's the biggest misconception about cheerleading?

Kathryn: Some people may think our sole focus is to cheer on other sports teams. Really, competition is our focus; we use games as an opportunity to practice our performances.



All illustrations: John Funk [BFA(Hons)/07]

As the world watches an oil slick smother the Gulf of Mexico, a look at the quest for alternative fuel sources—like the one **Richard Sparling** and **David Levin** are currently leading at the U of M—couldn't be more timely.

Writer ***Sarah Richards*** explores the efforts of Sparling, Levin and their team as they search for the right mix of waste, and the gas-producing bacteria that feed off it, to answer the question on almost everyone's mind:

What is the future of fuel?

For University of Manitoba researchers David Levin and Richard Sparling, a solution to the world's quenchless thirst for fossil fuels may be nestled in the nook of a maple tree. Or even in the depths of a manure slough on a family farm in Saskatchewan.

Levin and Sparling are spear-heading a $10.5 million international, multi-disciplinary research project in search of bacteria that can transform plant matter into fuels like hydrogen and ethanol.

"It's quite daunting, it's quite scary and it's quite exciting," says Sparling, an associate professor of microbiology.

Levin, an associate professor of biosystems engineering, says the four-year Microbial Genomics for Biofuels and Co-products from Biorefining Processes project will look at how particular bacteria are able to convert lignocellulosic biomass (the woody cell walls of plants) into biofuels.

Their goal is to understand the factors that control the metabolism of bacteria so they can manipulate them—through means like genetic engineering or controlling their growth environment—to make more of the desired biofuels. To make the process more efficient, the team is also looking at bacteria that can turn waste from the biofuel production into materials such as biodegradable plastics.

It's a quest that has taken on renewed importance in light of the recent deep-sea oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The April explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig caused up to 60,000 barrels of crude oil per day to spew into the ocean, killing an unknown number of animals and devastating their ecosystem.

"People have been warning about these kinds of catastrophic events for years, and now it happened," says Levin. "It basically underscores the need to develop alternatives."

Nevertheless, Levin and Sparling's quest may not be all that surprising, considering Manitoba is a leader in energy efficiency in Canada. Last year, Manitoba was the first province in the nation to implement a law requiring diesel fuel to be blended with biodiesel made from products like animal fats or canola. In 2008, provincial officials required fuel suppliers to replace a minimum of 8.5 per cent of their fuel with ethanol, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions by more than 135,000 tonnes.

Indeed, the grand-daddy of biofuels remains ethanol, which has been dramatically promoted in recent years as an alternative to fossil fuels. Currently, the United States and Brazil are the lead producers of ethanol. Brazil uses sugar cane, while both the United States and Canada use wheat and corn. It's produced by using yeast to ferment the grains' glucose into ethanol.

There were five plants producing ethanol fuel in Canada in 2002, one of which is in Minnedosa, Man., according to Natural Resources Canada. Depending on the quantity of ethanol blended in fuel, ethanol can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 75 per cent.

Still, ethanol has some serious weaknesses. Critics contend that it requires more energy to produce the corn or wheat that is used to make ethanol than the energy it yields at the gas pump. The U.S. Department of Energy states that it takes 1.4 gallons of ethanol to equal the energy content of one gallon of gasoline. Nor can ethanol be transported by existing gas pipelines; instead, it must be shipped by train, truck or boat. To top it off, ethanol production requires government subsidies or incentives.

Translation? No one has figured out how to make biofuels cheaply. Not yet.

Sparling and Levin are hoping to change that by identifying bacteria that are most efficient at breaking down the cellulose of waste materials. Sparling is focusing in part on the metabolic profiling of these bugs—growing the bacteria and understanding the products they make out of different waste, like wood chips—as well as understanding the genes and proteins involved in transforming that waste.

"The upshot is not just to find them, but to do a detailed characterization of who they are, and that's where the Genome Canada grant becomes important," Sparling says.

Genome Canada, the main financier of the project, is a non-profit organization funded in part by the federal government with the goal of supporting research on both genes and proteins. The project is also funded by the Province of Manitoba and other research partners. The University of Manitoba team was awarded its grant last year, and the project is being managed by Genome Prairie, a regional genome organization established by Genome Canada.

As for Sparling, he's an avid gardener who has long been interested in how things grow.

"I guess I can say that this vital urge to observe growing things spills over into my work, where plants are replaced by bacteria, but my interest in seeing them grow and understanding how they grow and what makes them tick is from the same source," says the 49-year-old researcher.

Sparling believes that if the team can determine the 'recipes'—or genomic blueprints—behind bacteria that are efficient cellulose degraders, it will allow the researchers to build biofuel-creating bacteria communities.

"We can look at the blueprints for the different organisms and say, 'Hey, you're better at doing this, the other one's better at doing that, and now maybe I understand why by reading your blueprint.' So we can start saying, 'If we move this gene which makes this organism better into that organism which has other more interesting properties, maybe it will be better.'"

This is where Levin, a 55-year-old molecular biologist, comes in. Like Sparling, he's also a gardening enthusiast. He's overseeing the team's activities directed at genetically modifying bacteria to enhance their production of biofuel.

"For organisms that produce the right stuff

but maybe don't produce it as much, or maybe there's some other product that competes with production, if we can knock out that pathway and make more of the stuff we're interested in—that's metabolic engineering," says Levin.

He and Sparling first met over e-mails in 2003. Levin, who at the time was working at the University of Victoria, ended up undertaking a project on biohydrogen production during a year-long sabbatical at the University of Manitoba. Levin and Sparling began collaborating more closely after the former joined the biosystems engineering staff in 2006.

"We've been working together ever since," says Sparling. "I find that so powerful—that engineers and microbiologists coming from very different cultures, backgrounds and training are working together."

They've studied Clostridium termitidis, a bacterium that has been found in the stomachs of wood-digesting termites, and have spent years investigating Clostridium thermocellum (C. thermocellum), an anaerobic bacterium found in rotting compost. Sparling jokes that the latter carries a Swiss army knife when it goes to lunch.

"It literally has on its cell wall a cluster of enzymes that can basically snip off and cut through the various parts of the wood to get at the cellulose fibres that are its preferred food," says Sparling.

He says C. thermocellum's picky eating habits are balanced out by the fact it has 'friends over for the party'—other bacteria—that degrade the other components of plant waste that it does not.

"What we know from nature is that all these bacteria work as groups," says Sparling. "C. thermocellum is probably calling friends, 'I'm eating this, but I'm also carving up that and that; I'm eating meat, but who likes broccoli?'"

The hunt for the best bacteria has taken the team to some different and unusual places—for starters, the tree across from Sparling's home in Old Saint Boniface.

"There's an old maple tree that has very old branches that have been eaten by a bunch of ants," says Sparling.

Sparling sniffed the tree and thought: 'I smell biofuels.'

"There's an odour of some of the fermentation products that are associated with degradation of cellulose," he explains. "Some of the bacteria produce a little bit of butyrate, which is a rancid butter smell."

Sparling took some samples to the lab, where microbiology student Jenna Aviles [BSc(Hons)/10] discovered that stool from the ants consisted of digested cellulose.

"I've isolated four (apparently new organisms) which produce hydrogen gas when grown on a source of cellulose," says Aviles.

Sparling says the team is considering doing a genetic sequencing of the discovery in order to further understand how the organisms work.

Another discovery came from the slough pond on a farm in Saskatchewan. The farm belongs to the family of Scott Wushke [BSc(Hons)/09], a first-year masters student specializing in metabolic profiling of novel, thermophilic (heat-loving), biofuel-producing bacterial colonies.

The team came across several interesting communities of bacteria in the pond and is analyzing them to see if certain combinations may provide a higher, more robust conversion of cellulose to biofuels.

"What Scott found was another strain of C. thermocellum, but with a friend that was mopping up the oxygen," says Sparling. "Here's an example of a community that might be of interest, because let's face it, we want fermentation to go, and fermentation does not require air. So we're trying to find a way of getting these wonderful bugs that are air-intolerant paired up among other things with friends that can protect them."

