



IN COMMON

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A NEWSLETTER FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS OF THE GAYLORD NELSON INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES, UW-MADISON

Nelson Institute Grad Honored as 'Distinguished Alum'

Florence Chenoweth, who earned a doctorate from the Nelson Institute's Land Resources Program in 1986, received a UW-Madison Distinguished Alumni Award in May.

Chenoweth is the executive director of the liaison office of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the world's leading agency in the fight against hunger. She was one of six 2005 award recipients chosen for having "demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of families around the globe," according to the Wisconsin Alumni Association.

Chenoweth was born in Liberia in 1945. At the age of 22, she became the first woman to enroll in the College of Agriculture at the University of Liberia in Monrovia. She then came to UW-Madison and earned a master's degree in agricultural economics in 1970.

After returning to Liberia, Chenoweth worked in government agricultural institutions and made history once again by becoming the African country's first female minister of agriculture in 1977. She took action to increase the production of rice, Liberia's staple crop, through the introduction of higher-yield varieties and acreage expansion programs.

But a coup d'etat in 1980, which took the life of the president and other government officials, forced Chenoweth to flee with little more than her children. They arrived in Sierra Leone on foot.

Chenoweth returned to Madison to pursue a Ph.D. in land resources, which she completed in 1986. For the next



Florence Chenoweth at a reception for the Distinguished Alumni Awards. (Photo by Brent Nicastro)

six years, she worked on a UW-Madison agricultural policy project in Zambia, followed by a stint as an advisor to the president of Zambia, who was seeking ways to liberalize agricultural markets.

In 1995, Chenoweth joined the FAO as its representative in Gambia in West Africa. She spearheaded efforts to revitalize assistance programs there, and conducted a review of the country's agricultural and natural resources that has since helped guide Gambia's development.

She then opened the FAO's first office in South Africa following the end of apartheid. In 2000, she coordinated relief efforts following floods that dis-

rupted the lives of 2.5 million people.

The following year, Chenoweth was named FAO liaison with the United Nations in New York, serving as the link between the relief agency and the U.N. General Assembly.

Chenoweth considers it her mission to help relieve the suffering caused by hunger.

"It is immoral that 842 million people go to bed hungry in a world that produces enough food to feed every single person on Earth. And 170 million of those hungry people are children," she says.

For more information on Chenoweth's award, and to view a video biography prepared for the award ceremony, visit the Wisconsin Alumni Association Web site, www.uwalumni.com/daa/.

New Director a Master at Merging Worlds

By Paroma Basu, University Communications

For most of her working life, **Frances Westley** has thrived on blurring boundaries, invariably seeing gray where others notice only black or white.

Her gift for moving seamlessly between professional worlds — and stitching together talent from disparate fields — will be critical as Westley settles in as the new director of the Nelson Institute.

“The reason she is a terrific choice is because of her interdisciplinarity,” says long-time collaborator **Steven Carpenter**, a UW–Madison ecologist who has co-authored several papers with Westley.

In this regard, Westley is on fertile ground at the Nelson Institute, which has earned acclaim for crafting multidisciplinary solutions to environmental dilemmas.

“It’s a fascinating job,” says Westley of her new position. “It’s a perfect fit between the things I care about, the skills I have and an opportunity that arose at the right moment.”

On the job since January, the new director aims to boost the institute’s

influence as a dynamic network of ideas and expertise.

“I want to integrate and synergize interactions between different people,” she says. “I want to work like any good broker, connecting resources to possibilities.”

A Start in the Arts

The winding path of possibilities that led Westley here from Montreal also is a lesson in how one person can mold a career, seizing unexpected opportunities and amassing expertise, while dodging professional categories all along.

Westley started out as a fine arts student at Vermont’s Middlebury College. But returning in the early 1970s to hometown Montreal, she sensed that art was not her only calling. After briefly teaching drama and even considering medical school, Westley finally decided to follow in her sociologist parents’ footsteps, enrolling at Montreal’s McGill University to study sociology.

