

Interviews with  
Dr. Leslie E. Wong  
President of  
Northern Michigan University  
2004-2012

Edited by  
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# Introduction

Since 1995 the University Historian has conducted oral interviews with past and present Northern Michigan University presidents: Edgar Harden, John X. Jamrich, James Appleberry, William Vandament, Judi Bailey, Michael Roy and Leslie Wong. These interviews provide an opportunity for the presidents to review the years in office and comment on them. This also provides researchers with the actual memories of the presidents. These interviews are deposited at the Northern Michigan University Archives for use by the public.

These interviews have been collected and edited in June 2012. They are presented to Dr. Wong as a recollection of his presidency as he departs from Northern Michigan University to the presidency of San Francisco State University in California.

Interview #1- 2005  
Dr. Leslie E. Wong  
Northern Michigan University  
Marquette, MI  
November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005

(Russell Magnaghi (RM)): Ok, good morning President Wong. I would like to start out filling in the last year. I did an interview about a year ago concerning the first few months of your presidency. What I would like to do now is continue with that and take a look at the last year, 2005. What were some of the major events that you faced for a year?

(Les Wong (LW)): Well if one can age in a non-linear way, the last twelve months have been pretty challenging and interesting. There is no doubt that last spring the legislative process was not only a low point but also the source of a big high point, not only for Northern but also for me. In the spring when the legislative process was sort of getting started and moving, the question of "how to fund higher education in Michigan" was certainly on top of most people's agenda. The opening months of my presidency were filled with the confrontation with tuition restraint; to what degree can the governor and legislator control what colleges charge students? As we have worked our way through that, that lead to a very large discussion about funding in general. Whether or not Michigan could stem the declining commitment that they have been making over three to four years, hopefully it will turn around for 2006 and forward. What I thought was going to be high quality, intense discussion about the future of higher education at Northern, turned into a very bitter battle. House

Republicans took a very different and surprising move towards formula funding. Formula funding in a way, was very disruptive not only to Michigan Higher Education, but to Northern in particular. The House Republicans proposed a 31% cut over six years to Northern, which is about a \$15 million reduction in our approximately \$45 million budget. So essentially saying, "Over span of six years, we are going to reduce you by a third." Now if they had proposed similar things for all 15 public schools, it would not have bothered me but the house version only targeted Northern and Wayne state for such cuts. The senate in a similar version said, "It is very clear that Northern per student funding is higher than the rest. We'll propose a 10% one time reduction." That is about approximately \$5 million, both of which are in an area in which our campus was growing. Programs are full, active, and productive it literally meant that we had the ugly possibility of actually eliminating full programs. So our challenge became how to share with legislators the awful implications of that kind of scenario. By our own accreditation, for example, even though we cut a program legally we are still required to conduct that program till the last graduate is out of that program. So what you do is stop admissions to the program, but anyone who is in it you'd have to continue to serve.

(RM): I don't know if it is a magic number, but doesn't the program continue for seven years or till everybody has had a chance to graduate?

(LW): It's the latter. Till the last major has been graduated, we still offer the curriculum. Again, when you are in a success mode like we are in terms of growth

and quality of programs. You cannot find a major at Northern that is low producing and low enrollment etc. that you make an easy cut off. Literally we were facing putting programs of 50 to 75 majors on the blocks. Clearly if you are a student in that major, your first decision is, "where do I go?" So not only was the program terminated, but you are suddenly confronting a mass of exodus of students off the campus.

(RM): Wouldn't it also have a bad PR?

(LW): Absolutely yeah. I am sorry, before I get into what we did, the other aspect of the legislative process in the spring that was quite surprising was the legislative attack on other institutions in the U.P. The proposal to close the prison in Newberry, which was highly efficient and cost effective, in favor of a private prison downstate that was losing money was very controversial. The legislator went after human service programs in Manistique. In areas south, down in Delta County and Dickinson County, there were attacks there as well so there appeared to be this huge attack on U.P. institutions. What happened was it just riled the U.P. I learned one of my high points was learning that there is nothing that drives cohesion and spirit than to have the U.P. attacked by downstate forces. Our agenda at Northern very quickly became a how to not only manage but participate in the grassroots effort to push back the legislative agenda cuts to the U.P. and Northern. We undertook a very extensive strategy of mobilizing alums, students, and supporters. Our goal was to put hundreds of e-mails into legislative boxes daily. It required a substantial effort, so the student

government, ASNMU, was very active and successful. The alumni groups were very successful too. In the first week had put thousands of e-mails into key legislative e-mail boxes. That sort of voice from the U.P. and from Northern not only came from in state people but all of our alums throughout the United States. My office tried to keep all of our alum and informational systems sensitive to our effort. In a way we even developed a week-by-week agenda of what group had this week and their duty to get information to legislators. We tried to not only mobilize the grassroots effort which was very successful, we also used the tact of every time we met with a legislator, particularly a key one, we wouldn't talk about "why are you doing this?" but offer them alternatives. If you want X, here is another way of doing it that doesn't impact the U.P.; it is more equal. That constructive approach fell upon very welcoming ears because other campuses went into the attack mode very quickly. I wanted my team to be known less for an attack but yet wanting to be part of the solution. So, very affectionately we developed a phrase for Northern, we were going to "fly low, play straight and work hard." Essentially with term limits the legislative process really involves ten people. The rest of them defer to them. The other legislators are newly elected; I don't know much so there was far more deferral to chairs and major committees than many of the old hands seen in the past. So we concentrated our efforts on those ten people. The grassroots effort, our effort to be constructive and solution based, and the third part of our effort was I asked all of our supporters state-wide if they ever heard Northern mentioned to let us know. If Northern was mentioned in either a derogatory way or cast in a set of alleged facts that were not true, we would get a correction to that person in 24-hours. The best example is the

chairmen of the appropriations, Scott Hummel, was giving a talk in Bay City and happened to mention that Northern had be receiving a disproportion of appropriations for years which is just not true. We had alum in the audience, who stood up and interrupted the speech and said, "That is incorrect." On the presidents website we had published the history of appropriations for all 15 campus's including Northern from 1977 till 2004. Clearly, there was no evidence. So he had that and handed it to him and got an apology really quick. We were very alert to keeping our sort of Northern allies very alert. They were very, very helpful. They also participated in our sort of "fly low, shoot straight, and play hard thing", which they were not going to chew on anybody and raise a ruckus but we were going to correct misperceptions very, very quickly. The governor, from the get go was very clear that selecting Northern and Wayne State as the bud of budget cuts was inappropriate. She has been a very outspoken and a very public supporter of NMU, which I am very grateful. She has been to the U.P. often; she has come to NMU events. Again, she has appreciated the fact that rather than appear in partisan we are trying to be part of the solution. Helping her office, certainly helping Senator Ken Sikkema the Republican senate leader, it didn't matter what party you were from or what part of the government you were from. We were trying to provide people good data and it worked. The high point of the summer was pretty intense, I think I learned a lot about Presidential lifestyle. Every Tuesday morning at 6 am, I was on the airplane heading to Lansing, coming home Thursday or Friday night. Very intense agenda that the legislative team of Mike Roy, David Haynes, Gavin Leach, Cindy Paavola, and myself, had two or three key alums for example Gil Ziegler, former board members Gil Ziegler and Dan DeVos were



very active in facilitating meetings supporting us. It became very apparent late in the summer that the house plan and in fact even the Senate plan was losing favor among constituents, Republicans included. We then implemented at that point the "it is hard to critique Northern if you have never been there" plan. So we attempted to get Senator Goschka up here. Many of the decision makers who had never been to Northern, we got them to campus to try to dispel their own mythologies about Northern. A lot of the local business people came to lunches to help tell our story: the CEO of Marquette General Hospital Bill Nemacheck and Mike Skitta, the CEO at Wells Fargo. A Lot of local business people showed up and said "Well this isn't just about Northern. If you are going to take a third of their budget, here is the impact throughout the community." That was very powerful. So when the end of the fiscal year was coming around, September 30<sup>th</sup>, our confidence was growing that it would be very hard for the legislator to impose anything on Northern at that time. Literally by the end of September, the House and Senate leadership and the governor, while they couldn't say it publicly, were simply saying the issue isn't Northern; the issue is higher education. We are not going to pick on Northern. They were very appreciative of our constructive efforts. When September 30<sup>th</sup> hit, the governor signed a bill that didn't include the cuts to Northern. I think of it as the \$15 million summer. Where we faced the prospects of a huge cut, we actually walked out with more money than we did last year. We were returned to the governor's budget, which included a 1.9% cut. With the additional money we were able to buy down that cut to about 1.6%. So in a way it was a very successful turn around and since that time, we kept up our grassroots effort. Probably not as intense but people know we are alert and they are

very sensitive to being fair to us. It is also very clear that Northern's presence in the legislative mindset, is much more solid much more fair. People do call me now and say, "Here is an idea that is floating, what do you think?" For a new president to be going into year two to be on the receiving end of calls rather than having to initiate calls is a pretty good change in my lifestyle. That intensity went from the lowest level you could image to that sort of euphoria saying, "God, we dodged a bullet for a year." What we have tried to do since September till today is establish our agenda. In January, we are going to offer to legislators and to the governor some formula options that are more supportive of the rural context that Northern operates in, hopefully in a way that is cost effective to the state. Rather than trying to, we are also going to critique the House formula, which is still being bounced around. Some of the formulas, particular the House formula, are based on urban models. What we have been doing is developing a more rural base model to show that there are ways to bench mark what we do, how we do it and the results that are different from models that might be used if we were sitting in Grand Rapids, Michigan. So that is essentially our chore for this year and everyone luckily now knows that. We have been very upfront about being at the center for the proposal alternate thinking.