The team's hunt for biofuel bugs goes as far as New Zealand. Matt Stott, a scientist at the Kiwi government's Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences research organization, is collaborating with the University of Manitoba team to locate hyperthermophilic bacteria in natural hot springs, where there are a variety of temperatures, acidity levels and decomposing organic materials.


LEVIN

But why the search for such hardy, heat-happy bacteria?

Sparling says if the microorganisms thrive at temperatures near the 78.4 C boiling point of ethanol, fermentation tanks could be run at higher temperatures, allowing ethanol to be both produced and distilled at the same time. One of the benefits of this would be a sped-up production cycle.

For now, those production cycles are tested in bioreactors at the lab of Nazim Cicek, an associate professor in the department of biosystems engineering. Cicek says the tests involving biomass like barley hulls and dried distillers grain have at times proven difficult.

"Feeding these high-solid substrates into a small reactor is an extreme challenge because it's a continuous feed," Cicek says. "You're feeding this stuff 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and issues with clogging, mixing—logistical things you wouldn't think would be significant—become a real headache."

Cicek and his students are working with Dutch equipment manufacturer Applikon Biotechnology to build a gravity-based feed system that would rely on a pinch valve activated by special software to address the problem.

The University of Manitoba team is hoping to develop biofuel production processes using leftover plant material like hemp hurds, the waste material left after extracting the fibre from the plant. They're also interested in flax shives, which are the non-fibrous stems that remain after processing flax straw. According to the Flax Council of Canada, depending on the type of flax, the shive can account for 50 to 85 per cent of the straw's weight, yet it has few uses that bring in money.

KNOW OF ANY OTHER

U of M-based investigations into green energy? Let us know!
E-mail Jeremy_brooks@umanitoba.ca under the subject 'going green'.

If Sparling and Levin can find bacteria that quickly and efficiently digests the shives' cellulose to create biofuel, it would not only address what to do with the shives, but it would also contribute to reducing the use of fossil fuels.

"We have to have something that's going to cost a few pennies per litre to make a cheap nutrient source," says Levin.

In addition to agricultural crop residues, the team is looking at garbage that ends up at municipal landfills, like paper coffee cups. Levin happened to have been walking by a Tim Hortons when he realized that paper cups would make a perfect base on which their bacteria could live. They've since added two collection bins near the Tim Hortons outlets on campus in order to collect the used cups, which are then shredded, turned into mulch and used in the bioreactors.

Based on some initial tests, the team believes that about 100 cups might generate 1.3 litres of ethanol.

SPARLING

"This is an estimate based on very preliminary results," cautions Levin.

The team also tried cups from Starbucks, but those cups took longer for the bacteria to degrade. The researchers are hoping to find out why through further study.

To off-set the cost of producing biofuels, the researchers hope to use bacteria to transform the leftover waste into material used for biodegradable plastics. Traditional commercial plastics are made from petroleum; bioplastics are now being used to make everything from children's toys to carpet to biodegradable cutlery.

"I can tell you that no one will be successful at turning plant material into a petroleum substitute unless we do exactly the same thing as a petroleum refinery, which is to make more than one product," says Sparling.

The Genome Canada project includes an ethical component, reflective of the deep discussions that have developed in tandem with the research being done on using food to power machines. Questions regarding the sustainability of biofuels and their positive and negative impacts on land, water and economic development will all be examined, Levin says.

This debate surrounding biofuels peaked two years ago, when both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank blamed skyrocketing food prices on countries setting aside crops to be turned into ethanol.

"There are a lot of issues around food vs. fuel," says Levin. "Because grain is a commodity, and fuel is a competing market for that, it drives the price up. If there's a bad harvest, the price goes up even higher, which is what happened over the last two years. When we have high grain prices, that makes the ethanol production not very economically viable.

So the long-term viability of grain-based ethanol is not very clear."

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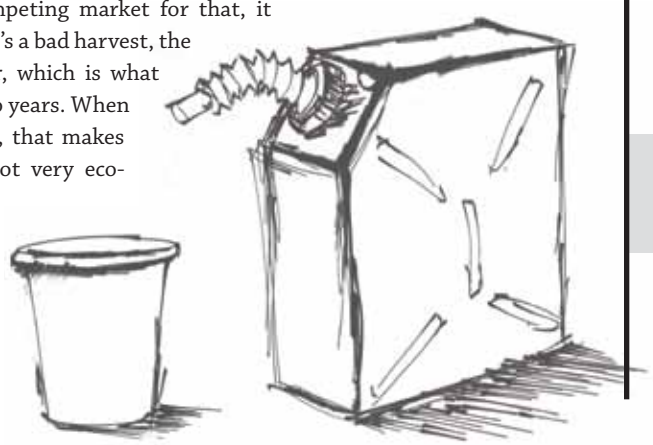

Photos: Jeremy Brooks

THE EVOLUTION OF GREEN

Noteworthy moments in the development of renewable energies

AD 500 – 900: Windmills for pumping water and grinding grain are developed in Persia.

1850s: The Halladay Windmill, the ubiquitous windmill seen in the American West with its tower structure and thin blades, is built and sold.

1904: The first dry steam geothermal plant is built in Larderello, Italy. The plant still powers about one million homes.

1908: Henry Ford produces a Model T that can run on gasoline, ethanol or a mix of the two.

1950s: Bell Labs develops a silicon photovoltaic cell, the first solar cell to convert the sun's radiation into power for electrical equipment.

1984: A commercial geothermal power plant begins operations at the Roosevelt Hot Springs in Utah.

1991: The first exploratory magma well is drilled in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

1994: The first commercial wind farm in Canada is completed in Pincher Creek, Alta.

1997: American car manufacturers start mass-producing vehicles capable of using gas, ethanol or both.

2001: Solar power systems are sold in some San Diego-area Home Depots.

2009: University of Manitoba professor Douglas Thomson and associate professors Michael Freund and Torsten Hegmann secure a three-year, $1.2 million grant to work with the California Institute of Technology on discovering ways to transform renewable energies like solar power into fuels like hydrogen.

2009: Manitoba is first in Canada to implement a law requiring diesel to be blended with biodiesel made from products like animal fats or canola.

Sources: University of Manitoba; U.S. Department of Energy; Alberta Department of Energy

Photo & Cover: Max S. Gerber

IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

Winnipeg-raised **Robert Kirbyson** [BFA(Hons)/92] plumbs his well of childhood experience to create his cinematic vision

David Silverberg

The irony is almost too rich to be true: aspiring cinematographer loses his sight in one eye, decides to become a director, fixes his eyesight but continues to focus on directing. Robert Kirbyson has a story ideal for its own biopic, if only the tale was over. At 40, Kirbyson is just beginning to realize his vision as a prominent filmmaker in Hollywood.

In May, his debut feature film *Snowmen* screened at the venerable Tribeca Film Festival where it placed second in the Audience Award category—losing out to a documentary about fellow Canadians, rock band Rush. Co-starring Christopher Lloyd and Ray Liotta, the film is semi-autobiographical but Kirbyson is mum on the details. He did reveal in an interview the storyline is inspired by events during his childhood years in Winnipeg. "It's my most personal film," says Kirbyson, now living in Los Angeles with his wife Catherine.

Snowmen, which is slated for an October release pending a finalized distribution deal, is eons away from the early days Kirbyson enjoyed on the Prairies. How many young filmmakers can say they worked on *Sesame Street* at 19? In high school, a teacher connected him with the National Film Board in Winnipeg, where several filmmakers were creating animated segments for the children's show. He produced a few of those segments, all while he was at the University of Manitoba pursuing his bachelor of fine arts.

Before he enrolled in the School of Art, he was inches away from going into one of the sciences. "Then my mom told me I'm too creative to be a doctor," Kirbyson says, "and that encouraged me to take fine arts and eventually filmmaking.

Kirbyson credits a very special experimental video class, led by Alex Poruchnyk, for shaping his vision of filmmaking. "That class, and my whole time at the university, really gave me my foundation so I was ready to take a gamble when I graduated."