After completing a master’s thesis on Charlie Chaplin films, Westley went on to write a doctoral dissertation about new religious movements. Later, she took a job teaching pop culture theory at the University of Western Ontario, in a small town called London.

The story might have ended there, but Westley’s newfound professional stability was destabilizing her personal life. Her husband was a tenured religion professor in Montreal. The couple lived apart for four years, having two daughters amidst the distance.

Hoping to unite the family, Westley started looking for work in Montreal. Opportunities were scarce, however, even as she began to feel ambivalent about her field. “I was feeling restless with sociology,” she recalls. “I felt the need to move from theory



Frances Westley

into more practical application.”

Her restlessness most likely prompted Westley in 1982 to apply for and win a government fellowship that helped social science professionals re-orient into the management field. Soon, Westley was working at McGill’s management school.

Within two months, Westley became an assistant professor. But adjusting to the career shift proved extremely challenging.

“I wasn’t trained in the whole jargon of management; I didn’t even know what a bottom line was,” says Westley of her steep learning curve. “Getting up to speed was the equivalent of doing another Ph.D.”

She also gave birth to a third daughter during this challenging time. But six years in, Westley began asking herself some hard questions.

“Even as I learned that many businesses use brilliant methodologies, I was chilled by what I was encountering at the big corporations I was researching,” she says. “I asked myself, ‘Do I really want to spend my life working in this environment?’”

IN COMMON

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Points of Commonality

Almost in response to her thoughts, Westley was invited in 1990 to speak at a conference that explored how management professionals could apply their knowledge to pressing global problems such as hunger and disease.

“This was exactly what I was looking for; it was a watershed moment,” she recalls.

Always passionate about nature, Westley decided to use her management expertise to help problems in conservation and the environment. Still at McGill, Westley became involved with several organizations, including the ecology group Resilience Alliance, as well as the Captive Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG), which works to save endangered species. Her services quickly became

indispensable, as she traveled around the world helping scientists collaborate effectively with diverse interest groups, ranging from international logging companies to indigenous villagers.

“Frances opened our eyes to how people take in conservation information and how to convey hard-core science to the people who will be most impacted by it,” says Philip Miller, CBSG’s senior program officer. “She brought the human element into the science of conservation biology.”

Carpenter, who met Westley at the Resilience Alliance, agrees.

“She would be the key communicator who can translate ideas among several technical jargons and help people see points of commonality or points of difference,” he says.

Westley will most likely depend on

such abilities — what she calls her “skills of the margins” — to negotiate her new working environment. She’s been talking to faculty and staff about teaching and outreach programs at the Nelson Institute to determine exactly what institute members want for the future.

Over the longer term, Westley hopes to lure new young faculty members as one step in an effort to bolster the institute’s resources.

After a lifetime in bustling, cosmopolitan Montreal, Madison is certainly a new world. But, says Westley, “when an opportunity comes up, you take it even if you don’t know where it’ll lead. When so many factors align, it’s almost like a call.”

Q & A: Frances Westley

What are your priorities during your first year?

I’d like to get a dialogue going about what we as an institute are trying to do, what it means to realize our mission of leadership in interdisciplinary teaching, research and outreach, how well we’re doing and what we could do better. So if I can get to the end of this first year and feel that we’re much more on the same page about what it means to be really excellent in this, and that we have some exciting initiatives that we can use to raise serious money, then I’ll feel pretty satisfied.

What’s your longer-term vision for the institute?

I’d like us to be seen as a leader at the national and international level, so that when people hear the term ‘Nelson Institute,’ they think that if you want to do really excellent interdisciplinary research and teaching, that’s the place you’d like to be, because you know that, as a researcher or teacher, you’re going to

find other colleagues there who are the best in the world. And if you are a prospective student you will want to come here in order to get a unique interdisciplinary education, unlike that available anywhere else, which will equip you to be a conservation catalyst or a desirable colleague in any interdisciplinary research project, in addition to being a well-trained scientist.