(RM): When you got into this struggle, were the legislators apt for Northern or the U.P. or was it just kind of a less populated area so they would get the funds from that area? When I was watching this unfold in the papers and what not, it kind of made it look like they were firm on their attack. At some point they were reasonable?

(LW): I think upfront, Russ, it was very true. I think if they could have pulled it off they would have taken the money and literally depleted Northern and U.P institutions. They realized that they couldn't do it. They just realized there was no rationality to have Northern cut. It was interesting because for me too, it was the quickest way to learn more about the U.P. from meeting the Newberry organizers down in Delta County, from Ironwood to St. Ignace. I don't mean this in any egotistical way but it helped to get my face recognized by the people in the U.P. and downstate. People knew that we were not going to take it sitting down; we were going to be very upfront and reasonable with people. In a way my own personality reflected, I think, much of the values of the U.P. and the good people up here. We are not going to bark and make noise unless you give us a good reason to bark. I think people appreciated the approach that I took. The fact that there was a point, people were saying, "Is Les going to be firm enough to do this?" Luckily I was, it seemed to turn the tide. But the tide is one that even though we are in a good spot now, the state could still make some structural changes. One of those structural changes will in fact be funding of higher education. Now we are at a much better, stronger position legislatively. I think it gives us some time to be far more proactive because it took us four and a half months to develop it and respond reactively to the threat. For me personally, it was also everyone one on campus that gave an offer of tremendous support. The reality and I understood it clearly was, "Les is new and are they picking on us because Les is new and there is an advantage to maybe going after a guy that is new to Michigan and Northern." Who Knows? So I am pleased that the tide went our way and the campus was very supportive. It is just a testament to my sense that

there is just a lot good will, talented people.

(RM): When all this started, how did you feel? It was kind of the unknown for you. I mean, maybe the whole legislative process but then sort of an angry negative process. How did you feel about them before you actually got a plan together to deal with it?

(LW): Clearly, it looked to me as the new kid, that it was opportunistic. It was a great time to attack on their part and it looked like there was new guy out there and it even added to that sense of it. So in a way I started to take it personally, then it dawned on me I have to take it personally, and then really maximize the use of resources here in ways that I have not used them.

(RM): Now who came up with that? Was it your idea or a collective idea to get this new plan going instead of challenging the legislators' with an attack on them? Who came up with that?

(LW): It is hard to pinpoint where that is. I think people, myself included, suddenly said, "Hold it, if Les is the messenger and the leader, what is his style and what is the best way to maximize that style that would stand out?" So there is a confluence of a lot of luck etc. because I am not a confrontational person. I'd like to think maybe that it is my own academic training etc. but I also knew as President of Northern that we had to move quickly and that my style had to be that that disarmed our critics. It fitted

well in my approach and people have been very thankful. I am finding out that legislators and the governor were so used to having people fight back and yell that when all of a sudden here they are attacking Northern and I walk in and say, "Hey look, there are ways to deal with this, for example here are four ways." People listened. I think they respected a rational reaction and I think it surprised them. Here was a president that was not going to yell and bark back and meet what they thought were their expectations about a pending battle. It really has helped I believe because all of the teams suddenly took that approach as well. So the question is a difficult one because in a way it is sort of the team acknowledging what I am talking about and my own preference for addressing serious issues and developing packages of information that fit that. I think the team was also surprised that there were two or three moments where I had to show legislators that we were reaching a point where reasonableness was going to end. I was very firm that were they to continue pursuing that path. For example I reminded a legislator who asked me: "What is above the bridge?" My response was: "334,000 votes!" Suddenly it dawned on them that I was open to the idea of turning votes toward their opponents and this kind of thing and that is their life too. So they were a little taken back so they saw that there was potential for being firm and aggressive. So now it is kind of interesting because like I said the beauty of it now is that people are calling and asking for opinions. That was not the case during the spring and summer when it was clearly an attack. If they could have gotten away with it I think they would have and left us on our own.

(RM): So do you feel that this is, like when we talked last year you had just gotten into

the position. That now this is I think any of these positions are kind of unfolding, so this is sort of what is happening, kind of set you mark out there?

(LW): I feel good about that because the many times the political issues are always sort of are able to do that and have done that. Hindsight is twenty-twenty; I had great dreams of being more on campus and learning more about the campus and the staff, faculty, and programs. We had to abandon that plan pretty quickly so I am hoping to visit more classes and programs a little more on campus presence this second year. I have actually gone to sit in on some faculty classes, given some guest lectures, and things like that. That has been pretty nice. As I look back on my first year, I feel pretty good about the political and legislative sort of the things presidents do off campus. I feel like I have come up a bit short on my on-campus agenda. Everyone understands why that happened and has been very helpful to get me back on track during this second year. I have tried to keep up my commitment to being student focused so I have been very clear in my priority of agenda items like attending student events, sporting events, and campus activities. I feel very good about that, I think students know I am a very accessible person and they also are respectful of the challenge that is in front of campus and certainly me. It is fun to be able to go over in Payne Hall and have chocolate one night to talk about the University and their education and what is going on with students. I feel pretty good about some of the initiatives that are gaining strength with the international discussion and the Superior Edge discussion. I feel very good about renewing our emphasis on academic scholarship and undergraduate performance. All of the sorts of quality of

experience issues on campus are really quite positive. I feel very good about those. It's not like I have a direct hand in those but I feel like if I can set the context that when people want to do things to involve students in very good intellectual work that they can do it. At least we are going to work to remove barriers that people feel are in the way to achieve that. The number of student presentations at conferences is way up, faculty presentations and publications remain very visible.

END SIDE A

BEGINNING SIDE B

(LW): When you throw it into the pot I think that is what the outside community is seeing; that we are taking the school up a notch or two in quality, expectations, energy, and excitement. I think that is part of what fuels our attractiveness to new students. Suddenly students who are living in the U.P and in Michigan are saying "Gee why is everybody from Illinois, Wisconsin, and Ohio going to school at Northern?" They are willing to look now. We saw a slight increase in students from the West and Southeast sector of Detroit and Wayne County area. There are only five schools of the 15 that grew this fall and Northern was one. It is a testament to good work of the faculty and staff to make sure that despite the challenges the quality remains high. All things look good. The adventure is still a positive one. My spirit is still high. It has been a fun, fun year. It is has been pretty intense. Somebody the other day asked me: "What was the biggest surprise?" I told them the biggest surprise was

the schedule management of my day from 8 o'clock in the morning to nearly 10:30 at night and sometimes on weekends. I tell people also it is the most fun that I have had in a job in my whole career. Northern has been just exemplary in that sense of the term.

(RM): So at this point then you kind of see everything kind of coming together for you and you have gone through some difficult times and difficult experiences. But now you feel as though it has kind of come together for you?

(LW): I was telling my sister who has never been near higher education in her career; she asked what it was like? The metaphor for me is the first year is kind of like learning how to drive a stick shift. You kind of get the clutch and the gas pedal coordinated now. During the second year it feels good that I can get into first gear and get going really quick.

(RM): All right very good, thank you.

(LW): You are welcome.

Interview #2- 2007  
Dr. Leslie E. Wong  
Northern Michigan University  
Marquette, MI  
February 5th, 2007

(Russell M. Magnaghi (RM)): Interview with President Les Wong. Northern Michigan



University, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Okay, President Wong, we're doing our annual interview, as we've done for the last few years, and I'll turn it over to you with the general focus on the high points of your year of 2006.