It wasn't a major gamble, but Kirbyson left *Sesame* to try his hand at directing for the CBC's hit reality show about interesting jobs, *It's a Living*. Filming all day and editing all night, Kirbyson suddenly became busier than he expected. As fun as it was to capture host Peter Jordan tackling fascinating careers, Kirbyson admits the stress took a toll on his body.

Then came the bad news: in 2000, central serous retinopathy damaged his right eye so severely he would soon be legally blind. Specialists guessed his work with cameras may have contributed to the condition. No one really knows why, Kirbyson says, but doctors told him he burst a blood vessel, and that explosion compounded to affect other key vessels. "When it first happened, I was terrified," he admits. "Would a guy who loves making movies suddenly go blind?"

But a funny thing happened on the way to the doctor's office. Kirbyson turned his pain into gain: after hauling cameras and testing the directorial waters with CBC Winnipeg, the then 33-year-old was ready to pursue feature filmmaking. "In a weird way, I felt that problem was divine intervention," he remembers.

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DS: Rob, where'd you get the idea for *Ctrl Z*?

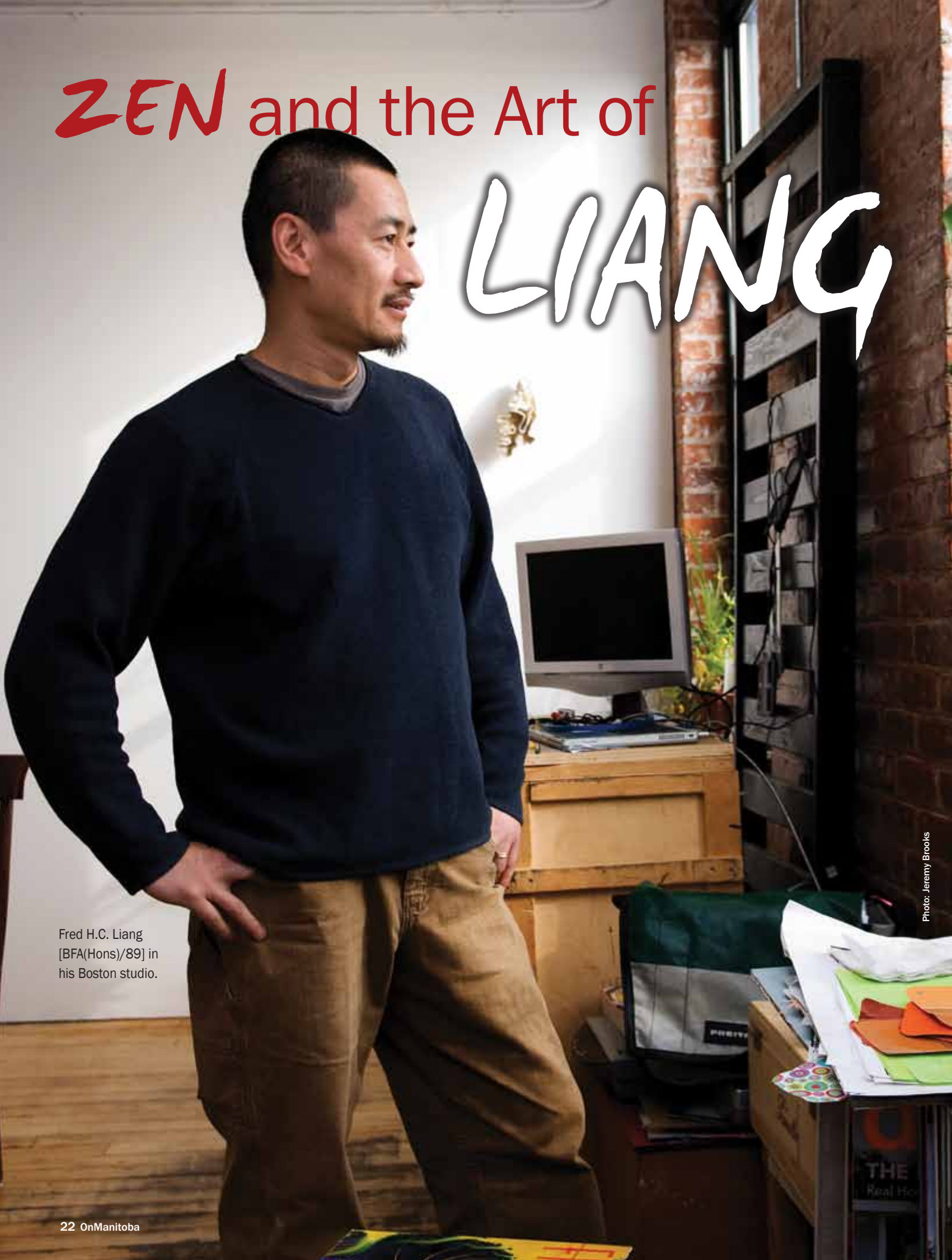
RK: **I needed to make the original short as part of my advanced application to the Steven Spielberg reality show *On The Lot*. The film had to be five minutes and we only had a week to finish it. I needed an idea that I could shoot in one day, cheap, in a single get-able location.**

I pitched to a co-worker an old feature film idea of mine about a time machine that travelled back only a few seconds—essentially an undo button. My friend responded, "Oh, like Ctrl Z on a keyboard". Epiphany! I wrote it that evening in a couple hours.

I should point out that I've always pronounced the title "Ctrl Zed", much to the amusement of my American cast and crew.

WATCH KIRBYSON'S WEB SERIES
by searching 'Ctrl' at nbc.com.

ZEN and the Art of LIANG



Fred H.C. Liang [BFA(Hons)/89] in his Boston studio.

Photo: Jeremy Brooks

Jeremy Brooks [BA/98]

Fred H.C. Liang ducks and darts through the commuter congestion of a Boston evening in March. The acclaimed contemporary artist, who's been shortlisted for the 2010 Institute of Contemporary Arts/Boston Foster Prize, is hard to keep up with.

His feet, and his thoughts, are always in motion. Entering the city's Chinatown district, en route to the Vietnamese restaurant—where his wife, Jeanette Juba-Liang [BEd/93], and their kids, son, Quin Long, six, and daughter Anjue, four, await his arrival for their dinner date—Liang questions Chinatown's authenticity; Liang himself lived in Wuhan, China, until he was 12.

"Culture is not static over time; what you see in Chinatown is an expression of China's past," says the 46-year-old ex-Winnipegger.

Liang's work regularly incorporates and explores aspects of his Chinese culture, and for good reason; he grew up in the country during the Cultural Revolution, a time when culture, religious study, and individual expression were forcefully repressed. "(That was) a big void in Chinese history that was never part of my understanding," recalls Liang. During his upbringing in Canada, and later on when he did his graduate degree at Yale, Liang delved into the mysteries of his heritage. Today, he has a clearer understanding of what it means to be Chinese. "The essential Chinese character consists of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism," he says. "It governs everything from family structure to society. And if you scratch the skin of every Chinese (person) one of the three, if not all, are somehow embedded in them."

If you assume artists love conflict, then you need look no further than the chasm between some of Liang's beliefs, and his role as artist, to find quirky examples of the internal rifts he contends with. For example, when Liang is finished with a piece for an installation, *he's finished.* He doesn't attend his own shows nor does he stockpile his work. The Buddhist in him believes nothing is permanent, so he pursues an idea through his work only up to a certain point. "My contribution ends when (my art) goes on the wall," he says. Liang, who's been a professor at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MASSArt for short) since 1997, also distances himself from his work in the classroom. He doesn't share or discuss his art with his students; he doesn't want them to admire him in any way. He'd rather they learn from the masters, as well as the up-and-comers. If the concept seems difficult to grasp, consider Liang's paraphrasing of a Zen Buddhist lesson on idolatry and admiration, "If you ever meet Buddha in the road, kill him."

