

**September 11, 2006**

Like all organizations, North Park University functions best when we who work here are informed about events, activities, and decisions that impact our life together on the campus. As one way to address this at NPU I am initiating this small and quite informal news-piece. The schedule will be occasional. The content will be largely of my selection but I'm certainly open to input from any faculty and staff member. The audience will be all employees of the university. As a new venture, I'm sure there will be room for improvement; your opinions count in this, so please send your comments my way.

I begin by expressing my sincere thanks to each of you for the gracious welcome you have extended to Linda and me on our arrival in Chicago and at North Park. During our early weeks here you have offered a warm embrace, you have been very forgiving when we've forgotten your name, you have made sure we are not lost in our way too much of the time, and you have promised us that winters are the same here as they are in southern Pennsylvania! We look forward to this year together, and to many future years with you.

One of the wonderful gifts of working in higher education is the ebb and flow of the calendar. Throughout the year we have clear points of beginning and ending. You can count on these. For example, as the summer comes to an end, the fall semester begins. We note this passing from one season to the next with a flurry of activity on campus. This change takes place in different ways across the campus and in our respective departments, but the change is most evident in the people who populate this place. Over recent days we've all said it frequently (and most often with a smile): "They're back!"

Our students have returned to the campus! Some are new to North Park, beginning an adventurous journey into higher learning. Others were here last year and have returned for another year. All are part of this community of learning.

And we, too, are part of this community. We work here. This is our place of employment, but it is much more than this for it is in and through this place that we influence lives and change the world among us. This idea of change, and our role in it, is reflected quite nicely in a short poem I read on Gathering Day. The poem is by Ken Hekman, and I repeat it here for your continued reflection.

## *The Art of Work*

I give myself to this, *to this...*  
a passing shadow, barely felt  
though un-mistakenly sent  
to darken this corner  
for a moment, to cast a little  
coolness, a little shade – for a change.  
With breath as a brush, I stroke  
and stoke and sculpt something  
that wasn't there before,  
leaving the world just a little better  
than I found it.

This is what we try to do, is it not?—to leave this world, and those who are present in it (primarily our students), “just a little better than [we] found it.” This is what it means to educate. We have a high and noble (and indeed, holy) calling, and regardless of what position we've been assigned on this campus we must work diligently to fulfill this responsibility to educate (thereby transform) our students. I'm honored to join you in this mission here at North Park.

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**S**ETTILING IN – One of the questions Linda and I have heard often from you is, “Are you settling in?” Our answer is “yes,” so long as you word this in an active voice. We have not yet “settled in” but we're certainly working on it. I'm still unpacking a few things in my office, Linda is still looking through her teaching files (she is teaching two courses this semester), and we still have a few boxes to deal with in our home. But we're making good progress!

One gift that comes our way in working at NPU is the president's residence which is ours to use, for our own life and in our work with the university. The residence is on Spaulding Avenue just one block north of Foster Avenue. The university has undertaken a few renovations of this home in preparation for our arrival. These include a fresh coat of paint throughout and air conditioning on the top floor. In addition, work will soon be completed in renovation of a guest room on the garden level and of the kitchen on the main floor.

Once these projects are completed, our boxes are unpacked, and most of the home is in

order, we'll look forward to hosting many occasions when people (including you!) can attend small gatherings in the home. We'll provide more notice on this in the days ahead!

Finally, I would be terribly negligent if I did not note the very gracious and capable assistance we've received from the University's physical plant staff. They worked hard to ready the residence for our move, and since we arrived they have assisted us in many ways. This group has been most kind to us even in the midst of fulfilling their other responsibilities across the campus as the semester got underway.

**M**OVING IN – Of course, Linda and I were not the only ones to move to North Park in recent weeks. The University opened its doors to over a thousand students living in campus residences and many more who travel to the campus on class days. These new residents at the University come from across Illinois and the mid-west, but also hail from many other states as well as a good number of other countries.