(Les Wong (LW)): 2006 was an interesting year for a number of different reasons, and I probably should start off by saying that the legislative success in pushing back on the proposed budget cuts to Northern was very, very successful. In 2005 both the House and Senate singled us out repeatedly for significant cuts. I believe that our students, their families, our alums, the campus and certainly the leadership team on campus put in literally hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of hours crafting a message that would appeal to our supporters, and also appeal to the decision makers at Lansing. I think it was significant that in February, about this time last year, we made arrangements for most of the Appropriations Committee to come to Northern. We flew them up through the generosity of two donors, and for the group that came; three-fourths of them had never been on Northern's campus. We had lunch in Reynolds Hall and a very extensive campus tour. I guess the gist of the whole meeting was summed up when Representative Scott Hummel, the chair of Appropriations, walked into the Superior Dome, and was speechless. His belief was that all the noise that we had been making about the expense of the Dome, and heating, and its operation and maintenance was over-done. I think he believed that the Dome was one of these small, air-filled canvas-topped areas that you usually see over tennis courts. And when he walked in and saw a dome of wood fourteen stories high, students playing — there was a practice on the field — it suddenly dawned on him that he had a very erroneous assumption about what we do and the fact that the

Dome really is a convention center for the UP. Craig DeRoche was also there, the Speaker of the House in 2006, and he was also speechless. He thought that we were a very small campus; he thought our physical footprint was quite small. The fact that we had 10,000 — you know, 9,600 students then and growing was lost on him. And so, like we do when we're recruiting students and families, if we can get them to campus, it's very likely that they're going to sign on the dotted line and come, and the same was true in this case. When they finally came and saw the campus, in the dead of winter, and recognized how positive it was, our growth, and the activity, they signed on the proverbial line. In fact, we actually ended up with a million dollars more in our appropriation than what we were scheduled to. The governor had scheduled us for a 1.8% increase. The Senate agreed at 1.8%. The House was adamant in cutting us, because of our FYES costs — the dollars per full-time student. Upon visiting the campus, they suddenly realized that we weren't a small operation. They threw a million dollars into our appropriation within a week of their visit, and we actually ended up the year with a 3% increase, so 1.2% higher than expected amount. That whole experience, and the coming together of the Northern family, was really a high point for me —that we spent a lot of money in crafting accurate, but vivid, messages about the work we do with students, their contributions in terms of their own careers and discovery. It seemed like we had broached a whole new area, where downstate legislators and lawmakers understood what we were about and what we did. Now the truth is also true, that political victories are fleeting moments, because, term limits has taken out some of those members, and November elections have eliminated a number of members. And so, the House Republicans, who we

spent a lot of time training up to understand us, are now in the minority in the House, so they do not chair any of the committees. The chairs of the Democratic committees, now, know about us, but I think we need to probably get them up to campus as well. But, what I've appreciated is that, the message was received that we were honest, forthright, and transparent. We did a good job of educating people and lawmakers, about who we are, and we're benefiting from that today. I mean, even the new lawmakers said, "By the way, my predecessor says that here you handed over a lot of material on Northern." We've looked at it, and so I don't think we're starting from in the hole, this year, although the state's in the hole. But, at least our effort to make sure that people are informed about us is having some very positive carry-forward effects. There's no talk of singling us out. The issue of our funding is moot. I don't think there are issues there. There are some questions about specific things that I think are sort of normal, everyday inquiries into our programs. But the general level of knowledge and respect has gone up dramatically for the campus. So I feel pretty good about that.

(RM): Now did you and your team still have to go down to Lansing and plead Northern's case?

(LW): Oh yeah. That never goes away. Usually, two to three times a month I'm in Lansing. Right now it's been about twice a month, and now that they're in session we'll probably keep to that schedule, if not increase upon it in some fashion. The political atmosphere has certainly changed, because last year they were interested in fixing things, and now they've realized that the size of the state deficit is so huge, that

it's really structural. I mean, last year they were acknowledging that structural changes were needed. I think they postponed it until this year and next year, so everyone's in peril now. In my first two and a half years, it was just Northern that seemed to be on the thin ice. But, with an \$800 million shortfall this year, maybe a \$1.2 to \$1.5 billion shortfall next year, the state has to confront some of the structural issues. Now the benefit of the political environment for Northern is that people recognize that higher education is not broken. We've actually functioned very efficiently. We've been good tenders of the public dollar. And I think people are impressed that, given our location, Northern continues to grow. And we hope that that will continue to be the case, and I think it will be significant if we can break 10,000 next year or some time soon. We're still confronted with all the problems of growth that we have to face: the inadequate staffing at the faculty level, some infrastructure issues, the staff and clericals. But clearly, I'd rather have those problems than the other side, where we're looking for cuts. As I look at last year, I think the other memorable piece for me is a solidification of our relationship with Marquette General Hospital. We had sort of stoked — actually, set the fire in 2005 the creation and co-funding of the cytogenetics lab. The university is now housing the radiology program. The community health program is now on our campus. The grant request that the biologists are submitting in partnership with some of the neurologists at the hospital has great opportunity in terms of potential funding. And in the grant business, you know, you can't win unless you play. I think if we had not been serious about partnering up, I don't think those grants would have gotten written, let alone submitted. There's talk of further partnerships in terms of health programs, the

hospital is thinking of a muscular-skeletal program that might involve our HPER department, sports medicine and sports management. There's some discussion about our IT being shared. Our first experiment in using the category — a new faculty category, called research faculty, looks like it's been successful. **Dr. Sassi**, and now with the chief medical officer, we're extending and opening up our library and databases to the physician-researchers that are partnered up with faculty. Last year I was really pleased; Marquette General Hospital, Marquette Health and our nursing program had a flu-shot day. There was a drive-up shot day at the Dome, and it was really kind of cool to see our students with physicians, literally manning a drive-up booth where citizens of Marquette could drive up, never get out of their car and get a flu shot, and drive off. And in many ways it was a sneaky way to practice mass immunization experience, in case the flu situation gets worse. Or, as we've been reading in the newspapers, the H51N virus has been found in Europe, and it's destroying hundreds of thousands of turkeys, for example, in England. It will not be soon before it's discovered in the US —we still don't know how it transmits itself, and its mutation rates. The newest piece that's being talked about is, Dr. Lopez in biology, who's a virologist, is working with a couple of the epidemiologists at the hospital. He believes he has a way of creating a marker, to detect H51 in humans. And instead of a 30-day turn around time, he thinks he can do it in four days, which would have great significance for public health, for small towns and rural towns. There's now talk of a joint grant to buy the equipment to do that. There are a number of health-related areas that, between the two of us, really are not only finding some reality, but also identifying potential areas of business cooperation or, who knows, maybe some

faculty and doctors will spin off a business in flu detection or virus detection kinds of services. So I was very proud of that, in the way the staff came together on that, in 2006.

There's no doubt that the third area is the implementation of the Superior Edge program, in terms of rolling out, and getting past the pilot test phase. We believed that getting a thousand students into it by spring of 2008 would've been a huge success, and it looks like we've got 850 during the spring of 2007. The student in the program, of formalizing their public service, service learning, and volunteer work, has great appeal, and that is just gangbusters. Right now Rachel Harris and Dave Bonsall are doing a terrific job right there. The hundreds of thousands of hours that students are putting into this community, in their home communities, is really significant, and I think once our promotional work gets the story out of the UP and into some national areas, it's truly a cutting edge piece. It was also another significant event in 2006.

I have to mention that opening the doors to international relationships also took a step forward in 2006. In October, there were ten of us that were in China, in Zhuhai, and in Beijing. Our team was partially the USOEC, and partially faculty and academic people, and myself. And it looks like a relationship with the three universities will occur. We have a tentatively signed agreement with one, and we're expecting Ji Linn of University of Zhuhai to visit us and have a ceremony signing an agreement to exchange students. And its good timing —the number of visas awarded to Chinese students coming to the US is going up dramatically. There's one estimate that this coming fall we will be back to pre-9/11 levels, so for us the timing was good, that

students who we met and who will see our materials this year in China might very well be attending Northern in the fall of 2007 and winter of 2008. We had a trip to Sweden recently. That looks like a very promising environment. It's very similar, ecologically, to the UP. Their program work is very similar to ours, although they have PhD programs. A lot of the curriculum is taught in English. We have a lot of ethnic Swedes in the UP that I'm hoping will step forward and support a program in that area, courses or guests that might come in through our Swedish connection. I think, to a lot of faculty's credit, too, there were a number of concentrated learning experiences that are being planned, that are significant. Dr. Compton is completing an arrangement to take twenty students to Chihuahua this coming spring. I believe we have a contingent of students going to Zambia with Dr. Lindsay in Biology to do field studies there. Our Vienna program continues to be very strong. We have another group of twenty students going back to China in the summer. And so, our familiarity and experience in doing group tours or group-based work certainly has gone up a notch or two. Our women's soccer team has just signed a contract to play in Holland, so our team of fifteen to almost twenty five women and sponsors will be in Holland for about ten days in the fall playing tournaments against elite teams. So now you have sport teams that are taking advantage of our international initiative, and helping us learn a lot in that way. Those are really big highlights for 2006, but I don't want to get lost in the big stories. We had a number of students and faculty publishing books, creating scholarship and creating ideas. At the Celebration of Scholarship in the spring, it is quite amazing, the number of publications and other professional awards or exposure that the faculty and students accomplish every year. It seems like the

number's getting larger every year, as well. And we've not lost our focus on the classroom. I think there's still very, very good teaching going on, and I believe that we still continue to award good teaching and identify good teachers when we receive that.