But it's not all deep and Zen with Liang. At one point during the journey from his warehouse art studio to dinner, he jokingly compares Boston's drive-at-five mayhem to that of another major metro he once called home—New York. "In New York there is one rule: everyone (in a car) is trying to kill you," he says. "In Boston, drivers and pedestrians are just crazy." And during the meal, he and Jeannette chat about Team Canada's recent gold-medal victory in Olympic men's hockey and the relief it meant for a pair of Canucks living south of the border. "If Team Canada would have lost, I would never have heard the end of it," he said.

The Yin Yang is probably the most recognizable symbol of Taoism, one of the natures Liang attributes to the Chinese, and it loosely represents the balance of opposites in the universe. This viewpoint bubbles to the surface in conversation with Liang as he routinely complements a thought with its exact opposite. When he spoke of distancing himself from his work around his students, he immediately acknowledged that like any other artist, what he fears most is "being ignored." When he explores the importance of an artist's contribution to the world, he tethers his thoughts to the ground; humble, not haughty, that is Liang's nature. "The beautiful thing about being an artist…art is a necessary endeavour into human history, but rarely is it crucial in a way that's life or death," he says. "As a result, artists are left alone a lot, like philosophers, to think. Like philosophers, we can come up with crazy stuff. (But) there are no real world consequences other than we contribute to the intellectual dialogue."

Over-Soul: Liang's 2008 wall installation at the Sun Shine Museum of Contemporary Art in Beijing, China. The exhibition ran during the Beijing Olympics and Liang speculates the military were probably there as part of the Olympic festivities. Photo: Peter Wayne Lewis

Culture may in part explain Liang's tendency to keep his ego in check, but other factors contribute as well.

For one, art-loving Liang grew up the youngest of three sons of an engineer and was surrounded by doctors, scientists or military men. "I was the black sheep of the family," he says. "I think they (his parents) recognized that we would have a difficult life ahead of us and wanted us to get a profession to support ourselves. It was natural parent instincts."

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Barbara Gehring [BEd/91] on set of *Girls Only* during its run at Manitoba Theatre Centre.

Photo: Thomas Fricke

The unhomecoming

Tamara Bodi [BA/90]

Barbara Gehring assumed the preteen diary and the valentine tucked inside were the only remnants of one of her most humiliating memories as a young girl.

But earlier this year, nearly three decades after Gehring penned her secret heartbreak, the actress suddenly found herself on a Winnipeg stage with the one person who could add a new chapter to her story.

Flashback to 2004. Gehring, born and raised in East St. Paul, and comedian-actress Linda Klein need to come up with a new act after the third member of their Denver-based comedy troupe [A.C.E.] goes on an extended vacation. After a sidesplitting afternoon sharing their girlhood diaries, the pair realize each chicken-scratch passage is a thing of beauty—tender and hilarious in its terseness—each entry shifting from the most casual of observations to the grandest of pronouncements in a few staccato sentences.

"Went to Denver and got a ginue [sic] pig. I named him McNickle Dennis Klein. Ken knows I'm going steady with DC," reads an entry from Klein's diary, circa early-80s.

Gehring's game-changer was inked on Feb. 14, 1981.

"Unlucky day. Nothing happened to me. We went tabogning [sic]. I gave Doug this Valentine and he started laughing and gave it back to me."

A later entry details the mortal wound.

"Today, Monday, was the worst day. Dougie asked Teresa to go around. Then he asked me. But he said he was only kidding about me, but he was serious about Teresa. Then he said he didn't like me, and that he only liked me as a friend. And then he said he didn't like me because I'm not good looking enough."

The diary confessions, along with sketches named The Pantyhose Ballet, Up with Puberty and Craft Corner, have all played out to great laughter and standing ovations since *Girls Only: The Secret Comedy of Women* debuted for the Denver feminati in 2008.

But if anyone thinks two extremely funny women leaping around the stage in bra and panties is a joke, consider this: *Girls Only* has been seen by 90,000 women and has grossed more than $2 million.

Given much of Gehring's material has its roots in Winnipeg, it was a natural fit the Colorado-based comedian bring the show here in spring 2010.

"I look at the audience and see people who were my childhood friends," says Gehring. "In Winnipeg, the audience responds to my stories in a different way than in Denver because they can relate to them. Like, when I say Winnipeggers drive south for vacation…to North Dakota. There is some context. I feel like I've finally brought it home."

During the ninth show of the Winnipeg run, it was more like home brought the past to Gehring.

She and Klein performed a sketch about their childhood keepsake boxes and asked an audience member to come up on stage and fish out an item. When Gehring called for her volunteer, Teresa Wasney—the *Teresa*—walked on stage.

Textbook Winnipegger happenstance, if you think about it. Dougie crushes Gehring's heart in 1981; almost 30 years later she brings that story—now part of a multimillion-dollar show currently pending international franchise possibilities—back home; as part of the performance she invites a crowd member on stage to dig through her old *Teen Beats* and student council paraphernalia; and that volunteer ends up being the girl who originally stole her teenage crush Dougie's heart.

"She's still just as beautiful," Gehring says. "After the shock wore off I told the audience who she was and gave her a big hug. I couldn't believe it."

Gehring successfully mined her history for comic gold without getting stuck in the past. And she's done plenty of living in the three decades since the Dougie debacle.

Following graduation from the Faculty of Education and her subsequent "very sad" departure from the Black Hole Theatre, she moved to Hokkaido, Japan to teach English for three years. That's where she met husband Paul, who hails from Colorado. After trying her hat at teaching, she switched to acting fulltime. Today, she's one of the busiest commercial actors in Denver. She's also a mom to Isabella and Gavin, a snowboarder, and as much master of the punch as she is of the punch line—Gehring holds black belts in karate and ancient weapons.

Her presence on stage is difficult to describe in words—basically, she's really, really funny. In person she's light, gracious and smart.

"Acting is not doing, but giving. I am so pleased to make these women laugh."

When pressed if she sees her sold-out 20-show Winnipeg run as a kind of homecoming, she answers philosophically.

"We're always coming home to visit my family. Home is always with you. If you're proud of where you come from you never leave it. If you're proud of your roots, you let people know about those roots."

Rob Kirbyson continued from page 21

On the set of *Ctrl Z* from left: Steve Howey, Rob Kirbyson and Tony Hale. Courtesy: NBC Photo/Chris Haston; Robert Kirbyson on the set of *Snowmen* with Christopher Lloyd (r) and young cast members: Christian Martyn, Bobb'e J. Thompson, and Bobby Coleman (photos courtesy Gorilla Pictures); *Snowmen* movie poster.

In another twist of fate, Kirbyson recently had surgery to correct his eyesight. But despite his restored vision, Kirbyson doesn't see himself returning to cinematography; he's caught the directing bug.

When he began, he worked on freebies, tried his hand as a director of photography, moved to L.A. with Catherine (who works as a film editor), took screenwriting courses. Like any passionate artist, he struggled until he found what he wanted.

What he got was a surprise. Kirbyson wrote and directed a short film called *Ctrl Z*, about a magical computer keyboard with the ability to stop time. Starring Tony Hale (who played Buster in the TV comedy *Arrested Development*), the film won acclaim at short film fests and even attracted major network attention. Kirbyson and his team were hired by NBC in 2009 to write a 10-part web series based on the short film.

"I appreciate Rob because he knew what he wanted with *Ctrl*," says Hale during a phone interview. "Some directors aren't secure in their vision, but not Rob. He made everyone feel comfortable."

Hale says he enjoyed his experience on *Ctrl* so much he would gladly work with Kirbyson again.

Ctrl the web series is unique, for both the director and the TV industry: it's been hailed as the first original web series from network TV (compared to offshoot vids from shows like *The Office*). Like the short film that inspired it, *Ctrl* has earned recognition in the award circuit: it won Web Comedy of the Year at the 2010 Los Angeles Web Series Festival, and Hale took home a Streamy (think Oscars for the web vid industry) for Best Actor in a Comedy Series.

