

Alumni in action

Coaches for Life



By Rebecca Tavernini

Coaches Tom Schwab and Mike Lilleeng with the John Hersey High School 2008-2009 girls swim team

Why would two retired men choose to spend their days with 40 or so rowdy teenage girls? And then spend nights and weekends with a team of pubescent boys?

For **Tom Schwab '72 BA, '74 MA** the answer is simple: "I love volunteering, to coach and to teach, both boys and girls at all age levels and all types of teams." For **Mike Lilleeng '74 BS, '77 MA** being retired "gives me more time to thoughtfully plan workouts and give even more of my energy to the swimmers."

When Lilleeng decided to try out for the NMU swim team, little did he know that he'd be starting a lifelong teaching and coaching partnership and friendship—one full of

mentoring and inspiring others to succeed. Schwab came to NMU on a swimming and diving scholarship and immediately saw great talent in Mike. Both were studying to become teachers (Tom in industrial arts and Mike in physical education and biology) and hoped to coach as well.

They excelled on the swim team. Tom finished out his undergrad years at NMU as a two-time NCAA All-American and co-captain of the men's team, then continued on to coach diving with former head coach Don Trost. Lilleeng was cut short on a sure road to being an All-American when he was stricken with meningitis his junior year while en route to Florida for winter training with the

team. However, he went on to attain All-America status as a master's swimmer in later years in many events. At age 48, he placed second in YMCA nationals in the 100-yard butterfly and first at the Senior Olympics at age 50 in the 50-yard butterfly and 500-yard freestyle.

After recovering from the meningitis and entering the graduate program in health education, Lilleeng served as swimming coach while Trost became diving coach, leading his team to a top 10 finish, with multiple swimmers earning All-America honors (including Tim Kerwin, who was just inducted in NMU's Sports Hall of Fame.) With a career filled with only winning

seasons, Trost set the bar high for Tom and Mike. Schwab says of Trost: "What a winner and fantastic leader."

After a couple of years teaching at Wheeling High School, in a suburb of Chicago, Schwab had the opportunity to recruit Lilleeng, who had gone on to teach high school in Beloit, Wis., and coach two state champion boys swim teams. "Tom did such a great job of talking me up I was able to get the job at Wheeling," recalls Mike. "From this point on he and I taught and coached the boys and girls swim teams together for the next 30 years." Always a team, they alternated as head coach. Not surprisingly, the duo led many of the young athletes to state honors and even one to qualifying for the Olympic Trials. They have sent several of their students on to NMU, too, including Missy Baron (All-America diver) and Lisa Goodman (springboard diving national champion).

In 2000, Schwab was given the Service Award by the National Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association and was inducted into the Lake County/Waukegan Hall of Fame.

"But our great achievement I feel is that we work with every student that comes out, no matter their ability," says Schwab. "Mike and I have always taken special needs students on our team, including MMI [mild mental impairment] students."

One of those students was Rick. "He never earned one point for the

team, but he taught us many real-life lessons about other people," recalls Schwab, who explains he used swimming as a reward system to help the student learn how to make change for a dollar and how to tell time. "Every meet our swimmers, and the audience, would be cheering like crazy when Rick would finish, with great pride." Rick went on to earn a varsity award.

"I felt a great personal need to gain a better understanding of the special needs students, who I felt were often misunderstood," explains Schwab, who went back to school to earn another master's degree (a third), this time in special education.

After retirement, the pair

teer coaches youth baseball and softball, which he has been doing for 30 years, with equally stellar success. He also enjoyed returning to Northern to assist running the National

Swimming and Diving Championship meet and the NCAA diving event and to judge at the NCAA National Championships. (His wife, Carol [Sepanek], attended NMU for three years and the couple loves to come back to Marquette, as do Mike and his wife.)

When so many people long for the relaxation of retirement, why do these two keep so involved?

"I like working with student athletes to try to improve them in swimming as well as their future. It also keeps me involved in a sport I like and makes me feel good about myself," says Lilleeng.

"Coach Mike Lilleeng and I coach together during our retirement every day, as we both were invited back because of our teams' successes. We work well together and can read each other's minds both in a coaching relationship and as best friends."

were asked to continue coaching swimming and diving at John Hersey High School in Arlington Heights, Ill. Last year, their team was undefeated in the regular season. Schwab was recruited to also teach and coach part time at an alternative school for special education students. In addition, he volun-

"I simply love teaching and coaching. It's still a big high for me!" adds Schwab. "I've had an exceptionally lucky career, being able to enjoy a lifetime of achievement with a teammate and best friend." ■

Tom and Mike would love to hear from their classmates and teammates: mikelilleeng@comcast.net tom.schwab@d214.org



Tom Schwab with national diving champ Lisa Goodman '85 BS, whom he coached in high school.



