RPTA set a foundation “fore” 2013 Distinguished Alumnus’ future

With the help of a Western Illinois University faculty member’s connection, Brian Gerard ’86 was able to complete his required senior internship at Kiawah Island Golf Resort. Nearly 30 years later, Gerard is now the director of golf and other programs at the South Carolina-based haven located on a barrier island a few miles from Charleston.

Earlier this year, Gerard was recognized for his long career at the resort and his contributions to his field by the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration (RPTA) with the department’s 2013 Distinguished Alumni Award. While Gerard was not able to come back to Macomb to receive the award in person, he did provide current RPTA students and faculty with a short video acceptance speech, in which he described how he advanced to his current role at Kiawah Island Golf Resort and the strong foundation his RPTA education and degree from Western provided him.

“One of my professors knew the director of golf at Kiawah at the time, and he made a phone call for me and down I came,” Gerard explained. “I had a great internship at Kiawah. It allowed me so many opportunities. It’s a multi-faceted facility, and I got to do just about everything. It really prepared me for me for my career. And when I finished that, they hired me as an assistant golf professional.”

Gerard attributes his long, successful career, in part, to his time at Western, which he selected because he “knew he wanted to go to a school with the best RPTA program.”

“During my junior year at Western, I was having a long discussion with one of my professors, and we were talking about a career path and where I wanted to be. I thought about a career path and where I wanted to be five, 10, 15 years down the road, that sort of thing. I’m not really sure how we got on this topic, but he said to me, ‘You know, Brian, most people will tell you what’s wrong and who is to blame. Very few people will tell you what’s wrong and how they can be a part of the solution to fix the problem.’ Really, what he was talking to me about was that I needed to be a good problem solver. And he was so right about that. If you can become efficient in that skill, you will set yourself apart from the masses, no doubt about it.”

View the video of Gerard’s acceptance speech for the 2013 RPTA Distinguished Alumni Award at http://vimeo.com/64067966.

Horn Field Campus Corn Maze honors alumnus’ service and alma mater

By Teresa Koltzenburg ’92 M.S. ’11

Every year in October, hundreds of autumn-activity and Halloween enthusiasts head out to Western’s Horn Field Campus (HFC) to experience its annual Corn Maze. This year, the maze’s design has special significance, not only for Western Illinois University, but also for the alumnus who designed it.

John Moninger ’13, a graduate of WIU’s recreation, park and tourism administration (RPTA) program, designed and created the Corn Maze based on Western’s Marine-style logo. (WIU is the only public school in the U.S. that has permission through the Department of the Navy to use the United States Marine Corps official seal, mascot [the bulldog] and nickname, “The Fighting Leathernecks.”) To finish his bachelor’s degree in RPTA (13 years after he initially started at Western), Moninger served as an intern at Horn Field Campus this past summer. One of his major projects for his internship was to create the Corn Maze. For him, a former Marine, basing the maze’s design on the Marine-style logo was a way for him to show pride in his soon-to-be alma mater, as well as in his service for the U.S. Marine Corps.

In a short bio piece Moninger wrote for HFC’s quarterly newsletter, “Horn Happenings,” Moninger shared how he first chose to come to WIU (back in 2000), as well as how he left Western in 2004 to join the Marines.

“When I was 15 years old, I acquired my first job as a lifeguard at Flick Pool in Glenview, IL. I loved working outdoors so much I stayed on and did it part-time for almost 10 years. I had not thought too much about what my major was going to be at WIU until I was a second-semester sophomore. So, I talked to my aquatics supervisor, who is a WIU alumna, and she told me to get into the RPTA department. I completed four years of college courses, and instead of finishing up my degree, I made a life-changing decision to join the U.S. Marine Corps. I served my country for five years with several overseas deployments, one of them being Iraq in 2009. I was also in Okinawa, Japan, for my last year in the military and had the honor of assisting Japan in the tsunami disaster relief in 2011,” Moninger wrote.

After he left the Marine Corps, Moninger said he decided to come back to Western “to finish what he started,” with the assistance of the G.I. Bill.