And I would like other centers of excellence that are concerned with other elements of sustainability or systems or environmental studies to see us as having a particular niche, and to be interested in collaborating with us because we have a competence that complements theirs.

Can alumni become more involved with the Nelson Institute?

I’d love to get them more involved. I think they’re a huge resource that we aren’t tapping nearly the way we could.

For example, we have a fascinating and excellent student body. Many

of them are doing what I would consider to be professional degrees. I’d like to get our alumni much more involved with connecting them into the corporate world or the government world or the NGO world, preparing them for what that world will be like and helping them find placements there. I think we have a lot to learn from our alumni, so I would like them to think about ‘inreach’ as well as us thinking about outreach.

I would love to get a very active alumni group going, and by active I don’t just mean reunions. I mean finding ways to include them in the work of the institute to the extent that they’re interested. So any interested alumni just need to get in touch, because I’d love to have them on board.

Westley can be reached by phone at (608) 265-5296, or via email at westley@wisc.edu.

Field Trip to Baja, Mexico, Yields Enduring Lessons

By Tom Sinclair

Most university students pull at least a few all-nighters before they graduate. But rarely do they pull all-nighters quite like this.

For the better part of a week, nine UW–Madison students took turns patrolling a miles-long stretch of beach on the southern tip of Mexico’s Baja Peninsula from dusk until dawn.

They watched in the darkness for a wonder of nature that few people ever see in person — the ancient ritual of a female sea turtle emerging from the ocean to scoop out a simple nest in the sand, lay her precious eggs, and drag herself back to the water.

Whenever this happened, the students’ job was simple: stand guard while the female completed her task, then retrieve the Ping-Pong ball–sized eggs — more than 100 from the average nest — and take them to a nursery.

“We were protecting the eggs from people digging them up, from dogs, coyotes, crabs,” says **Kristina Cawthon**, who is earning a master’s degree in conservation biology and sustainable development. “If nests were right on the beach, then people might also run them over with ATVs and horses, and they would not be viable.”

The unusual assignment was part of a course in community-based conservation offered last year by environmental studies professor **Nancy Mathews**. After a semester of classroom study in the spring, Cawthon and eight other students joined



Olive ridley sea turtle hatchlings

Mathews, Madison-based environmental consultant **Regina Hirsch**, and retired zoology/environmental studies professor **Tim Moermond** in the fall for a week of first-hand observation and participation in a sea turtle conservation project near Pueblo La Playa, a small fishing village in Baja California Sur, Mexico.

The turtle-rescue effort, launched several years earlier by an energetic local elder who later perished in an ATV accident, itself had been rescued by other locals. The project survived the tragedy and, perhaps in tribute to its founder, blossomed. It is now faithfully carried on by a small paid staff and a loyal corps of volunteers. Its grassroots character intrigued Mathews and Hirsch, an honorary fellow with the Nelson Institute.

“We thought this would be an excellent opportunity to look at a community-based project,” explained Mathews, who says it was “virtually unknown” to the larger conservation community when Hirsch encountered it during a previous visit to the area.

The local initiative to protect olive ridley sea turtles, whose populations worldwide are endangered, was an important focus of the trip. The students learned about the history of the project, attended workshops on turtle care and management, and visited local schools to see what children are taught about the rare reptiles. Besides collecting eggs, they also released hatchlings.

“Any time you are holding an endangered species in your hand, and you’re letting it go, and you’re wishing it well, you are wishing the entire species well,” said **Jennifer Bradsby**, an undergraduate majoring in wildlife ecology. “It’s hard not to have that touch your heart and not to become



Students and staff biologists dig artificial nests to safely incubate turtle eggs.

emotional about it. I know I did.”

Economic and social trends in the region were another important focus of the trip. Change is afoot in Pueblo La Playa as hotels, condominiums, and marinas catering to foreign tourists creep ever closer from the resort city of San Jose del Cabo, just down the road. The sea turtles could be in jeopardy, and they are not alone.