Mike Lilleeng (left) with friend Jim Rivers '74 BS at Presque Isle in 1976.

Shawn Brown is pictured at left, working with a community AIDS program in Kenya.

By Kristi Evans

Mission possible



If a commitment to service is somehow embedded in our DNA and if **Shawn Brown '07 BA** passes on even a portion of the charitable gene to her first child—due in January—the world will be better for it.

While enrolled at NMU as an athletic training major in the pre-med program, Brown amassed an impressive service record on campus and across the globe. She has continued on the same track at the University of Michigan, despite the rigors of medical school. Impending motherhood might have interrupted a planned trip to Haiti last summer, but it has not diminished her drive to make a difference.

“I think of volunteering as a way of life—I’ve never thought of not volunteering,” Brown says. “Northern was an amazing environment for it because the smaller size gave me opportunities I wouldn’t have had at a larger university and direct access to the people who could make it happen. Northern also embraces globalization to the extent other universities don’t. If you’re willing to look, there are plenty of ways to get involved.”

One option is the Superior Edge, which helped Brown identify “gaps” in her engagement in domestic diversity. Another is the International Volunteering Student Organization, which Brown established at NMU with encouragement from an adviser to increase awareness of overseas service options. She led by example, traveling on service missions to Kenya, East Timor and Peru.

Brown worked with grassroots organizations in remote Kenyan villages on women’s empowerment and AIDS/sexual education programs. The latter included home visits to registered AIDS patients. Brown offered

whatever help she could—from nutritional support and education to counseling and medications.

“We tried to make their home life as easy as possible,” she says. “There’s a stigma in tribal Kenya that AIDS is punishment for something you did and families often disown or ignore individuals after a diagnosis. But what was eye-opening to me is that people weren’t dying of AIDS; they were dying of starvation. They created everything they ate. If they got sick, they couldn’t fish or work the land, which meant they couldn’t produce food and eat. The cycle would just continue. It’s interesting to think of not being able to go to a corner grocery store to get what you need.”

“I hadn’t been outside of Michigan and my first-ever airplane flight was to Kenya, so you could say I was thrust into a very different culture. I had a hard time reconciling myself to living by tribal society rules. But the people were welcoming and seemed genuinely thrilled to have me there. It was a self-driven environment. I filled in where I could.”

Brown arranged the trip herself and traveled solo, but she was accompanied by NMU peers on future missions.

In East Timor, a trio of pre-med students spent two months at the Bairo Pite Clinic. Brown says it was founded by Dr. Dan Murphy, a U.S. physician born in Ishpeming, and is one of only two major medical facilities in the country. Both are staffed by Timorese nurses and administrative assistants, but rely on overseas volunteers to serve as doctors. The country regained its independence earlier this decade, and 20 years of Indonesian occupation and genocide left behind palpable deficits in medical services and infrastructure.



The students witnessed a tuberculosis epidemic and worked mostly in the clinic emergency room, assisting with wound care. They stayed in shipping crates that had been converted into living units, complete with air-conditioning.

In Peru, Brown and other NMU students assisted teachers at schools in the slums outside Chiclayo and moonlighted as English language instructors. Their daytime role extended beyond the classroom. Sometimes they wandered through

neighborhoods, looking for children who weren't in school. Youth often earn money for their families by collecting tickets on buses and other odd jobs. Brown talked to their families about the value of education, to convince them that children could secure more lucrative jobs if they continued on to secondary school.

"The three service trips I took while I was at Northern completely changed my life and outlook. I never realized before I went just what it was like overseas and how good we have it here. From a personal perspective, it was empowering. I wasn't sure I had enough resources or knowledge to help anyone, but when you go somewhere with so little, everything you do makes a huge difference. I was a licensed EMT, so the first two missions involved a lot of basic medical work. That hands-on and health education experience were more up my alley and really cemented my

mission to do overseas medical work as a career."

At the University of Michigan, Brown is involved in the Student Alliance for Global REACH, a larger version of the organization she started at NMU. After completing her surgical residency, her goal is to work nine months out of the year in a stateside clinic near her and her husband's families in Traverse City, and spend the remaining three months in foreign clinics, doing work with trauma relief.

"My extended family has gone on international missions to Haiti and China and a cousin works for the United Nations on refugee resettlement work. I think the impetus for me to volunteer came from them."

It looks like Brown will likely ignite a similar passion that will extend her family's tradition of service to a new generation. ■

One net at a time

The Northern Michigan University student chapter of Nothing But Nets figures that even from halfway around the world, it protected 480 lives last year.