On this year's "moving in day" Linda and I visited with new students and their parents. As we walked through the student residences, and as we talked with families who were readying their student's room, we noted a very positive response to NPU's welcome. Each new student, and each parent, was all smiles. In spite of the heat of the day, the challenge of moving in, and the deep emotion of parting from one's family, each member of these families evidenced a warm response to North Park's embrace.

This was especially encouraging to me as the University's new president. From my own experience as a new student (many years ago!) and my work over the past two decades in other colleges and universities I can confirm that parents and students do not always have such positive emotions on moving in day.

Certainly there are many reasons for how our students and their parents felt this year. But I'm confident that central to this response is the way in which the people of North Park have embraced these families throughout their journey to this community. This includes nearly everyone on the campus: those who recruited the students, those who processed financial aid awards, those who planned the orientation weekend, those who fed our guests, those who unloaded cars (and trailers), and those who painted walls and made sure furniture was in place. (There were many others as well, but I need to bring this paragraph to a close!)

In short, I simply want to thank each of you for your part in bringing new students to our campus, for welcoming them when they arrived, and for educating them during their stay. As I noted above, I'm truly honored to work with you.

**O**PEN OFFICE DAYS – In order to foster increased opportunities for communication between my office and the campus community I'm introducing the practice of periodic days when my office door will be open to any and all employees who wish to drop by. (Similar days will also be

available for students.) On these days, you may stop in at the office at your leisure for a brief conversation; no appointment is necessary. We'll keep the visits relatively short so there is time for others to visit with me.

The "agenda" for these visits is strictly yours to define. You may have a topic related to the workplace, a concern for students, a moment of celebration, or a topic of personal interest. You may come alone or with a group of colleagues.

I trust that you'll take advantage of this opportunity for it is one of the ways in which I can get to know you and learn of your work here at NPU. The days scheduled for this semester include

- September 14
- October 5
- November 21

We'll send an electronic reminder message prior to each date.

**S**UMMER PROJECTS – As you've likely noticed, a variety of facilities projects have been completed over the summer. The largest of these, of course, is construction of the Helwig Recreation Center. But there are a good number of others as well. These include:

- New Bookstore – renovation of space below the Viking Café (in the space formally used for the fitness center)
- Wilson Hall – Fresh paint and new flooring throughout and waterproofing treatment to improve the sculpture studios in the lower level; new furniture was provided for the classrooms on the main level
- Hanson Hall – Fresh paint and new flooring in the common areas; new lighting for H-23, the upper level recital hall
- C-13 Classroom – complete renovation including new and expanded seating, new classroom mediation with an electronic podium, repair of the HVAC system, new acoustic wall panels, new flooring, and wireless connectivity

- Burgh Hall – one bathroom stack (one of the two bathroom areas on each floor) was completely renovated with private showers, new fixtures, and new finishes
- Carlson Tower – four classrooms on the third floor were upgraded with “smart classroom” technology
- Kimball Parking Lot – this project is still under construction; located behind and west of Sohlberg Hall the parking area will add about 90 spaces for institutional use
- Gymnasium Building – improved entryway floor treatments with new entry walk-off carpeting, new stair treads, and adjacent hallway floor treatments

Some of these projects were completed by physical plant staff members; others were engaged by outside contractors. In every case the improvements are welcome changes to the campus.

**CAPITAL CAMPAIGN** – One of the major reasons for celebration during the summer was the announcement that the capital campaign had been successfully completed. This involved much hard work on the part of many individuals (in the development office and beyond).

The funds raised in this campaign are important to securing an effective future for the University. The major campus projects supported by the campaign have been the following:

- Campus Green Space
- Holmgren Athletic Complex
- Helwig Recreation Center

**POINTS OF CELEBRATION** – Each academic year offers times when we can celebrate our life together at North Park—concerts, lectures, athletic contests, Homecoming, and the like. This semester, however, we have opportunity to engage two occasions of special significance in the life of the University.