“We interviewed two local people who were very supportive of the turtle project and really concerned about the development in the area,” said **Vanessa Lamb**, who also is studying conservation biology and sustainable development. “They lived right next to a large area that had just been bulldozed. They let us into their home and talked to us for two hours about the situation they are experiencing and how the community is dealing with it.” Whatever the lessons, Mathews believes the students will not soon forget their experience.

“I’m guessing that almost everyone in this class, in some way, shape, or form, is going to — if not reach a hand back down to those particular people to try to help them in some way — is going to do that for a similar organization somewhere in the next two or three years,” she said.

Recent Contributions

The Nelson Institute thanks the following people and organizations for their generous contributions:

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New Alumni

Undergraduate certificates: Rachel Arango, Carissa Boettcher, Natalie Brant, Nicole Burm, Alicia Butz, Jamie Clemans, Clare Cragan, Kelly Forman, Danielle Gould, Margaret Griffin, Jacob Hahn, Diana Hartner, Eric Heggelund, Sarah Herzberg, Eric Holbus, Robert Kirmse, Jessica Krull, Scott Laeser, Jamie Lamers, Benjamin Lowenberg, David Marsicek, Julia McCarthy, Amy Newman, Jonathan Pliska, Amanda Schiller, Rebecca Schreiner, Christopher Sell, Benjamin Shepherd, Lindsay Skotterud, Kirsten Sloan, Lori Steckervetz, Jaffer Traish, Shay Vetterman, Laura Wagner and Matthew Weaver.

Conservation Biology & Sustainable Development: Heidi Bonnaffon and Erik Steffens, master's degrees.

Environmental Monitoring: Suzanne Fitzgerald, Brynda Hatch and Heather Kelley, master's degrees.

Land Resources: Julia Wilcox, master's degree, and James Yount, doctorate.

Water Resources Management: Michele Restino, master's degree.

Christine Thomas
David Thomas
Peter Thum and Barbara Irvin
Mary Kate Beard Tisdal
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Judith Wilson
Thomas Yuill
Charlotte Zieve
Nancy Ritter Zolidis

Alumni News

Kathryn Harris (M.S., WRM '98) is a project manager in the regulatory branch of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Portland, Oregon.

"After graduating from the Water Resources Program, I moved to Austin, Texas, and accepted a job in the water quality section of the state's environmental agency," she writes. "Realizing Texas was just not my style, I moved to Oregon in the spring of 2000. I knew I had found heaven before the plane even landed."

Harris says she had to overcome some reservations about her new employer.

"I always had a rather negative view of the Army Corps, but once inside, I realized my fellow co-workers share my concern for the environment," Harris explains. "My job entails reviewing applications to impact waters of the United States, including wetlands and rivers of all shapes and sizes. The two counties under my review involve two spectrums of the state: urban and coastal farm communities, resulting in a great variety of work."

Harris has also become a serious triathlete.

"I went back to Madison last fall for the first time since graduating in 1998 to participate in Ironman Wisconsin," she writes. "My first triathlon was a short, all-women's beginner's course in Texas. I feel like I barely made it across that finish line five years ago. Crossing the finish line at Ironman Wisconsin was an amazing feeling of accomplishment and relief that I hope to repeat in Canada in 2006. Until then, the mountains beckon me to hike and backpack, while the rivers call me to kayak."

Harris can be contacted via email at tohnilih@hotmail.com.

Benjamin Hodapp (M.S., WRM '02) recently accepted a position as an environmental scientist with Anderson

Engineering of Minnesota, LLC, located in Plymouth.

"Mainly I am tasked with wetland investigations, delineations, and permitting for our clients, in addition to hydric soil investigations, EAW/EIS preparation, and other environmental issues as the need arises."

Hodapp lives in Brooklyn Park, Minn.

Jaime Jelenchick (B.S., Art/Environmental Studies '04) will begin working on a master of fine arts degree in the Science & Natural History Filmmaking Program at Montana State University this fall. After graduate school, she hopes to pursue independent documentary film-making, museum film production, teaching, development of science education materials, "or all of the above."