The group of about 75 NMU students raised more than \$1,200 in its first year of existence, which helped to buy 120 insecticide-treated, anti-malaria bed nets used to protect African families at night, which is when the vast majority of the malaria-causing blood parasite, *Plasmodium*, is transmitted from mosquitoes. Each net can protect a family of four for up to four years.

The national Nothing But Nets campaign was created by the United Nations Foundation following the outpouring of response to former *Sports Illustrated* writer Rick Reilly's April 2006 column about his family bringing the wrong kind of nets—sports-related nets—to the children of Tanzania, when what they needed most desperately were bed nets.

Each year, about a half-billion people (or the equivalent of the population of Canada, Mexico and the United States combined) are infected and more than a million people die—about a person every 30 seconds. Malaria is

the leading cause of death of children in Africa.

The NMU chapter of the national organization was started by students Allison Gager and Stevie Fisher, both of Marquette.

"We had been involved in the project through a social justice committee at our church," says Fisher. "After a couple projects there, we saw that the cause was very effective in our area. We felt that through Northern it would give students an opportunity to help internationally."

Among the group's fund-raising efforts were a raffle, a car wash, an auction, contribution tables and a very successful fashion show.

"A lot of students want to make a change in the world, and this is a way to do it. They know that the time and energy they spend working with us directly affects and saves lives," Fisher says.

Fisher added that several of the group members have traveled to Africa in the past. "Those who have said that the bed nets are just a way of life; they're a necessity to protect yourself. One girl who helped us out last year grew up in Africa and when she was young, a close friend died from malaria. I think that put it into perspective for a lot of people."

Assignment: Thailand



One of the outside vendors in Singburi making guai dio nam - noodle soup. Thailand air conditioning.



Becky Korpi '07 BS signed up for the Peace Corps shortly before graduating from NMU. She is now with the Corps teaching English in Thailand in an elementary school and short-session "camps." She also has recently been appointed co-editor of Peace Corps Thailand's volunteer magazine, Sticky Rice. Following are excerpts from her blog.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2008

Lost Count

Last week Eric John, the United States ambassador to Thailand, swore me and my 53 colleagues in as official Peace Corps volunteers. There were representatives from the Royal Thai Government and Washington, and we took the same oath that is given to members of Congress and other government employees—"protect against all enemies foreign and domestic" and suchlike. We looked over the words beforehand, but once we said them they weighed down the air in the room. Those words can't be taken lightly, no matter how good a sense of humor you have.

But Eric John, surprisingly, is a hilarious guy. "Today you are all ambassadors to Thailand. No wait, there's just one, and that's me." He's also got one of the most amazing speaking voices I've ever heard. If he wanted to narrate an audio book, even a motorcycle repair manual, I'd buy seven.

Now I live in Buriram province; six hours from Bangkok, a million years from being able to take care of itself. People stare at me and wonder what I'm doing here, but they still smile because they're Thai and that's

what they do. I am currently staying with Jeab, my 29-year old teaching counterpart, and it's been a helluva trip so far. Just today alone we drove to Prakhon Chai in a death trap truck, almost hit several things because the wheel doesn't turn well, got locked out for a good hour because the doors stick, and nearly ended up in a ditch because it was raining and we weren't able to locate the wiper button. All the while with her 2-year old screaming in the cab.

TIT: This Is Thailand. You either roll with it or go home, and I'd rather not go back to Michigan when it's still winter.

Tomorrow I'm renting a house. Not an apartment, a house. I have two to choose from, one with air conditioner and one that's more gorgeous than any home I have ever lived in. I have \$16,000 baht and a craving for independence.

Jeab and I just bought papaya salad, sticky rice and fresh mangoes from the market, so it's time to chow and then chase her sons around for awhile. The school year doesn't start until May 16 here, so actual work isn't necessary for weeks yet.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2008

Lucky

I thought it would never stop raining in Buriram. When it did, 22,000 people were dead next door in Burma.

Then when we had our backs turned, our neighbor





Ja, Jeab's youngest son, who will be 2 next month. He's either contemplating the fascinating history of the Phnom Rung ruins or he's just in need of a nap. My fourth graders presenting their favorite colors. Note their uniforms; this style is the same throughout Thailand.



to the north—China —had an earthquake and an additional 10,000 people lost their lives. All Peace Corps China volunteers and staff are accounted for and safe, thank goodness. There is no Peace Corps Burma, also thank goodness.

Jeab and I sit in a small but expensive hotel room in SaKaeo province, watching the rain return to Thai skies and drinking cold glasses of rum and Pepsi. If women are seen drinking in this country it's a decision that follows them the rest of their lives, but once a month Jeab and I find a remote place and indulge with just one drink. It's enough to endure whatever's coming for the next four weeks, whether it's from man or nature.