(RM): Do you see any developments, or are there any developments in terms of the infrastructure of the university; new buildings, or renovations, or anything like that?

(LW): Although it might be seen as a relatively small thing, I think it was a big step. We were able to start up the Beaumier Heritage Center in its temporary home in the Dome, and I believe that now we have sufficient momentum to, not only hire one, but also maybe two curators over the next year. I forget his name.... Russ. No.... Our current curator over at the DeVos....

(Both): Wayne Francis.

(LW): I'm sorry, had his name mixed up. He looks to be retiring soon, and then, through the Beaumier gift we will be looking at a second curator-type person to manage the collection and develop some exhibitions. But I think that's been important because John's been very generous and also very patient with us as we try to get the Heritage project underway. The opening of the new student apartments occurred in 2006, and the 210 beds that, what I'll call pretty high living for students, has been very, very successful. And so our confidence went up in whether or not we



want to plan two more or three more similar. The Summit Street apartments really are below code, though they're functioning, are scheduled to be taken down, and now we're thinking that maybe, one or two new students apartments in that physical area, would be very desirable. All the utilities are there, so it would be a nice way to replace some very old housing with some very up-to-date options for students.

(RM): Do you feel that having facilities like that attracts more students, a different clientele, or an up-scale clientele if you say that?

(LW): The reality of that is much more clear to me now. There's no doubt that quality of programs, and our laptop initiative, continue to differentiate us. But when you get a student onto campus, their parents are interested in the academics, and they're interested in where they're going to live and where they're going to eat. The improvement in residence hall quality, coupled with what really became an exciting new level of food service last year, in 2006, I think is going to have a very significant effect in attracting students to campus. Last year was, in a way, André Mallie's first year on campus, and the turnaround in quality of food service was remarkable. The Marketplace had fresher, more nutritious vegetables and better information on nutrition, but the conversion of the basement of the library to Mexican food, and the conversion of the food service in Hedgecock to sushi and Japanese food have been very, very successful. Students have wanted more ethnic foods and original fresh foods, and we've responded. Sales, food plans, both on and off campus have gone up dramatically. The revenue, in terms of food sales, has gone up. We've got some

notoriety in the Detroit Free Press over the quality of the dining services here. Certainly the feedback we get from people who are part of banquets and other fundraising pieces have been very, very positive. So, the answer to your questions — I really do think that once students and their families experience food service here, that's a definite plus. It really does differentiate us from, you know, sort of typical college food service. So that's been very, very significant.

We're continuing to remodel the quad areas. We're now scheduled to take on Van Antwerp this coming summer, and that'll give us three of the four quad areas remodeled. Obviously, the following year we'll start the fourth piece of that. So we continue to take a look at the improvement in residence hall living. The thinking now about new student apartments certainly looks possible. The only other sort of piece that's floating out there with legislation; in 2006 we proposed that the Dome be transferred to a state authority, and it looks like that bill, which passed in the House, is moving forward. It really will signify no significant change to the campus, but it's really more about ownership and responsibility for the costs. You know, it is a public service, it really is a convention center for the UP, and it ought to be financed much like other convention centers in other parts of the state. The other sort of sense of excitement is the remodel of Cohodas. If the governor passes a capital bill this year, it's likely that we'll have to empty out Cohodas in 2007. But the discussion of its remodel and where people should go, and what people should do, really had started in earnest in 2006. It involves everything from whether or not West Hall should be turned into offices, or should we reopen Cary, and make that a temporary administrative area. It looks like that probably is our easiest strategy now, so you

don't have to move all kinds of people. With our residence halls filled, if you take down West, there are a couple hundred students that you have to accommodate somewhere, and we don't have that right now.

(RM): Or else you go back to the old days of three and four to a room. That didn't settle too well with the students.

(LW): I think today's students have a hard time having just one other roommate, let alone two or three other roommates.

(RM): I've been here for a while and watching the campus develop, and also watching businesses, how restaurants and different businesses have to constantly upgrade themselves, and review what they're doing, or they go out of business. It has happened to a number of places in town. What you're saying is pretty much the same for Northern. Under your presidency we're beginning to see major changes to the infrastructure — or, the way we do things on campus, and to bring it into 2006, 2007, and I think this becomes extremely important. I think in the past, people didn't really look at that as being important. "Well, they can eat the same food that we ate, the same type of stuff we ate years ago." With today's student, yeah, they'll walk out the door and go to another place if they don't like it. The parents might like the academic program, and a young fellow or gal is going to say no, no, no, no, it's not for me.

(LW): Yeah, it's pretty challenging, and maybe the evidence is the outcome. The fall

enrollment was the highest in the history of the institution. We're looking at just under 9,800 students. I can imagine, five years ago people couldn't believe that we could get to 10,000 when that goal was announced, and now we're knocking on the door. It attests to the resiliency of the campus and the willingness of the whole campus, all employees to think differently when we have to. You mentioned something Russ that really should be part of the record. It's been becoming increasingly clear to me that we're going to lose our biggest customer. The ability of the state to continue funding half the costs of our full-time students is not likely to be sustained. So, like a business who is losing their primary customer, we need to ask ourselves, how do we develop other customers to make up for that loss? What I see faculty and staff doing is being more entrepreneurial, and talking about how to get into new audiences, and how to break into areas where perhaps we had not been recruiting well. One of the areas that are very new for us is the whole issue of providing services to corporations and businesses. Much more entrepreneurial, short time pieces where you go in and do a program for, you know, fifteen hundred hours, and then you're out of it.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

(LW): What universities have done well, since the Medieval period, is to carefully, and analytically, and rationally examine new opportunities, and always with the intent

that these additions would be permanent. The process is very good, it's very, very effective, and it's also very, very slow. When we venture into a program that's benefitted from this analysis, the odds are good that it's going to succeed. I think the world that universities face today, have to be both permanent and you have to develop short-term strategies. That's where this sort of openness to talk with corporations and businesses about short-term programs, or training, or even a service, is something that will be new for Northern. But I've been surprised at how willing faculty and staff are to think outside the box now, so we don't want to get away from our strength, and what we're very good at. But, given Michigan's volatile economic situation right now, we don't have three and four years to do that analysis. If a business came to me and said, "We'd like to buy 1,500 hours of training, and let's negotiate a price," I probably would respond far more quickly today than I would have a year ago. Instead of saying, "Jeez, we don't do that kind of work, and I'm not sure I can get faculty to break way," losing our biggest customer makes me say, "Let me have a talk with the school or the relevant department and see if there are faculty, staff, or students that would like to take on a task for 1,500 hours," knowing that there's an incentive for them individually, maybe an incentive for the department, and for the institution. Knowing that, 1,500 hours later, we're not in that business anymore. So it's a much more rapid turnaround, it's a much more opportunistic approach to programming. But I just met with EPC today, and shared with them — I think they already knew the message, but our leverage in the marketplace is selling credits. If we can't maintain our quality control, and maintain our innovations that I've seen with online WebCT kinds of things, I think we can make money and open up

audiences. It might be that someone who does 1,500 hours of training says, "God, I like Northern so much, I'm going to continue, and transfer into a degree program." So part of our planning is, how do we make those 1,500 hours a strategic step for a student to step easily into a degree program? That's a real different kind of thinking for universities to get into.

(RM): Do you think, from your past experience, that entrepreneurial model is a challenge for academe? The entrepreneurs are out there; they aren't in the ivory tower. Do you notice that this is something that you kind of have to sell people on?