Comedy works for the web because viewers want quick bites of humour, Kirbyson says. When he taught filmmaking at the University of British Columbia, he stressed to students the importance of story, and he sees the web as a prime vehicle for telling a tight, well-edited narrative. "People can leave in seconds if they aren't hooked in right away," says Kirbyson. "On the web, you have to win over the audience quickly."

He's hoping to win over audiences with *Snowmen*, which he likens to a Canadian *Stand By Me*. And he's encouraged by the test screenings. "People were crying and cheering, and I dream of that, to move people with my story," Kirbyson says.

Snowmen would be ideal for the Canadian market, he adds. "Since I find it nostalgic, I think most Canadians will too."

Kirbyson is also going Canuck for his next project: a film about hockey. He's tight-lipped about details—the deal is preliminary—but let's just say Kirbyson is rooting for the film to be shot in Winnipeg. "I'll take any excuse to return to Winnipeg," he says with a short laugh.

Some artists carry around a lucky charm when they work. Others claim to follow the moral taught by a teacher or parent. Robert Kirbyson's philosophy can be summed up in a poem he read as a boy, four lines he's learned to live by, four lines to inspire anyone enduring the challenges of their art:

"Time and stress will make or break/Keep smiling, tho' through tears/For it's not the years you live that count/But how you live the years."

Fred Liang continued from page 23

Liang describes the relationship he has with his parents today with humour, "Luckily for me, my parents have more to worry about now than me: six grand kids, they're off my back." And acceptance, "We'll always be kids in our parents' eyes."

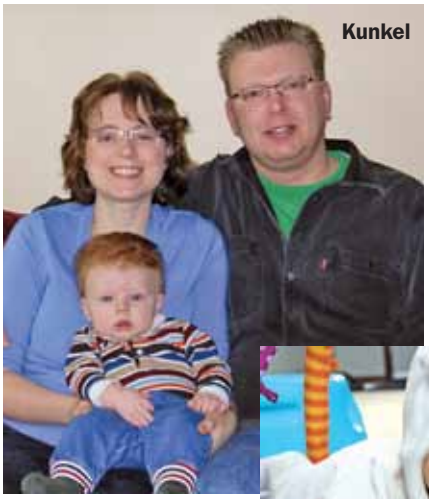
Though he paints himself as the black sheep, Liang nonetheless excelled at the things he took an interest in. And art was there, right from an early age. "I remember my oldest brother John teaching me to draw; very quickly, I could draw better than him," says Liang. He brought his 'knack' for drawing with him to the U of M's School of Art. There, a trio of instructors: Diane Whitehouse, Steve Higgins and Sheila Butler, especially Butler, immersed Liang in the true language of art. "(Butler) totally dismissed the fact that I could do photorealistic art and said it was 'the worst crap she'd ever seen,'" says Liang. "She woke me up from my slumber. Sheila was the most influential as a teacher because she taught me, 'tell them the truth and they'll figure it out.'"

Years later, in 2001, Liang returned to the School for a solo exhibition in Gallery One One One. Cliff Eyland, an associate professor in the School and the Gallery's director, shared his thoughts on Liang's work. "He set up a circle of wild Manitoban rice on the gallery floor and a circle of white rice in the rotunda floor just outside the gallery," Eyland recalls. "I thought of that as a direct reference to his ethnicity as a Chinese Canadian, but also as an invitation—like all of his work—to a certain kind of contemplation. Fred made specific reference to Zen Buddhism in our conversations and I regarded his work as a set of images and objects meant to perhaps provoke some kind of awakening after contemplation."

Back to Boston, and March. Dinner is over but the conversation continues as Liang leads a brisk hike through the city's touristy spots. Our interview has been an endurance race of sorts from Liang's studio, to Chinatown, to dinner, to now, its end. And on the sidewalk below our feet is the finish line to the Boston Marathon.

For our Dec. 2010 issue, the deadline for TTY submissions is Oct. 1, 2010.

Accomplishments


Kunkel


Desrosiers


Buffie


Nicolson


Neethirajan

1960-69

Hendrie, Hugh C. [DipPsych/67] has been named to the U.S. government's Department of Health and Human Services National Advisory Council on Aging. Hendrie, a geriatric psychiatrist and health services researcher, has spent 40 years studying the psychiatric issues of aging and has written more than 400 peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and abstracts.

1970-79

Hebert, Gilles [BA/79] was recently appointed executive director of the Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton).

1980-89

Peterkin, Dr. Allan [BA/79, BSc(Med)/85, MD/85] was recently named head of the University of Toronto's Narrative Study and Healthcare Humanities program. Peterkin is an associate professor of psychiatry and family medicine at U of T and a founding editor of ARS MEDICA: A Journal of Medicine, The Arts and Humanities (ars-medica.ca).

McCurdy, Dr. Wendy E. [BMR (PT)/85, BPE/87, MD/93] is thrilled to announce the birth of her son, Benjamin Alexander Knight McCurdy, on Jan. 10, 2009.

1990-99

Schroeder, Tamara [BSc(Hons)/98] and **Kunkel, Jeremy** [BSc(Maj)/93, PhD/02] are thrilled to announce the birth of their first child. Asher Theodore Leron Schroeder Kunkel, a healthy and robust blue-eyed and red-headed boy, was born Sept. 24, 2009 in Winnipeg.

Buffie (Gillis), Jennifer [BSc/99, BSc(Pharm)/03, BEd/06] and **Buffie, Ryan** [BSc(Pharm)/01] are delighted about their new arrival—Juliet Magdalene Buffie—on Sept. 23, 2009.

Vann Struth, Elissa (Adrien) [BA(Hons)/95] earned second-place honours from the CBC's National Literary Awards for her English-language short story *Down to the Roots*. Vann Struth lives in Vancouver, B.C., with husband and fellow U of M graduate Jamie Vann Struth [BA(Hons)/95]. They have three children.

Desrosiers, Greg [BSc(GE)/97] and **Mark, Donna** [BHEcol/98, ExtEd/99] are happy to announce the birth of their second daughter, Chantelle Jing Lan Desrosiers on Oct. 10, 2009. Chantelle means 'singer' and 'Jing Lan' means radiant flower (specifically an orchid). Her name represents both her beautiful French and Asian heritages.

Hunt, Adam [BA/98] had his tenth book and first novel, *The Longest SAR*, published recently.

2000-2009

Nicolson, Heather [BSc/02] and **Ryan Nicolson** welcomed baby boy Morgan Aaron Nicolson on Jan. 11, 2010.

Neethirajan, Suresh [MSc/05, ExtEd/09, PhD/09] has earned multiple, international awards for his academic and research excellence including: the Obei-Tanki Fellowship from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, which made him eligible to work as a visiting researcher at Japan's National Research Institute in Tsukuba; the Humboldt Fellowship from the Alexander Humboldt Foundation, which allows him to work as a researcher at Germany's Max Planck Institute; and from Canada, a 2010 Natural Science and Engineering Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship which will allow him to work for the U.S. Department of Energy at their Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee.

Neethirajan is a registered professional engineer (P.Eng) with the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of the Province of Manitoba. He holds a U.S. provisional patent on a food quality monitoring nanosensor and has published his research in 15 peer-reviewed journals and 20 conference proceedings.

We welcome your news and photographs. Images must be 300 dpi and in jpeg or tiff format. Images that do not meet these requirements will not be included. E-mail jeremy_brooks@umanitoba.ca.