Our hotel —The River Resort—caters to foreign tourists by having bilingual signs and menus, but the TV channels speak no trace of recognizable English. The news is all the same and so Jeab does not translate for me. We were invited to SaKaeo to participate in a teacher training that fellow volunteer Chris was hosting; it's business as usual in Thailand while the rest of Asia scrambles for aid and answers.

"What do we call this in English?" Jeab asks, her almond eyes focused hard on the TV screen. She is not pointing to a specific object, so I know she's inquiring about the situation—the devastation, loss of life and shock combined. Peace Corps didn't put us together for our shallow thinking, that's for sure.

"Two near-misses," I answer. It's not always easy to translate the kinds of things she wants to know, but I try. She looks this up in the battered English-Thai dictionary that she bought at the Sunday market and nods with satisfaction.

"The gypsy said you'd be smart," she adds a few minutes later, changing the channel to an American movie

that has been dubbed—poorly—in Thai.

Her English is still developing and is therefore usually straightforward, but every once in awhile she throws me completely off. "Arai na ka?" ("Pardon?") I ask.

"You were supposed to be 24 years old but she got the rest right." This is one of those moments where she keeps the specifics vague on purpose and she knows it drives me batty.

It's starting to rain hard again and we know the floors will be wet when we get home (Jeab's house is cursed with leaky ceilings). But with the air conditioning on full tilt and a strange Thai voice coming from Matt Damon's mouth, we also know how lucky we are and celebrate by playing "rock, paper, scissors" to see who goes down to the lobby for more ice.

FRIDAY, MAY 30, 2008

Kuhn Kruu

My fourth graders pick flowers for me so that I'll sing for them at the end of the day. But it can't be something as short and sweet as the ABC's; it has to be something uniquely American with a catchy tune and a lot of words. They're absolutely hungry for my native language, always listening and watching my mouth with careful concentration.

The media and their parents tell them that America is the future and English is the vessel of passage. You can see it while they practice "Hello, what is your name?"





Playing a balloon game of Jeab's creation to help remember colors. Jeab, my trusted and loyal teaching counterpart. She also doubles as my landlady and partner in crime.

with each other, the intensity in their eyes as though the rest of their lives depend on this lesson.

But the singing thing is my own fault. I have a habit of filling silences by softly crooning something, whatever's in my head at the moment. As broad of a musical horizon as I have (everything from Arlo Guthrie to Warren Zevon on my iPod), it's usually something gutless and poppy from the mainstream. I'm like an American radio a notch above "mute" while I walk around my cramped classroom surveying my kids' work. Sonic wallpaper, as my NMU music prof. Floyd Slotterback used to say.

They're absolutely hungry for my native language, always listening and watching my mouth with careful concentration... In this way, I pay more attention to how beautiful my own language is.

In this way, I pay more attention to how beautiful my own language is. I sing every word slowly and clearly for my kids, and they marvel at the most common words because the sounds are brand new to them.

This week was Rhianna and Nelly Furtado. Next week will be Madonna because her 80's hits are probably easier for them to pick up. Luckily I just bought five of her albums on one CD for 300 baht (about \$5) at a Bangkok market. For as disillusioned as Thais are about catering to Americans, they at least know how to make a good deal that no foreigner can refuse.

I will probably completely lose my voice in two years, but having a fresh cupful of jasmine and buttercups on my desk every morning trumps everything. ■



Me and my supervisor, Atchara Buayam. She could make my life miserable if she wanted to, but as you can see there's nothing but love here.

The Peace Corps Tradition at NMU

The Peace Corps loves to recruit at NMU. The number of students who are interested in the Corps and sign up for service "is impressive for this size of a school," says recruiter Julia Capizzi. On top of that, NMU students bring with them impressive qualities. "They tend to be engaged, open-minded, curious, flexible and adaptable," she adds—a backpack full of skills that are crucial to those who undertake the 27-month commitment. Not only does she find full houses at NMU information sessions and invitations into many classrooms, she's met with enthusiasm and a real respect for what Peace Corps does and the power it has to make a resumé glow.

While a stint with the Corps can be a great transition between school and work or grad school, its life-changing powers are open to people of any age, as **James Peters '78 BS**, age 52, is finding out. He started serving in Cape Verde, Africa, this summer, where he'll be facilitating vocational education for post-secondary students and creating construction jobs. "After working 28 years [for a major automotive company], it's just time to give back," he told the *Oakland Press*. "I want to share my experiences and knowledge and hopefully make a difference in others' lives." Capizzi adds that the Peace Corps has just launched an initiative to bring more people age 50 and older into the Corps and "hear the call."