(LW): It's harder on what I'll call the mid-career and senior people. It has been an idea welcomed by the young faculty. I do think people here understand what's motivating it. Michigan, as late as twenty years ago, 70% of a university's costs in Michigan were borne by the state, and that's probably less than 20% now, in terms of the general fund budget that goes to higher education. I think all of us have been in the higher education industry for twenty years have seen that erosion of public support. Ironically, Northern, because we're autonomous and have our own board, we really are in many ways analogous to a private university. Now we happen to have a nice customer that hands us appropriation. But with that going away, I think we'll have to be as entrepreneurial as the privates. We'll probably have to step up our fundraising abilities. 2006 was significant because we made a decision to expand the staff in the foundation, and we hired four major gift officers assigned to different units. We've put in motion a fundraising team that I think is very different from what

this school has ever had. The role of the deans, for example, in fundraising and working with their respective gift officers is a very new experience for deans here at Northern. To their credit, they've stepped up and said, "This is welcome, we understand the problem." In the few short months this model has been in operation, we've already seen five-figure gifts come in that I think would not have occurred. If I look back at 2006, the decision to expand that development staff, I think, might have been the most underrated decision that might have the biggest impact on the university. We're all getting used to that. It's not something we expected of the deans, and coaches, and things like that, but people have responded quite well to that. And when you get the big gift, it's pretty nice. Students get supported, and programs get enhanced, and we keep moving forward. But the idea that Northern's identity now, is taking on a reflection of both steadfast, high-quality, high-touch, and yet this entrepreneurial approach. I think you said it really well. That really is something of a paradigm shift that we're just starting. For me it changes the complexity of the president's office dramatically. I had tried — Bill Vandament, a good friend, and Jim Appleberry's a good friend too, and we were convinced that Northern was 70% on campus work, and 30% off. In fact, talking to John X. Jamrich, he was saying, "Well, yeah, that's the way presidencies have evolved." From being on-campus bully pulpits and delivering messages to external. In fact, Jamrich and I have a wonderful dialogue going on, comparing the demands on him in the 1950s, or, actually, early 1960s, compared to Les Wong in 2004 to 2005 and onward, and it's really different. It probably isn't any different in intensity, but where the president's time gets spent is really different. I have some regrets. I don't like being away from staff, faculty, and

students. But I think if we're to make this new paradigm work, I'm going to have to succumb to what all presidents across the country are now getting involved in; being far more external than what we ought and have been in the past. In 2006 we also made a significant change in administration. I made the decision in 2006 to terminate our relationship with Miller Canfield as the institutional legal representation. They're a downstate firm; they've done all our legal work for nearly thirty years. In this new paradigm, my staff, particular the vice presidents, needed access to legal assistance much quicker and more on time than in the past. It was also a significant paradigm shift for the Board of Trustees. They've been used to Miller Canfield for many, many years. It took us a couple months, but when Cathy Dehlin was hired as, first of all, an Equal Opportunity officer, but also came with a very significant law preparation, big firms in Washington, D.C. and Arizona. It was an opportunity for us to implement what I call the "modern university legal model", of having in-house counsel. That got us much more into preventative work, rather than having a law firm that came into action when we got into trouble. Her influence in a whole change in the quality of administration has gone up. Deans are getting legal help right away; we're much more into preventative problems. Cathy has taken it upon herself to train mid-level administrators about legal obligations and good practices. The overall general level of awareness has gone up. I credit her, that she's a good teacher; she's a very good attorney. The Board has been very pleased. While we have always harbored the hopes that it will save us money, we didn't get into it to save money, so much as it allowed us to become so much more effective. Now, I should say that, at least, we were checking the records under Cathy's leadership. There were two board meetings, in



which the legal documents were non-existent. In other words, there were actually no pending legal cases to be presented to the board. My understanding is that's been the first time in the modern era that there have been no pending legal cases on either the plaintiff or the defendant. The smile on the Board's face that we have cleaned up a lot of long-standing issues testified to the notion of having in-house counsel present.

Cathy's office, interestingly enough, in the organizational charts, is a dotted line from the Board of Trustees to her, and then a dotted line from her to me, because she really is the institution's legal counsel, and the Board's legal counsel, and then, secondarily, the president's legal counsel. That's also reflective of the modern campus.

(RM): Was she hired originally for that purpose, or she was brought in to work on something else?

(LW): She was brought in to work as an Equal Opportunity officer in Human Relations. Her family was tired of Phoenix and Arizona and all that. Her husband was from Gladstone. So, they decided to cash all that in and come to the UP. She was just looking for work to keep sharp. When we discovered that she was a blue blood, very well trained — actually a cleric for a Supreme Court justice, worked for Hogan & Hartson, arguably the fourth or fifth largest firm in the world, in their D.C. office as a partner. This was someone with incredible knowledge and training. And then she just fits. Her temperament, and wanting to be at a university, has been really positive. The preventative work is different. When you're defending a case, you literally are on your own in a law library, and you're in court. When you do preventative work, you're

fielding far more phone calls, and responding to people's queries. I typically call and say, "Will I go to jail if I do this?" and she goes, "Well, you might go to jail, but I can at least get you into minimum security, as opposed to maximum security." She's got a good sense of humor, too, and she's been learning rapidly how complex a university can be, and how good the professionals are. Her comment to me, mid-level administration, deans and the vice-presidents is that we're full of good practices and we do things well. That was one reason why she was able to clear our legal docket in such a short time. So, knock on wood, we'll try to keep that that way. But, legal cases are inevitable. Someone slips and falls, someone feels wronged. We keep at that. But, I think we're going to be much more effective at avoiding many things that, in the past, would have incurred really significant legal bills.

(RM): I know, in the past, when something would come up, it would literally take weeks to get solved. You kind of wonder, "What work do we have? What are we doing here?" I did it a few times. You'd go up to the Provost's office, and they'd say, "Okay, we'll take this," and then you wouldn't hear anything for several weeks. It sounds like now, a lot of the stuff just moves along. It's kind of interesting because when you talk about these large firms, they have all these levels of people that are working. Here, it can actually be done, it's kind of incredible, and it can be done in house.

(LW): That's a good point.

(RM): And I think, as you say, if you can prevent problems, do it —that's usually how

I operate as a department head. You keep on top of things, you prevent problems, and then yes, you're not fielding phone calls and irate faculty and so on; it's taken care of. Be kind of up-front, and you let me know, and move on.

(LW): It's a good feeling too, especially when she anticipates something and calls up, say, Public Safety, and says, "Are we handling materials correctly?" and gets it fixed, and we avoid thousands and thousands of dollars of litigation.

(RM): Was she the person that was responsible to have those? Last April we had those faculty workshops dealing with chemicals and safety, was she the one who instructed that?

(LW): Yes. It actually led to the uncovering of a couple of very unsafe situations that, had we not noticed them, would have led to be problems. They were remedied very quickly, safely, in accord with the law, and we're the better campus for it.

(RM): So that was another plus for 2006?

(LW): Yes. Interestingly enough, when you think of being able to comply with the complex laws over hazardous materials in general, that's very, very significant. The only other piece that the record probably should note is, we did start a search for provost last year. Our hope was that Dr. Joy was interested in a new assignment. I was very interested in getting the university more engaged in economic development,

very much in the spirit of this new paradigm, because we do contribute to the economy of the U.P. and Marquette. He was very excited to take on a new assignment. Unfortunately that first search failed. All were competent people however no one excited us very much. I thought we deserved better, I didn't want to make a desperation hire at all. So I cancelled the search and asked the Committee to continue their work. We're just finishing campus interviews this past week. I'll have to tell you that if any of the current candidates had been in last year's pool, one of them would currently be the provost. We have four. The quality of the pool is so much better. I'm just hoping that we can talk our top candidate into coming to Northern. So that's coming to some fruition. And the academic office is going to be positively influenced by a new provost. The sad passing away of Teresa Hunt over the Christmas holidays broke all of our hearts, but the associate provost position is open as well. On the other side of it, it was great to see Dr. Prosen get her feet on the ground, but really know where she's running and what she wanted to do. Our successes in grants have quintupled dramatically, with **Andy Smitkowsky** working in her office. The whole renewal of our discussion about graduate education has been initiated. Potentially, the role of Northern offering doctoral programs has taken some very big steps. In a way, the seeds of two major changes have occurred in 2006. One is the new paradigm of being entrepreneurial. But, the possibility that we would be offering a Northern doctorate as early as next fall is a very dramatic move for the university. It's one of those quiet things that, if you were an outsider, you'd go, "Well, what's the big deal?" But after 115 years of success, for us to move into the doctorate business is very significant. There are currently four departments crafting doctorate programs that

reflect who we are, the way we want to do it. I believe that discussion with EPC is underway right now. All the signs are positive. Our partnership that we signed with Oakland University to co-deliver a doctorate in practical nursing has started, and we have thirteen students from Marquette in that program, doing doctoral programs here on campus, taught by our faculty. So in a way, our foot is in the door. We are cooperating — even though our name will not be on the doctorate that Oakland offers, we are teaching it with qualified faculty. It is a way for us to get some experience doing that, so that when we do hit the "Go" button on our own doctorate, I think we'll be much more savvy and knowledgeable. I hope 2007's a little bit quieter, though. But it's all pretty exciting stuff, because it's playing a game from our strengths rather than being defensive. Again, it's a testament to the incredible talent on campus that we can be both traditional and entrepreneurial, and people are taking up the challenge.