While she was an undergraduate, Jelenchick spent time in Ecuador, where she became involved with a privately owned cloud forest reserve in the northwestern part of the country called Río Guajalito. Her experience was highlighted in a story published by the UW-Madison International Studies Program. You can find it online at www.intlstudies.wisc.edu/DeansOffice/EIntl/StudentNewsS04.htm.

Jelenchick has been working as the economic development coordinator for the Milwaukee Alliance, a non-profit group that works in urban neighborhoods.

Bruce Kahn (Ph.D., LR '02) is a financial consultant with Smith Barney, Citigroup Global Markets Inc. in New York, specializing in socially responsible investments.

Kahn can be reached through his company Web page at <http://fc.smithbarney.com/bkahn/>.

Megan Lauber (B.A., English/Environmental Studies '96) is the crane coordinator at the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans. She had previously worked at the

International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

"That's where I fell in love with cranes," says Lauber. "I am captivated by these birds because of their beauty, intelligence and joyfulness. Each has its own personality, and watching a crane dance with its mate or care intensely for its chick is extraordinary."

Lauber was recently featured in an online interview on the Audubon Nature Institute's Web site (www.auduboninstitute.org).

"Cranes have existed for millions of years, but just in the last century they have become endangered," she explains. "Both our native Mississippi sandhill cranes and the whooping cranes are endangered due to habitat loss and human disturbance. Techniques such as artificial insemination and costume-rearing chicks has significantly increased the number of properly imprinted chicks that can be released into the wild, which is a good sign since both species are monogamous, forming lifelong pair-bonds and raising usually one chick a year."

"I can't imagine a world without cranes," Lauber says. "I want to help them in any way that I can."

Lauber can be contacted by email at mlssc@yahoo.com.

Justin Mog (Ph.D., LR '03; M.S., '99) and **Amanda Fuller** (M.S., LR '02) were married last August at a "picnic in the park" celebration in Madison.

Mog says the "buy-nothing" event was designed to minimize environmental impact. It featured a vegetarian potluck picnic with reusable tableware, local wildflowers, home accommodations and carbon offsets for out-of-town guests, and a colorful bicycle parade.

The central findings of Mog's dissertation research were published as an article in the December 2004 issue of *World Development*. Its title is "Struggling with Sustainability — A Comparative Framework for Evaluating Sustainable Development Programs."

Erin O'Brien (M.S., LR '03) was named the 2004 "Performing Songwriter of the Year" by the Madison Songwriter's Group. O'Brien has been performing at Madison-area venues for the past two years.

She's also been serving as a wetland policy and conservation specialist with the Wisconsin Wetland Association. She focuses on strengthening state rules and regulations governing wetland management and provides support to individuals and communities interested in protecting local wetlands.

The organization is evaluating which Wisconsin's property tax policies create economic disincentives for landowners who hold or restore wetlands, and is seeking to replace economic barriers with incentives that encourage wetland conservation and restoration.

O'Brien has also worked for the River Alliance of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Association of Lakes.

For more information about O'Brien's music, visit her Web site, www.erinobrienmusic.com. Her email address is eob12@hotmail.com.

Lisa Stefanik (B.A., Sociology/Environmental Studies '96) recently announced her engagement to Andrew Gussert.

Stefanik recently started a new position as marketing manager for the Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation. She previously worked for the UW System as a market research analyst from 1999 to 2004.

Gussert is president of Progressive Strategies, a government relations firm in Madison. The couple is planning a September wedding in Madison.

Alberto Vargas (Ph.D., LR '98) was recently appointed associate director of the Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian Studies Program (LACIS) at UW-Madison.

"This appointment is going to have a tremendous positive impact on our program," says LACIS director Guido Podesta. "Alberto's excellent

academic credentials in the fields of forestry and land resources are going to be instrumental in strengthening our relationship with departments and academic programs beyond the humanities and social sciences. He also has a unique and refined intellectual understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean and a genuine interest for Spanish and Portuguese affairs."

