

Reaching beyond what you know



“I would never have done even half of the things I did if I hadn’t gone to NMU. I think back to how absolutely unprepared I was—such an innocent, green person. Going to Northern was a big opportunity for me.”
—Kathleen Weston

Kathleen Shingler Weston ’29 AB, was one of Northern’s first female graduates to go on to complete a medical degree. In the mid-1950s, she was a member of the research team that developed the Salk polio vaccine while working with Parke, Davis, and Company. In the 1960s, she was honored at the White House by President Lyndon Johnson as one of the nation’s “Outstanding Medical Women.”

It’s hard to believe that there was a time when Weston was somewhat intimidated by the size of Northern Michigan University. And yet she clearly remembers stepping onto the NMU campus for the first time three-quarters of a century ago. It was a turning point she said defined her destiny.

“I am from Kenton, which isn’t a very big U.P. town, so when I went to Northern it seemed like a huge institution to me,” said Weston, who now lives in Grosse Pointe, Mich., and who will turn 99 in March 2006. “I would never have done even half of the things I did if I hadn’t gone to NMU. I think back to how absolutely unprepared I was—such an innocent, green person. Going to Northern was a big opportunity for me.”

A significant change from the NMU Weston remembers to today’s campus is the way computers allow faculty, staff, and students to communicate with each other.

“I recall when President J.M. Munson wanted students to know about something, he’d pull out a blackboard from his office into the hallway with a message on it. That’s quite different from the Internet

and e-mail, but it seemed to work at the time.”

One thing that hasn’t changed, according to Weston, is the opportunity for a university to expose students to a diverse mix of people.

“I didn’t see a black person until I went to NMU. Where I was from, all of the people were pretty much the same. I had no real concept of other races and cultures. I remember when I went to graduate school, I saw a woman from India dressed in native apparel; it was an impressive sight to me.”

Weston first majored in physical education at NMU. “My mother thought it might be a good choice since I was so active, but I didn’t like it. Biology and history were what I really enjoyed. Professor Chase (history) and Professor Lowe (biology) showed me there were so many things for me to learn. Everyone was afraid of Professor Lowe, but he hired me as a student assistant and that was probably what set me on the biology track.”

Completing her teaching degree in biology turned out to be the first step to a career as a nationally recognized toxicologist. Her area of expertise became animal toxicity in pesticides and drugs. She also became an award-winning author of numerous articles on toxicology.

Despite the many accolades for her scientific work, Weston is just as proud of the part of her career that involved teaching—more than 50 years of it, she is quick to point out.

Upon graduation, Weston taught biology at Munising High School. When her husband, the late **Jean Weston ’30 AS**, enrolled in graduate school at the University of

Michigan, Weston followed and earned her master's degree in anatomy and genetics in 1934. It was there that she began to seriously explore the research aspect of science.

When Jean entered Temple University Medical School, Kathleen was offered a position teaching an anatomy and physiology course.

"Until I came, many of the nursing students really struggled with that required class, so the dean made me a deal. He said, 'Kathleen, if you can get these nurses to pass their anatomy and physiology course, I'll let you into the medical school.' Well, they all passed, and I always got a kick out of the idea that it was the nurses who got me into med school!"

Weston taught at Temple from 1938 until 1951, the year she received her doctor of medicine degree. She and Jean were then hired at Parke, Davis, and Company to create a modern toxicology laboratory. They remained there for 10

years before moving to a suburb of New York City to work in laboratories there. The couple decided in 1968 to create Weston Consultants, Inc., which they operated in Virginia until 1981. It became a leading firm in toxicology analysis with clients such as the National Institute of Mental Health and the Environmental Protection Agency.

During her time in Virginia, Weston returned to the classroom as a professorial lecturer at George Washington University Medical Center and Georgetown Medical School.

"Working on the polio vaccine for three years was my top scientific accomplishment, and serving as a legal expert in court on toxicology issues was also very satisfying," said the 1983 NMU Distinguished Alumni Award recipient. "But I'm most pleased with the fact that I was always teaching. Even when I was in a lab and 'teacher' wasn't part of my official title, I was teaching. My real

talent and concern has always been teaching, and I tell people I've taught at every level from Sunday school to medical school."

Recently, Weston endowed The Jean K. and Kathleen Shingler Weston Scholarship, which will provide a minimum award of \$500 per year to an NMU student with financial need who is majoring in a science area. First preference will be given to students from Kenton, Sidnaw, or Trout Creek, followed by other U.P. high school graduates.

"One thing that hasn't changed over time is the fact that there will always be kids in places like the small town I grew up in who may not have all of the opportunities others have, and who may not have someone pushing them to reach beyond what they know right now," said Weston. "The teacher in me hopes this scholarship encourages its recipients to believe that they can succeed."

Cindy Paavola '84 BS

Les and Phyllis Wong make a gift to the international effort at NMU

President Les Wong and his wife, Phyllis, made the cornerstone gift to Northern's current effort toward expanding its international learning opportunities during a summer dinner held at Kaye House for community leaders who are interested in providing international experiences for NMU students.

The Wongs contributed \$10,000 to international student travel. Other participants at the dinner have also made significant contributions to the fund.

"It is my dream to bring Northern to a point where we can require each baccalaureate student to have an international experience," said Wong. "Hopefully most would choose to actually travel to a different part of the world and experience new cultures."

During the 2004-05 academic year—Wong's first as NMU president—Northern held a year-long, campus-wide discussion about the curriculum for the 21st century. The early talks evolved into the development of two task forces, one on service learning and the other on interna-

tional learning opportunities.

"Obviously, providing study abroad and other types of international experiences is a costly endeavor, but it's also an idea that seems to resonate with some of our alumni and university friends, especially those in business. They know how important understanding our multicultural world is to their career and personal success, so we hope others will join Phyllis and me in growing these funds to help Northern expand its international offerings," said Wong.

To set the mood for the discussion, Phyllis Wong and local restaurateur Don Curto prepared a menu featuring Italian cuisine. The Wongs hope to make this dinner an annual event.

Alumni and friends can support Northern's internationalization effort by contacting the NMU Foundation at 906-227-2627 or at foundnt@nmu.edu. To learn more about NMU's curriculum for the 21st century discussion, go to <http://www.nmu.edu/academics/curriculum21>.