(RM): I'll just make an observation, that that's quite a step forward, being entrepreneurial in that way, among academicians. I'm sort of the entrepreneur, I mean, actually out selling things, and doing things, and so on. Faculty, for instance, always lost me printing books or something for the NMU press. They'll have a room full of books, and then, the next step of selling them doesn't quite kick in. I see this as an academician's problem. They just don't see that as being important, and we're in a world where that is important for, either you're selling books for the NMU press, or delivering new programs, doing new things with departments. So, that's really a challenge that you've met and moved ahead with.

(LW): And we're moving ahead, and I'll have to give the faculty credit, because the pushbacks have been the right kinds of pushbacks. Good questions about quality, and good questions about, "Is this part of our identity?" and "Is this a reflection of who we are?" That's exactly what high-caliber faculty ought to be asking a president who is initiating this paradigm shift, and I welcome that. The level of discussion has been very high, and at times unselfish. All I've asked people to do is, let's be fair, and let's be true to our mission, and let's respond to this. Because, it could be that we have no choice to face a big disaster at some point.

(RM): — yeah, a disaster, and then, when you're at that point, you can't say, "What are we going to do?" Well, you should've done it, and we're doing it now. It also looks good, I think, for the legislators who look at programs and so on. Northern's moving forward and we're doing new and different things. And you have the faculty and staff behind you. I think that's important, so you're not going down to Lansing without support behind you. And from my perspective, having been around here for quite a while, it's like a whole new emphasis and focus that Northern's getting into, that's very useful.

(LW): You've said it well. It's a delicate balance, because you don't want to give up your strengths, and you don't want to give up what has worked for us. Hiring Bernie Anderson as the new football coach, for example, an alum, from the U.P. People knew we needed a new coach, but we also needed someone who knew us, and brought a

set of values to build that program. And already, after a very short season, there are already demonstrable changes there. That's the kind of example that you find all over campus. People stepping up, doing the right thing, and cherishing our identity. I haven't asked people to change the identity. So I'm pretty excited. It's been very good. I'm still excited.

(RM): Another good year.

(LW): Yeah, we'll keep at it.

(RM): Okay, thank you.

(LW): You're welcome Russ, thank you.

Interview #3- 2009  
Dr. Leslie E. Wong  
Northern Michigan University  
Marquette, MI  
April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009

(Russell Magnaghi (RM)): Interview with President Wong, Marquette, Michigan, April 20<sup>th</sup> 2009. Ok, President Wong, we haven't done an interview now in about a two years, which I apologize for. Maybe we'd start today with beginning with the current situation on campus and the current situation sort of ties in with the national economy and considerations. Could you talk a little about the situation on campus and the way you view it in the terms of the economy and what's happening?

(Les Wong (LW)): It's a very good question. This year I have probably learned more about finance and bonds and economies of scale and the federal process as well as state process. As a student, it's been wonderful to learn all that, but as the president



sometimes you don't want to learn certain things. This year has been the case. The meltdown in the economy started in February 2008 and it really came to fruition during the summer of 2008, six months later has really shocked all of us in higher education. Like everyone is saying, this is my 35<sup>th</sup> year in this business, and there are just no prior lessons to guide us. I did make an attempt to talk to former president Vandament and former president Jamrich; they are at a loss for words as well. With the caving in of the housing market and the banks, who would have ever thought General Motors was on the brink of disappearing from the American landscape. That really had all of us surprised. For me, the really staggering thing is not only the size of numbers of losses, but also the extensiveness across sectors. For a university, that's particularly challenging because our mission is still to provide students access to higher education. We are also an employer. We consume goods, we buy power, we feed people, keep them warm, etc. And so, as the finance sectors were rapidly crumbling, our strategy became what can we do to protect the teaching and learning mission. One of our first moves was to make sure the student loan monies that we use were in parts of the federal government that were not done by the bank meltdowns. We felt pretty good that the student loans and were unaffected by the melt down. Subsidized loans and unsubsidized loans to our students were well protected. As fall of 2008 started this academic year, we were pretty confident that no student would have to experience cancellation of loans midway through the semester. We felt pretty good about that. The other decision we made back in February of 2008 was to move a lot of our debt fail safes to fixed-rate loans. We were one of the first campuses early to do this and everyone was wondering why we

wanted to do that. But we made the calculated guess that the loan markets were going to go south pretty quickly, and we were right. So we have very low rate loans, which are very standard for public institutions by moving them to fixed rate bonds, and loans literally saved a couple million dollars in finance fees. Our construction projects were all protected at that point. They were minor ones; we were not building buildings or anything like that. Mostly maintenance and repairs, we were able to complete that. So our bond rating, in light of that, has remained high. In fact the bond rating for Northern Michigan University is higher than the State of Michigan. We are actually worried that as the state goes down it's going to drag our ratings down. That's where being a president is my first exposure to think like a business and corporation when in fact our mission is to teach students. That's clearly been a big learning experience for me. Certainly since fall term into winter term, our attention has gone into understanding the recovery act, or the stimulus bill. Clearly President Obama has taken the strategy to heart, and I think the experts support him; his plan is the only way to get out of such a catastrophe by big government spending. It's the only sort of institution that has money and financial power to overcome what they are calling toxic assets that the banks have as well as covering people living beyond their means. Credit limits were in the red zone for too long. The recovery bill does a couple of different things. It does fill the gap, and it does fill it temporarily. The benefit to Northern is one of the contingencies that are receiving stimulus bill money is that the state can not cut K-12 or public higher education below 2008 levels. And if you do, you sacrifice all stimulus bill money. And so what's happening right now is that K-12 and higher education is about a

fourth of the general fund project. You can't touch it in order to get all the stimulus bill money. What's happened is to fix the 2009 budget; the other three-fourths of the Michigan budget will have to take the brunt of the 2009 cuts. In the short term, as of today, it looks like we will be spared any short-term cuts. It looks like the stimulus bill will plug the gap between fiscal year 2010 and 2011, and then that's the lengths of the stimulus bill. It's gone. I'm very worried now about 2012, that seems to be the challenging issue. I'm getting ahead of myself. The issue for us now is to understand how the federal dollars flow into the state and how the state then begins to distribute that according to the recovery bill. Infrastructure projects are on tap, Marquette is on tap for some road projects in and around campus. The receiving date of money is on its own schedule and then there's a whole level of stimulus money that is competitive and we are applying for some of those. Over the next four or five months, we'll find out if our applications are funded or not.

(RM): The other day there was discussion on putting in for grant money. That's what this is?

(LW): Exactly. What the Obama Administration decided to do was fund heavily into existing contract programs: the National Science Foundation, National Institute of Health, Department of Education. Instead of creating a new process, a lot of stimulus money went right into their dispersal system. So in the past, if you were able to fund ten projects under the same guidelines and requirements, you may now fund fifteen, and so you have to apply through those agencies. And then there is the discretionary part that goes to the governor. What I'd like to share is the combined heat and

power plant and the biomass plant will receive some federal stimulus dollars. That's an interesting development because we have decided to withdraw our permit that included coal and we are going to submit a wood only permit. Both the Sierra Club and the DEEQ have endorsed this new application. The timing is good because the Sierra Club is going to sign off on it and the DEEQ is going to put us at the front of the line for permitting and that will put us in line for stimulus dollars. That's about a 65 million dollar project. It will provide three hundred construction jobs for three years, a sizeable number of jobs, a hundred permanent jobs beyond that, and then institutional savings of about a million dollars a year. It's about a three-year construction phase. We couldn't do it unless there was federal support, state support, and we'll probably see private support in terms of energy credits or energy investments that the tax code is now allowing. We'll start looking at that. That is certainly our top project that helps our base funding by utility costs. Just again, for the record, the beauty of this program is that the Borderline Power in Marquette supports this program. They are already at capacity and taking us off their grid, which gives them some capacity to sell to commercial people who want power. So Borderline Power has endorsed our project. We are actually going to sell some of the steam byproduct to Marquette General Hospital, so the plant will heat the hospital and Northern Michigan University. It will save them money, we get to make money because we are going to charge them for the steam, and it'll save us money. The fuel is pretty much sawdust, woodchips and scrap wood, which the UP has quite a supply of. We are hoping within the next five years while we are up and running that we could use renewal fuel that is also licensed in marketing, which is a biomass

cube that they have invented. It's a non-coal product. I think it's a switch grass pulp primarily. First it's compressed, they have biodegradable glue that they use, and it burns as hot as coal and significantly cleaner than coal. At some point, we'll add them to the fuel mixture.