Vargas earned a bachelor's degree in general agriculture from the Monterrey Technological Institute in Mexico and a master's degree from Texas A&M University. His doctoral research examined the interactions of federal, state, and local actors in the sustainable use and conservation of tropical forests by local communities in Quintana Roo in southern Mexico.

Vargas has worked for the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the Federal Environmental Attorney's Office of Mexico, the International Institute for Environment and Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Wildlife Fund-U.S., the Overseas Environmental Institute, the National Wildlife Federation and the UW-Madison Land Tenure Center. He's been an honorary fellow with the Nelson Institute since 1998.

Vargas was raised in Pachuca, Hidalgo, in central Mexico. He's married to Laurie Greenberg, who holds a doctorate in geography from UW-Madison. They have two children.

Kent Withrow (M.S., LR/EAP '95) began working last June for the Midwest Independent Transmission System Operator (MISO) in Carmel, Indiana, just outside Indianapolis.

"MISO now dispatches electric generators throughout 15 states in the Midwest (including Wisconsin), and serves as a clearinghouse for trading wholesale electricity between utilities," he explains. "In theory, this will provide more efficient use of this region's electricity infrastructure, with lower

prices for consumers as a result. It could also make it easier for alternative sources, like wind turbines, to get built and used in a manner that makes them profitable."

Withrow is MISO's technical lead for market settlements applications.

"I work with the software that reconciles all the trades that take place each hour of each day and divvies up the collected money accordingly. It has been pretty intense work to prepare for the 'market launch,' which happened on April 1, 2005. But it has been interesting to be involved right at the heart of it.

"Whether this experiment fails or succeeds, it will have been a good learning experience. The concepts being put into place here were just starting to be discussed in 1993 when I started in the EAP program. Since then, although I never really intended to be a nomad, it has been a circuitous career path. I have now lived and worked in all four U.S. time zones since college, plus England and Australia. But now, it's nice to be using my EAP education on a daily basis ten years after graduating.

"On the personal side, in June 2000, I got married in Cozumel, Mexico, to my college girlfriend Linda. With this marriage, I gained a daughter, Teresa, who just turned 10, and we have a son, Luis Vicente, who will be three in July. We lived in Austin, Texas, near Linda's family, until moving to Indy last year. Indianapolis is okay, but you never see it in those 'most liveable cities' surveys that Madison always makes. Both our kids are native Texans, so where we end up 'permanently' remains to be seen.

"I miss Madison and the IES (Nelson Institute) community there. My family and I will try to come and visit more often, now that we are back in the Midwest. Meanwhile, please e-mail me at kwithrow@engineer.alum.berkeley.edu."

Your Gift Makes a Difference

Gifts are an important source of financial support for the Nelson Institute.

Private contributions from alumni, friends, and faculty and staff members enable us to offer unique scholarships, fellowships and travel opportunities for students; named professorships for outstanding faculty members; special lecture series and related public programs; this newsletter; and much more.

Please consider helping the Nelson Institute with a gift of your own. For more information, visit our home page at www.ies.wisc.edu and click on "Giving to the Institute."

If you've already given to the institute recently, thank you.

Calling All Alumni!

By Mary Mercier, Senior Student Services Coordinator

Are you currently working in an environmental field? If so and you hear of environmental job opportunities with your employer, please share this information with other Nelson Institute alumni.

We publish a weekly online newsletter of environmental job opportunities (www.ies.wisc.edu/alumni/ejo), and we'd particularly like to include current vacancies contributed by our alumni.

To contribute a job announcement, email to mercier@wisc.edu, or send by post to the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, Room 70 Science Hall, 550 N. Park Street, Madison, WI 53706.

And if you're job-hunting, check out our online environmental employment resources. You can find them at www.ies.wisc.edu/students/careers.htm.

Your turn...

Let us know what's new in your careers and lives. Drop us a line at *In Common*, 10 Science Hall, 550 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53706-1491; fax us at 608/262-2273; or email to Incommon@mail.ies.wisc.edu.

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