In Memoriam

The Alumni Association Inc. of the University of Manitoba extends their condolences to the family and friends of the following alumni:

1920-29

Elliott, Hazel I. [BA/29] April 17, 2010

1930-39

Gourley, M. Beth [BSc/37, MSC/56] Feb. 23, 2010

Pickard, Herbert M. [BA/36, LLB/40] May 2, 2010

Swan, Lilly M. [BScHEc/35] April 3, 2010

1940-49

Baron, Dr. Paul J. [MD/44] March 11, 2010

Braddell, David L. [BSc/48, BEd/62] March 28, 2010

Bradshaw, Shirley Margaret [BA/43, BA(Hons)/46] April 9, 2010

Brook, Albert C. [BComm(Hons)/49] Jan. 26, 2010

Brownlee, Wm Richard [BSc(CE)/46] April 9, 2010

Burns (Rossini), Winnifred Anne [BComm/49] April 30, 2010

Cormack, Jack Waitt [BSc(CE)/44] May 25, 2010

Deniset-Bernier, Rev. Pere M. [BA(LatPh)/42, DipEd/48] March 4, 2010

Ellis, David W. [BSc(EE)/46] May 25, 2010

English, John F. [BA/43] Feb. 24, 2010

Everett (Gladstone), Patty G. [DipID/47] May 19, 2010

Fraser, George Robertson [DipAgric/40, BSA/48] March 12, 2010

Haddad, Can. Joseph [BA/40, LLB/44] March 21, 2010

Hayakawa, Dr. Joseph [BSc/49, MD/55, DipAnaes/61] May 1, 2010

Kantor, Dr. Sam C. [BSc/45, MD/50, DipAnaes/59] May 26, 2010

Marcoe (Zivot), Bernice Shirley [BA/47] May 26, 2010

McCawley, Dr. J. Comrie [MD/46] Feb. 25, 2010

McRuer, A. Robert [BSc(Pharm)/47] April 13, 2010

Mills, Robert H. [BSc/46] Feb., 2009

Murphy (Baragar) Marie Louise [BSc/41] April 20, 2010

Phillips, Alfred T. [BA/43, MA/48, BEd/57, MEd/64] April 14, 2010

Rudnicki, Walter [BA/49, BSW/50] March 7, 2010

Shiffman, Max [BA/48] April 21, 2010

Young, Dr. Arthur F. [MD/45] March 14, 2010

1950-59

Canvin, David T. [BSA/56, MSC/57] March 16, 2010

Chant, Robert [DipAgric/57] Feb. 14, 2010

Connell, Cameron Laird [BEd/57] March 22, 2010

Crawford, Colin E.H. [BComm/54, LLB/59] March 16, 2010

Deneka, Victor [BArch/52] April 3, 2010

Gaborieau, Antoine A. [BEd/59, MA/70] May 5, 2010

Heffelfinger (Carlson), Barbara Jean [BScHEc/58] March 18, 2010

Hodson, Dr. Douglas Stewart [BSc/50] May 7, 2010

Houck, James Norman [BSc(GE)/56, BPed/61, BEd/63] Feb. 15, 2010

Hudon, George Ernest [BSc(Pharm)/52] May 18, 2010

Johnsrude, Dr. Irwin S. [MD/56] May 16, 2010

Kettner, Dr. Joseph [BSc/51, MD/53, BSc(Med)/53] Feb. 18, 2010

Klym, Stephen J. [BA/55, BEd/58] April 2, 2010

Konantz, William G. [CA/50] April 26, 2010

Lev, Roy M. [BArch/53] April 3, 2010

Menlove, Bruce P. [BSc(CE)/51] May 1, 2010

Mercury, Aristotle J. [BA/56, LLB/60] Feb. 22, 2010

Muchnik, Dr. Sam [BA/53] April 16, 2010

Oliver Morgan, Margo A. [BScHEc/50] June 4, 2010

Penner, Dr. Erwin H. [BSc/50, MD/55] June 2, 2010

Pethybridge, William G. [BSc(EE)/54] March 7, 2010

Screaton, Ross M. [BSc(Hons)/52, MSc/54] March 10, 2010

Scouten, Raymond E. (Ray) [BSc(ME)/52] May 8, 2010

Siemens, Lloyd George [BA/56, BPed/59] March 27, 2010

Sims, Theodore [BSc(Pharm)/59] March 10, 2010

Solar, Melvin [BA/58, BEd/60, MEd/66] May 6, 2010

Stanger, Dr. Norman E. [BSA/50, MSC/62] April 2, 2010

Steele, David A. [BSc/51] Sept. 9, 2009

Topham, Arthur H. [BSc/58] April 18, 2010

Treble, Annette L. [BA/53] March 31, 2010

Watts, Don H. [BSc(Pharm)/55] April 2, 2010

Wiens, Frank [BA/51, BPed/52, BEd/61] May 12, 2010

Zeller, Frank J.W. [LLB/57] May 20, 2010

1960-69

Citron, Zita [CertNurs(T&S)/62] Feb. 28, 2010

Colyer, Charles E. [BSc/66] March 26, 2010

Dobbs, Bryan Griffith [BA/61, Cert Ed/77] March 10, 2010

Forrest, Patricia J. [BA/61, ExtEd/87] March 15, 2010

Foster (Richtik), Veronica [BSc/63] March 10, 2010

Harrison, Scott E. [BSc(Hons)/69] April 22, 2010

Hurlburt, Patricia Helen [BSc/60, Cert Ed/63, BEd/64] May 3, 2010

Kerr, William Jeffrey [BA/67, BEd/71, Cert Ed/71] Feb. 17, 2010

Klippenstein, Alvin [DipAgric/62] March 19, 2010

Lund, Anthony H. [BA/64, MSW/69] April 13, 2010

Maksimow, Verna V. [BA/66, BEd/70] April 12, 2010

Meder, Ilene D. [BA/67, BEd/71] April 19, 2010

Moyes, Jennifer C. [BA/65, MSW/69] May 1, 2010

Oczkowski, Dr. Gene [BSc(Hons)/60, MSC/61, MA/73, PhD/82] May 26, 2010

Picton, Georges [BA(LatPh)/61] May 17, 2010

Find A Friend

IT'S AS EASY AS 1–2–3... The Alumni Association is pleased to help graduates reconnect with former friends and classmates. Please fill in the form located on our website at: **umanitoba.ca/alumni/find_a_friend/**.