(RM): Will an UP corporation undertake this?

(LW): **Cliff Spottam**. Yeah, they have a plant down by Jackson, which is very experimental and yet very successful. So Cliff decided to buy them so they will become the major fuel source for the planet for clean reliable sources. Ideally, the coal plant along the shore will close due to the disappearance of coal as fuel. The new plant will generate electricity through this renewable fuel product. So I think there is a win-win environmentally and all kinds of ways. For Cleveland Cliffs, for Northern, for the city, for the hospital, and the power plant seems to be one of the first steps to make that happen so we are pretty proud that we are getting closer to that particular project. Getting back to campus, the big issue is the governor's budget has proposed a 3% cut in pays, which are permanent cuts that take us to 2008 levels. We'll get some of that reimbursed by the stimulus bill but the big challenge is operating costs continue to increase, so even with that cut 3% and get paid back for that 3%, we're still four million dollars short. Sure, pension costs don't continue to rise but utility costs continue to rise. And so we are trying to develop a short-term model, like many campuses are doing. We are trying to get agreement campus wide on salary freezes for one year, perhaps the creative use of voluntary furloughs and trying to save money around every corner and under every rock over

the next couple of months. The union groups, met with them this morning. I'm confident that they understand the picture that's out there. I continue to believe that saving as many jobs as I can is my current challenge, under any of these models that we are putting together. In fairness to the unions, they have to buy into the idea. What we learned this morning, they want to know what's possible if they agree to accept the salary freeze for one year, and what would they be able to accept if we needed a salary freeze for two years to prepare for 2012. We are going to have to put that together. There is a lot of concern of healthcare coverage under the salary freeze because their bill goes up, under a salary freeze as well. So we are hopefully going to get that out to the community before the semester is over. I think people are quite aware of what's confronting us. On a brighter note, we had our first accreditation visit this semester from the higher learning commission, our first campus visit since 1994. It was a very successful and positive visit and I'm confident we'll be renewed. The two campus visitors were also the authors of the 2006 critique, which was very negative of about Northern, primarily because we didn't tell the story well and this time we made sure we did. **Dr. Prozen** and Prof. Poindexter did a fabulous job of coordinating a small army of people, department chairs, department heads, unit heads, the president's office and the Board of Trustees. Their visit here for three days was very, very positive. The reviewers on their exit interview with me referred to Northern as a Magnus Opus, a great piece of work. They were pleased to visit the place because the paperwork only takes you so far and they were quite mystified by their visit. It really fills out what you read on paper, so that went very well. That was the culmination of about fifteen months of

work and testimonies by students were just exceptional, so that was very, very positive.

(RM): I was there that day; you were hearing their comments for the first time because you don't go around and ask.

(LW): I don't, yeah.

(RM): How were you affected by that, hearing it for the first time?

(LW): I've been in academe for thirty years and one of the beauties of it is the wide range of opinions about things. My first mistake was holding the hearing in the Mead Auditorium. The venue was too small; people were standing shoulder to shoulder. I didn't think that many people would show up. Many people showed up, students, staff, and faculty. And then the stories were just, boy, talk about bringing a tear to your eye. Students talking about what Northern had done for them. Faculty members talked about the opportunity to teach here, all unrehearsed, unscripted, and I was really touched. And I said to the community, "Boy, did I underestimate you guys and I won't do that again." The meetings between the Board of Trustees, the community and business leaders went well and after three days, you suddenly understand the work that's being done here to a much fuller extent than seeing it every day. I think that was very nice.

(RM): I think one of the problems with these people of distance is they only see us at the end of the road, on the shores of Lake Superior. They can't really imagine what

goes on here, but you do have a rather active University at work here instead of some north woods campus.

(LW): When you look at any university on paper, we're all about 120 credits for a bachelor's degree, 40 credits for a master's and there's a not a lot of variation in that. Everybody has an English, Psychology and History department, and so we've carved out a very nice niche in terms of technology. The growth and blossoming of our international program, our community work through Superior Edge and other programs that faculty are directing separate us from other universities. Those three pieces are very unique signatures that came out loud and clear in the visit.

(RM): Regarding the biomass plant, you are talking about of what's happening now. Where did that actually start? Was that about 2007 or so?

(LW): Actually we started serious planning in 2006, the beginning of my second year here, so it'd really be the 2005-2006 academic year. That's when the energy prices were going through the roof, including natural gas, which we use exclusively right now. Our utility costs were just as if you had your own home and natural gas coming your home, you saw your bill quadruple over two years and so we started to ask ourselves if there are other alternatives out there. We did a lot of planning and research, and then we made a decision in 2007 to hire an engineering firm to do a feasibility study of a multi-fuel boiler so that we couldn't be held slave to any particular fuel. From that came the idea of a biomass plant. The science three years ago was pretty rudimentary. The advancements to today have been significant. Sweden for example has a plant close to what we want to do and they burn the



town's garbage, shredded tires and other biodegradable products. They literally put next to nothing in a landfill. That was very attractive to us. I don't think we have the infrastructure to collect garbage and do all those kinds of things but that is certainly a possibility. The idea of using woodchips, sawdust and other waste of biomass products could be done. The actual operational costs for that plant are pretty low, so that sold us on the idea. I think from that time on, from mid 2007 till today, we were very serious about this project. The studies have included the possibilities of wind and solar as well. I know that students are infatuated with wind and solar. If you look outside the window, the question right now that would answer the solar question, since its April 20<sup>th</sup> and snowing right now. Wind is possible but there is an aesthetic problem here in Marquette. We are convinced wind generation is possible if you are willing to put the generators out in the water, and the science of moving the energy from the windmill, across the water, into where you want to use it, is getting better. But, people don't want to look out at Lake Superior and see three hundred windmills out there. So we know the answer to the feasibility of wind, the possibility of solar, but really, getting into a multi-fuel wood-based plant is really going to be significant for us. That project includes the \$60 million start up of an energy research center. We hope to get some chemists, biologists and energy people interested in some research surrounding biomass to see if you can generate lubricants from the waste product. Our students and faculty could take the lead on the research as well. That project is more than simply generating power; it will give us an entryway into some research possibilities.

(RM): In the mid 1970s, there was a sort of environmental round table that I was part of, I and there was a fellow that talked about what we're seeing now. He saw the Upper Peninsula of being a Saudi Arabia of wood fuel. I thought it was a great idea; people kind of looked at him and said you're out of your mind. The other thing that used to be here was a Dow Chemical charcoal factory up by the Superior Dome. The chemicals were exhausted through the refractory tower and were burned instead of wood. So it looks like we are going back to a generation of chemicals connected with providing fuel, so we are kind of doing full circle.

(LW): Well it's always good when science and engineering catch up with the ideas. As I look back at this year, 2008-2009, I think the advancements we made in what's now called "Green Techniques" really have been dominating. It's one of the giant accomplishments on campus. The LEED certified resident halls, the deployment of potato spoons and silverware, the use of fresher foods and local produce that feed people and the recycling that's going on in the campus is literally in the tons rather than the pounds. I don't think we give ourselves enough credit for that. And the willingness of people to use renewable energy is remarkable. We are developing wind generation for spots on campus, the power to Starbucks' lights by one solar panel, or one turbine outside the library. I think an Ishpeming retirement home is putting up a huge tower next to it that will hopefully generate electricity just for that building. We are looking at the possibility of localized windmills, for example, at the Jacobetti Center. There's a big field right next to it right in the wind path we understand, so students have now put up a test wind turbine on top of Jacobetti and are collecting data. It's a great teaching and learning experience.

(RM): The other thing is we have that Longyear property under Forest Hill. On that property is a hill, and on top of that hill, if you look back at the city, it's our property.

(LW): Let's not forget the 200 acres by Mt. Marquette. Maybe windmills on the mountain are a little more tolerable than windmills sitting out on Lake Superior. The campus steps in that direction are pretty positive. 2008-2009 enrollment is holding steady, there are certainly a lot of challenges for that 2009-2010 year. Across the country students are staying home and not traveling very far to go to school however we're continuing to do ok. Having a very low tuition, I think, will work to our benefit as the economy continues to spin down. I always believe we under-price what we offer to the public, if it appears as well as our aspiration appears, but that's ok. I still remind myself everyday that we are a public university and part of that is a public mission to be made accessible to people. As the state continues to decay, we are doing our best to limit tuition increases. Now it looks like the national economy, in the shape that it is, students will stay home for maybe two years, and then you'll see them move. I think the old models of trying to predict enrollment pattern need to be thrown off and new models will certainly be developed.