The first of these is the dedication of the Helwig Center on Friday and Saturday, September 15 and 16. A schedule of activities has been distributed recently, and further information is available on the university web page. The dedication of this new addition to our campus facilities offers a time to thank those who have had important roles in bringing this project to completion. In addition, the dedication provides an occasion to “cut the ribbon” and in doing so celebrate the official opening of this new facility which will serve all students, as well as faculty and staff of the university, who have an interest in recreation. Be sure to join the festivities!

The second event is the Presidential Inauguration, scheduled for the weekend of November 10-12. The program of events is quite varied and includes an academic symposium, a concert, a gala dinner, a festival for students, a morning prayer service, and the inauguration ceremony itself. Preliminary information is available on the University’s web site, and further information will be presented to the campus community in the weeks ahead. For now, reserve the weekend on your personal calendar for a wonderful occasion to “celebrate North Park!”

**FIRST THURSDAYS** – Members of the faculty are invited to join in a social gathering during the late afternoon on the first Thursday of each month. For the Fall Semester this includes:

- October 5
- November 2
- December 7

Hosted in the President’s Residence (located at 5258 N. Spaulding Ave.), the occasion will include a bit of food, something to drink, and good conversation. Walk over alone; walk over with a group; but do walk over and join us from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. on each of these days.

**ENROLLMENT** – The fall semester brings to us a new (and returning) group of students. Official enrollment numbers won’t

be available until later this month on our “census date.” For now, however, we’re pleased to report that in nearly every part of the university enrollment is strong and meets the goals we had set. This is good news for us, and something we can rejoice in.

As official enrollment numbers are available we’ll report these to the campus community, along with a comparison of these numbers with those from last year.

Special thanks are expressed to all who had a part in recruiting this year’s class across the various program units of the university.

**SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM** – As you might imagine, one of the groups I interact with most frequently is the University’s senior administrative team. During the past 18 months, Jay Phelan, Carl Balsam, and Dan Tepke joined together to fulfill various responsibilities in the “office of the president.” In doing so they provided effective leadership for the University in their respective capacities. At Gathering Day we recognized their work and presented a gift to them. I’m sure, however, that they would still be pleased to hear a “thank you” as you have time to express it.

As the academic year begins I have decided to make a small change in the membership on this team and in the way selective responsibilities are distributed among us. Specifically, the area of student life, which has been included in Dan Tepke’s portfolio of responsibilities, will be transferred to my office. In her capacity as Dean of Students, Andrea Nevels will report directly to me, and consistent with this she will join the senior administrative team.

From my perspective this modest restructuring will result in several positive benefits. It provides an opportunity for Dan Tepke to give more time and effort to leading the work of the development office, it allows me to be more directly linked to undergraduate life on campus, and it provides a wider set of voices

around the senior administrative table. The change is effective immediately.

**UNIVERSITY COUNCIL** – Over the past few years the Executive Cabinet gathered periodically as a means to provide a cross-departmental discussion within the University’s administrative structure. Membership included those people who reported to the president as well as directors in several programmatic units. I expect to continue this practice with a few structural changes.

Generally, the group will discuss various issues which are of broad institutional interest. These topics will include, but are not limited to institutional planning; university-wide personnel policies, procedures, and practices; inter-departmental collaboration; non-curricular programs and initiatives; and overarching issues of university image and marketing.

In order to better reflect these cross-institutional interests, I’ve chosen to rename this group as the University Council. I will continue to chair the group; we’ll meet each month, with the actions of the Council to be advisory to me as university president.

Membership on the Council will continue to be comprised of those reporting to the president and directors of several campus units. However, at the September meeting of the faculty I will ask that body to name three faculty representatives to the Council. I will also ask for appointment of a member from the seminary faculty.

As the membership of the Council is fully defined, we’ll make sure these names are communicated publicly. We’ll also look for ways to provide for the campus community periodic reports on the deliberation of the Council.