Pries, George D. [BPed/64, BEd/66] May 15, 2010

Prior, John L. (Jack) [BSc/64] March 13, 2010

Pyra, Patricia L. [BA/66, BEd/69] May 15, 2010

Seabrook, R. W. [CA/64] March 18, 2010

Thomas, Barbara Joan [BA/64, Cert Ed/65, BEd/77] April 15, 2010

Wilkins, Mark E. [BSc(ME)/65] March 31, 2010

Wilson, Hildur I.J. [BA/62] March 12, 2010

Wilson, Robert R. [CA/66] Feb. 17, 2010

Wolynec, Marion H. [BSc/66, Cert Ed/67, BEd/72] Feb. 14, 2010

1970-79

Bavasah, Esmail M. [BEd/70, MEd/74] March 6, 2010

Borody, Melvin [BEd/79] March 13, 2010

Bourdon (Stewart), Marion [BPed/71] Feb. 13, 2010

Collyer, Richard Francis [BSc(ME)/79] June 3, 2010

Donaghy, Dr. David I. [BSA(Hons)/70, PhD/73] May 22, 2010

Friesen, Bert [BA/70, ExtEd/88] April 15, 2010

Gushuliak, John W. [BA/70, BEd/72, MEd/75] March 11, 2010

Hall, Arthur Geoffrey [LLB/78] April 15, 2010

Halpenny, Ronald Roy [Cert Ed/70] May 4, 2010

Kidd, Kenneth G. [BSc(CE)/71] March 8, 2010

Maertens (Gyselinck), Patricia Lynne [BA/73, Cert Ed/73] April 2, 2010

Martinson, Edward Wilson [Assoc Ed/72] April 2, 2010

McCrea, Margaret W. [BA/74] April 25, 2010

Ostry, Thomas G. [BSc(Hons)/72] April 13, 2010

Perriman, Anita Wilhelmine [Assoc Ed/75] May 13, 2010

Poersch, Lynn Lawrence [DipAgric/73] May 2, 2010

Rumberg, Ross M. [BA/72] March 1, 2010

Zelt, Dennis W. [BSc(EE)/71, BSc(Maj)/96] March 20, 2010

1980-89

Brown, Cornelia [MA/82] March 31, 2010

Bukal (Fonda), Milena A. [BEd/80] April 16, 2010

Churchward, Neil [BSc(Maj)/82] April 25, 2010

Cortens (Cheam), Tat Siang [BA/84] April 1, 2010

Falk, Brenda [ExtEd/87] April 15, 2010

Hicks, Dona Lillian [BA/87] March 5, 2010

Honer, Darryl John [BSc(EE)/83] May 24, 2010

Kapusta, John D. [BSc(Maj)/81] March 12, 2010

Kelly, Bernard R. [ExtEd/86] April 8, 2010

Kochanski, G. Jason [BSc/89, BA/91] May 10, 2010

MacDonald, Twilla Suzanne [BA/88] April 2, 2010

Mallett (Jarjour), Rita Eleanor [BA/85] April 5, 2010

Pekary, David Victor William [BSc(EE)/82] March 31, 2010

Shklanka, Peter Andrew [BComm(Hons)/81] May 5, 2010

Smith, Kathleen Noel [BA/87] June 1, 2010

Valdimarsson, Gunnar [BSc(Maj)/84, MSC/87] May 9, 2010

Warren, Charlotte Isabel [BA/82] June 1, 2010

Welbergen, Anthony Frank [BA/81] Feb. 18, 2010

1990-99

Collette, Rene L. [ExtEd/91] May 28, 2010

Dil-Palay, Elana Beth [BComm(Hons)/96] April 26, 2010

Hanna, Alice Emily [MEd/94] April 15, 2010

Huzarewich, Edward [ExtEd/91] Feb. 17, 2010

McKinney, Rhoda Mary Cameron [BEd/93] May 2, 2010

Oh, Mila [BSc/90, BA/91] May 26, 2010

Saler, Alfred [ExtEd/91] May 7, 2010

Smirnov, Jan Bernice [BMR PT/98] March 29, 2010

Vince, Ryan J C [BEd/96] March 6, 2010

2010-Present

Grant, Dr. Dianne Sharon [PhD/10] Feb. 15, 2010



50 That's how many reunions we've helped plan so far in 2010.

Thank you to all the reunion coordinators who've led efforts to bring their classmates and friends together in 2010. It's a real perk of my job to work with volunteers who care so much about planning an event that is memorable for everyone who attends. Whether we've spoken in person, on the phone, by letter or e-mail, I've enjoyed helping you navigate the ins and outs of reunion planning, and I'm confident your efforts will create lasting memories for both you and your fellow U of M alumni.

Looking ahead to 2011, our goal is to continue growing our reunions program. And you can help. If the ties that bind you to your alma mater and fellow graduates go beyond the typical school, faculty or class reunion, send us some details. Maybe you want to gather with your former sorority sisters, fraternity brothers, sport or hobby club peers. Give us a call, we're here to offer you our help.

Thanks,

Tammy Holowachuk, Reunion and Special Events Officer
holowac@cc.umanitoba.ca or (204) 474.6455



umanitoba.ca/people/alumni/homecoming/

LIKE, WOW!

Who are these people and what are they doing?

This is one of hundreds of images available for viewing in the U of M's Archives and Special Collections. Located on the third floor of the Dafoe Library, Archives and Special Collections houses countless rarities and oddities. And, like, wow, you're welcome to visit their space and explore their collections. If you can't make it to campus, Archives and Special Collections has diverse online resources as well. Here are some links worth checking out:

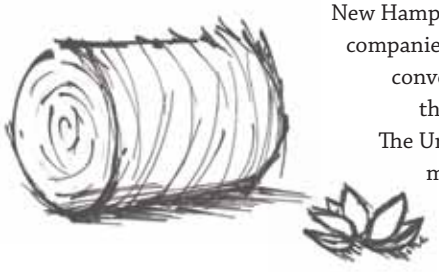
Archives' home: **umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/**
Archives on Twitter: **twitter.com/umarchives**
Archives' clever blog: **whatthefonds.blogspot.com/**

Bio Fuel continued from page 19

What is clear is that Levin and Sparling aren't the only ones working on making biofuels a cost-effective reality. Tembec, a Montreal-based pulp and paper company, is already producing ethanol from the wood waste left over by its pulping operations. At the moment, however, Tembec makes more money selling the ethanol for producing vinegar and as a solvent than it would as a biofuel.

Nor are Levin and Sparling alone in their quest for bacteria that produce biofuels from feedstock. There are several teams of researchers racing towards similar goals, like the Joint BioEnergy Institute in California, the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center in Wisconsin and the BioEnergy Science Center in Tennessee.

There are even private businesses like Mascoma Corporation of New Hampshire and Qteros of Maine, companies that are working towards converting biomass into biofuel through degrading microbes. The University of Manitoba team members say their project is different in part because it includes producing by-products like bioplastics and emphasizes creating what they call 'designer consortia.'



"People are trying to genetically engineer a superbug—one organism that will do everything," says Levin. "We don't think that's the right way to go. We think that in nature, this doesn't happen; there's a community. So let's try to make well-defined communities that can do the job."

However, it's unlikely any of these products will be available commercially in the near future.

"Are we going to see biofuels that are using our bacteria in the next five years? Probably not at the commercial stage, but possibly at a pilot stage," says Sparling.

It will take even longer to develop a system of biofuel centres across the country, Sparling says. Still, Levin believes the future of biofuel is secure, even if the full scale of its role has yet to be determined.

"If we believe we need to displace fossil fuels as our energy source—and I don't know if we can replace it, but we can displace a significant portion of it—then we need biofuels."

AUGUST 2010

OnManitoba

CONNECTING ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

SØREN RYSGAARD

Canada Excellence Research Chair in Arctic Geomicrobiology and Climate Change

SPECIAL FEATURE

Arctic Research at the U of M

As Arctic climate change researchers put their heads together to uncover new information about the changing nature of the region, and what that means for you and me, we know one thing is certain:
the University of Manitoba is now tops in the world when it comes to researching at the top of the world.

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IA PACIFIC™

University of Manitoba Alumni Association Inc

The University of Manitoba received the Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Arctic Geomicrobiology and Climate Change in May to further its world-class investigations of sea ice in the Arctic. The federal government awarded only 19 of these prestigious prizes to top research groups at universities nation-wide. Their aim is to attract the world's best talent to Canadian institutions. Coming to the U of M is chairholder and Greenland recruit Søren Rysgaard, a renowned geomicrobiologist, along with $10 million to further explore the Arctic—on a micro scale—during the next seven years. Rysgaard will join the already internationally recognized Centre for Earth Observation Science, led by Canada Research Chair in Arctic System Science David Barber [BPE/82, MNRM/89].

Thanks to even more funding from the university, the Province of Manitoba and a private donor—bringing the total to roughly $35 million—the CEOS team will grow substantially and enjoy an expanded workspace atop the Wallace Building.

In this special feature, we introduce you to the CERC chairholder, hear from a very excited university president, and profile an alumnus whose personal contribution will help ensure the U of M's Arctic research team stays strong for years to come.

Photo: Laurel McFadden / ArcticNet

Søren Rysgaard Q&A

On a hot May afternoon, Søren Rysgaard strolls into a meeting room on the fourth floor of the Wallace Building, dressed from head to toe in technical gear more suited to inclement Arctic weather than blue skies and prairie sunshine. He wears an undeniable intensity across his forehead and eyes, but a handshake and a quick flash of a smile disarm the towering Dane, all six feet, six inches, and reveal his soft-spoken and thoughtful nature. (Turns out the hard scientist, a father of six, lulls his youngest kids to sleep by strumming his guitar.)

With just days to go before Rysgaard's May 17 introduction as the U of M's Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Arctic Geomicrobiology and Climate Change, and in spite of a morning jam-packed with photo ops and interviews, the acclaimed investigator is relaxed, elbows resting on the boardroom table, hands touching at the fingertips. It's tempting to get caught up in speculation about what Rysgaard and his U of M colleagues might discover over the next seven years as they explore the North on a micro scale. They do, after all, represent the largest Arctic research collaboration in history. Instead, we zero in on Rysgaard himself.

This photo and Cover: Katie Chalmers-Brooks

Growing up, I wanted to do something related to the ocean because I watched Jacques Cousteau and I was fascinated by his adventures.