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IDT student puts WIU campus on Google Earth map…3-D style

By Teresa Koltzenburg ’92 M.S. ’11

If you’ve perused the map of Western Illinois University on Google Earth, you may have noticed a few of the buildings appear to be three dimensional or “in 3-D.” Sherman Hall, the Leslie F. Malpass Library, Waggoner Hall and a few other buildings protrude from a mostly otherwise flat depiction of the campus. So far, 10 buildings on the Macomb campus are available for viewing this way, all thanks to the hands of Dane Severinsen (Germantown Hills, IL), a Western Illinois University senior majoring in instructional design and technology, who used Google’s free 3-D modeling software, Google Sketchup, to create the models.

The website for the free Sketchup program encourages individuals to “join the worldwide geo-modeling community and help put every village, town and city on the 3-D map.” According to Google, an individual’s 3-D models can appear in Google Earth and Google Maps. Although Severinsen said he was able to use the 3-D modeling software and the project for an independent study-course in Spring 2013, he started creating three-dimensional renderings of the campus buildings as a personal, independent endeavor in September 2012 because the opportunity presented itself.

“I first became interested when I was using Google Earth, and I realized no one else had done it yet, which was a little surprising to me. There wasn’t a single building on the campus that was modeled, so I saw it as an opportunity to leave my mark on campus,” Severinsen explained. “I think it’s really cool that anyone can access it and see the three-dimensional appearance of the buildings. I think it can be especially good for international students, who can’t necessarily come and visit in person, but they can come and visit virtually.”

He noted that he first became interested in using Google Earth, and the possibilities it offers for three-dimensional projects, a few years ago.

“…I think it was in 2005 or 2006, when they came up with the three-dimensional buildings. When it was first released, the 3-D buildings looked like gray blobs...not too pretty. But as the technology progressed, it enabled users to create buildings that could look more lifelike. That’s when I started to really become interested in three-dimensional modeling, to try to bring the maps to life,” he said.

According to Severinsen, creating each three-dimensional building tends to be a tedious, pain-staking process. To start, he takes a number of photographs of the building he plans to model.

“I take the front part of the building, back and all around it, to get a good perspective so I can make the model look as accurate as I possibly can. I even go as far as counting every brick on the building to know how high it is,” he said. “The amount of time it takes to complete each rendering depends on the size of the structure and how intricate it is. A simple building can take four hours, while a really complex one can take 25-30 hours.”

After he completes a building rendering, he then has to upload and submit each file to Google for an approval-and-release process. The first part of Google’s relatively simple process works much like any other web-based program to which you upload an image or graphic file.

“All you have to do is key in what you want to call the building (I always use the proper name of each building, and you can also put in a description, such as a URL to WIU’s website), then you just click on an ‘upload’ button to upload the Google Sketchup file,” he explained. “Before a new rendering is viewable on Google Earth, it goes through a two-step process. It first needs to be accepted manually at Google—they make sure it follows the guidelines for models, and if it does, it gets approved. The second step involves when the model will be released and available to view on Google Earth. Google establishes release dates for their 3-D models, so once a model is approved, you may not necessarily see it right away. It will be available for viewing the next time Google decides to release the newly added 3-D models. The whole process can take anywhere from a week to a month.”

At this point, Severinsen has 10 of the 3-D building models available for viewing via Google Earth, including: Currens Hall, Horrabin Hall, Knoblauch Hall, the Malpass Library, Morgan Hall, the Multicultural Center, Sallee Hall, Sherman Hall, Stipes Hall and Waggoner Hall. He has three buildings awaiting release by Google Earth, including Memorial Hall, Western Hall/the Donald S. Spencer Student Recreation Center (which are connected) and Mowbray Hall. While he said he plans to continue to work on rendering the buildings on campus, he would more than welcome anyone else creating and adding 3-D models of campus buildings.

“I would like to see other people get interested in doing this, so it’s not just me doing it. What I have found is that some universities in the country have teams of five, six or even seven people creating 3-D models for campus buildings. So far, for Western, it’s just been me.”