After high school, I spent a year in Iceland on a remote farm. When I came home, I thought about studying genetics but the practical side of genetics was boring. I happened upon microbiology and it just kind of grew from there. My main attraction was the collaborative approach of the microbiology group. I remember coffee sessions that would start at nine in the morning and carry through the day.

Canada, I would say, is ahead in terms of focusing on Arctic sea ice research. I've been working with people like David Barber for many years now. Canada's collaborative approach—setting up an icebreaker and inviting researchers from around the world—is leading-edge.

My children stopped listening to me describe my research a long time ago.

What do I look forward to in Manitoba? The weather. We don't have days (at home in Greenland) where you can go out with just a T-shirt on. And here, you can plan events more spur of the moment than in Greenland. I look forward to showing my children all the trees as they have not seen those in years. Culture as well; you have a lot of that here.

Canadians seem to speak their mind and just be easy going.

Our research sometimes requires the invention of special devices. One of those, a micro monitor that measures oxygen levels in the ice, now has a medical application as well. It is used to monitor oxygen levels in human blood in small capillaries. This allows doctors to monitor the area surrounding an operation.

I used to be away a lot so my work took its toll on my relationship with my oldest kids. I moved the whole family to Greenland so we could all be together.

My two oldest kids go to school in Denmark. My daughter spent a year in my lab but today she's studying art. I feel everyone should pursue what interests them and makes them happy. And besides, her pursuit of art will teach me something new.

I used to work with music on but now I find I need total silence.

There is definitely a shift going on in the climate, and it is not explained away by natural processes.

Our goal, right now, is to better understand (the Arctic) region. What is there, what are the processes, the types of life? It's been a traditionally under-explored region because of its remoteness. I'm happy to see this is changing.

I am an outdoorsman; you have to be when you live up in Greenland.

I get very excited about my work and I am fascinated by sea ice. There is so much going on in there.

There are only 150 kilometres of road in my town in Greenland. Everyone has a boat. You sail between the fjords to visit friends.

I leave my work at the office or lab. I don't bring it home. I have kids climbing up all over me so home is my time to be with family.

My kids have been with me on the ice and in the labs. It's been a great opportunity for them to see what I do and meet different and interesting characters from around the world.

I've collaborated with some young students and they have such a strong curiousity. If they keep that curiousity, then we have hope.

Arctic research program like none other

As news of major federal government funding for Arctic research at the University of Manitoba spreads, plans to make room for a growing team of Arctic scientists is already underway.

In May, the University of Manitoba was awarded a $10-million Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Arctic Microbiology and Climate Change. The chairholder, world-renowned geomicrobiologist and Greenland import Søren Rysgaard, is teaming up with the U of M's Centre for Earth Observation Science (CEOS) to explore the Arctic on a micro-scale over the next seven years.

Lending his support for the expansion of the team's facilities, alongside the university and the provincial government, is U of M graduate and Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources namesake Clayton H. Riddell [BSc(Hons)/59, DSc/04]. Riddell has contributed $2.5 million towards construction of a fifth floor on the Wallace Building. This latest donation builds on his previous gift to the faculty in 2004 of $10 million.

At the May 17 CERC announcement, Riddell, a respected geologist with decades of exploration work in Canada's north, spoke of the need to strike a balance in the Arctic when he observed that "Growth in the Arctic will and must occur…with a sensitivity to the Arctic and its people."

Thanks to the contributions of Riddell and others, the new space will offer 60,000 square feet of specialized labs and classrooms. The build comes with an $8-million price tag and will accommodate the influx of grad students and researchers set to converge on the U of M to work with the pre-eminent team in the field of Arctic climate and sea ice research. At the same time, CEOS will see its membership grow to more than 100 members or about triple its current size. The new research and study space will be called the Nellie Cournoyea Arctic Research Facility to honour one of Canada's first female premiers (Cournoyea was leader of the Northwest Territories from 1991-95) and staunch advocate for the protection of the Arctic and its inhabitants.

"The opportunity for U of M to become the leader in Arctic research is very exciting. The addition of the Nellie Cournoyea Arctic Research Facility recognizes a great Canadian whose tireless efforts have and continue to benefit the North and its residents," says Riddell.

Cournoyea, an Officer of the Order of Canada, says it is "a privilege and a great honour to have been recognized in this manner." During her remarks at the CERC announcement, she stressed the importance of research in the Arctic that is "relevant" and that it was much needed. Echoing Riddell's sentiments about the future of Northern development, Cournoyea said, "We are an adaptable people. We try not to live under illusions or delusions that things will remain the same." She also alluded to the special partnership that exists between Arctic researchers and the people of the region. "We are far away and we know we need friends, and we know we need supporters."

Norman Halden, dean of the Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources says the university's comprehensive Arctic research program – including the new facility, the existing icebreaker-turned-research vessel CCGS Amundsen based in the far North and the experimental sea-ice research facility located in Smartpark – is "like nowhere else in the world."

The Nellie Cournoyea Arctic Research Facility is slated for completion in 2011.

Photo: Katie Chalmers-Brooks

Clayton H. Riddell [BSc(Hons)/59, DSc/04]

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World-class research finds its home at the University of Manitoba

Many will have heard me talk about why I love the work I do: I consistently tell people it is because both the cause, and the company, are great.

I can think of no better demonstration of this than the recent announcement that the University of Manitoba has been awarded a Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC), which is an investment of such magnitude that it will dramatically increase our world-renowned capacity to contribute to an area of research of global importance.

For the most part, our endeavours can be seen as layers of achievement, building over time, and opportunities to be part of a singular, transformative event are rare. The announcement that the University of Manitoba had been awarded a CERC in Arctic Geomicrobiology marks what legitimately could be described as one of these rare occurrences.

The CERC program was announced by Canada's federal government in 2008 as part of its strategy to strengthen our country's ability to compete globally. It sought both to concentrate resources in areas of science and technology that were identified as priorities for the country and to act as a magnet for research talent. It represented a way to encourage the best and brightest home-grown researchers to choose to stay in Canada while also attracting the best from elsewhere in the world to our research institutions to pursue their work.

An ambitious goal supported by a major infusion of resources, the CERC represents a federal investment of $10 million over seven years, a level unprecedented in Canada. It also already has prompted major funding commitments from the Province of Manitoba and our alumnus Dr. Clayton H. Riddell. In all, this initial investment is expected to leverage an additional $25 million over its lifetime, all of which will support world-class Arctic research.

The work that will be sparked by this investment is critically important. We are learning more all the time about the importance of the Arctic ecosystem and how the changes we observe there can represent an early warning system. Work to understand how and why our climate is changing, its anticipated impacts, and how we can adapt to them is underway all over the world. There is little dispute that these are questions to which we must have answers. Our new Chair – Dr. Søren Rysgaard – will be looking at life at the microbial level in arctic sea ice. His work will expand our knowledge about how the sea ice habitat will be altered by a changing climate, and how this affects carbon dioxide balance and carbon sequestration.

Securing the CERC required a strong commitment to growing our capability, a great deal of work from people both inside and outside of the university community, and a vision of possibility. Having been chosen recognizes these things, and more; our selection also recognizes our inherent strength as a research institution and specifically, our reputation as a preeminent Arctic climate research facility. We were selected based on the strength of the proposed research program and on the reputation of our existing Centre for Earth Observation Science team, whose contributions have attracted this investment and Dr. Rysgaard, and spurred a larger partnership with the Greenland Climate Research Centre at the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources.

Every so often, something occurs that allows us to extend our reach further than previously we had thought possible. I believe the CERC to be one of those factors for our University and I am tremendously excited for the opportunities it presents. It cements the University of Manitoba's position as one of Canada's top research-intensive universities, as one of only 13 universities in the country that were awarded CERCs. I am confident that the University of Manitoba will be known globally as the place to undertake Arctic research, and that the excitement that is building around the Chair will spread as new collaborations are born, and other world-class researchers increasingly choose to make the University of Manitoba the home for their own pursuits.

David Barnard president and vice-chancellor