(RM): Was there any one person who got into the biomass plant and the green initiative on campus, or was it kind of a spirit that went through the system and got things like the potato spoons and etc.? I know I've had visitors where one person came to campus and was totally impressed with how we collected things and break it up. He said in St. Louis, if they tried that you'd have every custodian union going through the roof.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

(LW): Russ, that's a very good question. I have to tell you, I know if he's retired now, I forget Mike's last name, he still sends me interview stuff, he used to be an employee with Kathy Richards, he was the person who helped us buy natural gas on the open market. He said, "I'm just going to learn as much as I can about this biomass stuff." I don't know if he was the start of the idea, but he kept saying, "It's possible, it's possible." Then it just kind of took the spirit that went through everybody that said, "Why can't we do that?" We're in a perfect location to try and do that. So we did start talking, for example, Mike Roy, upon his semi-retirement, we sort of asked him to be the coordinate point for this entire biomass project. So Mike typically met with all of the wood plants, or the lumberyards, trying to get an assessment and if they would they be supportive. We had a number of meetings where every owner of anything to do with cutting and shaping wood was at the University Center. We were sharing the idea and they said, "Oh yeah, more than possible, there is fifteen years of wood buried under the ground right now." I was told a lot of the burns that you see around the Jacobetti go from here past the Superior Dome towards the organic mulching area. They moved us to Borderline Power, it moved us to Mining Engineering, systems and business that can have some experience and help us determine the feasibility of it. People never said that's a dumb idea, don't do it. People were acknowledging that the science was going to get better and better and it sure did. Right now, if you talk to the ten people who have

been around this project intimately, we'd probably all disagree with a name. We all would come up with a different one.

(RM): One of the recent developments, if you want to comment on, is the development in businesses and activity on Presque Isle.

(LW): That's a great transition to go back to 2007 and 2008 because two significant documents were completed at the same time. One was the road map to 2015, our strategic plan, really the first plan we could determine since late Jamrich years. All the presidents since had short-term plans and were often fighting the budget. In 2007-2008, I took a subcommittee from the president's council and we went back to the Jamrich years and pulled every document that spoke of future ideas and plans, eliminated those that were completed or done and asked ourselves what are some questions that people want answers to, initiatives that people wanted to pursue, and haven't been accomplished. Then we sampled the community, "What's your vision for the next ten to twelve years?" And we distilled that down to the road map. I'm very proud of the document and the work done by the group of people and it showed that we were listening and paying attention to them. I would say three fourths of the road map is ideas that have percolated up through departments and units of campus and that came out in the spring of that 2007-2008 year. Then we had already been in a planning phase with JJR Associates out of Ann Arbor over a physical master plan. We tried to coordinate it at the same time so you'd have an academic strategic plan as well as a physical master plan. And that involved discussion across campus with a lot of folks, do you like cars, or hate cars on

campus, what does it take to walk, the migration of the campus has moved from Cohodas to the University Center area. Russ you probably walked through the old buildings, Kaye and Longyear Hall, the campus center has moved North about a mile and a half to the academic mall. So the question was, if that is the center of the campus, what are our perceived needs, how can people move around campus, do we want to move cars off of the backbone of the campus to the periphery and everyone said please do. So the campus master plan is a green bill for the major spine of the campus for walking, cycling, etc, and cars will be moved off to the sides. It identified a new spot for the Student Union, which is high on people's wish list. And then, to get to the answer to your question, the consultants said that they looked at Presque Isle Avenue right along the Superior Dome, the PEIF, and the Barry Events Center and said, "Boy, you have an opportunity here for a gateway that would connect both sides of Presque Isle, because you have the main campus on one end and all the athletic footage on the other side." We have not been predatory buyers; we haven't been aggressive about buying property. With the downturn of the economy, we've always made it known to our neighbors that if you are interested in selling, please think of selling to us first. Little by little we've been accumulating property. The master plan, people said, that you might want to consider mix-use development along Presque Isle so where you could have a boutique of stores that would service students primarily but neighbors as well. And maybe by the student apartments, if done in a unitary theme, it would be a great opportunity to build a walking path right into the dome, which is really the UP's convention center. What's happened is that everyone, meaning city commission, planning commission, etc., we met with

them; everyone likes the idea but has a lot of questions. Clearly, we aren't in the development business so we had questions of our own. The next logical step is to hire people who do know about that. So we had a contract with some mix-use development people and their charge is to simply answer the question, is it feasible. To date, they are specifically charged with telling us if it's a bad idea or not. They are starting that process in fact today, I met with them, and they were on campus for the first time. It doesn't mean that we've got the money to do it. I always remind people the master plan was 2020 and beyond. But we want to be ready. Nobody predicted the stimulus bill and we just lucked out in terms of the power plant. It might be that the economy turns up and people won't want to invest in mixed-use development. So that really is the history of that. The consultants, both JJR and the current consultants identified over a dozen or more universities in the same predicament where a partnership with a private developer developed areas that were blights around the campus into stores and student based activities, which generated tax money for the cities, didn't hurt neighboring business. This is a concern here in Marquette that if we did it here, would downtown suffer? Again, trying to craft a win-win. That's really where that is. In the master plan, there are thoughts about Wright Street. My goodness, I can't even think about Wright Street and Sugarloaf over by the Ripley Plant right now, we are hoping that the building of the biomass plant is likely to be all we could do there for quite a while. But, part of the charge to the JJR people was to say what are our needs space-wise and could those needs be answered in the context of wanting to be more green, having less car traffic, still being able to move a lot of snow, and allowing easy ingress and exit by the

community. We know for a fact the community comes on the campus a lot for theater, music, for art, for just a number of cultural and educational things. You want to make the campus friendly in that sense too. So last spring, when both the road map and master plan were out, it really represented some direction setting for the university. As I look back to 2007-2008, I think the whole development of those two plans were really key events. We didn't have any inkling that economy was going to head south, but the actual teeth in the wind of the economy hadn't quite struck yet. But, I'm still confident that those two documents would guide you through the current storm.

(RM) Some of the horror stories for the University of Arizona, and things I heard about the University of Georgia, like, cutting faculty and what not is just, kind of mind boggling because here we don't have that extreme response to the bad economy.

(LW): Today I was asked how I felt about what's going on in the economy to the campus and I said, "You know this is the end of my fifth year now, and there has not been a layoff. When people have retired or moved on, we certainly have thought about merging jobs and trying to get more efficient and those kinds of things, but in the faculty ranks in my five years we added forty lines, when everyone else was shrinking. You know we are a little behind schedule, but still in line to fill positions. We've not cancelled all of our searches, so life has to go on." You have to be thinking around here, but I told people I'm pretty proud there've been no layoffs at Northern. I don't anticipate any; we can solve a couple of different issues here.



(RM): I know as a Department Head, in a meeting with Dean Cidoff, I look back and told the faculty there aren't any layoffs plan, etc. Continue doing your work; don't really worry about problems. That kind of attitude coming from him, I think served us well because people almost pinched themselves. "Are you sure?" I said, "I'm telling you what I've heard, and this is what I've heard, and there's no concern or question about faculty." "Oh, ok." And they go about their business.

(LW): I think that's very accurate, but then as I said Russ, who would have thought GM would cease to become a car company in America and Chrysler is clearly going to go down as a car company. Who knows what will rise up in its place?

(RM): I guess you can also look at it as a challenging, exciting time. We'll really be excited when it's all over and we'll see the results of the process.

(LW): I think if nothing else, the country is recognizing the value of an education. All the areas of a country that have withstood the current storm seem to be university based towns. You know, the San Antonio's, and the North Carolina's and etc. Places that have a vibrant university seem to be able to diversify their economy much better and have an educated workforce out there that attracts companies, so there's a clue out there for us. And again, luckily, the diversification of the economy in the UP and Marquette County is not dependent on the car industry, and so that really helped out. I've been struck by the difference in the two Michigan's now. When you cross the Mackinac and head down state, the obvious destruction is Flint, Dearborn and Brighton; those are real different places right now. When you're coming north across, there's no evidence here of what's going on.

(RM): I know with our relatives, my sister-in-law works for Ford, her husband is in credit management at a bank, they are just absolutely furious with Obama and the Ford Motor Company and so on. From our end up here, it's like whatever you say, but we aren't quite there. I agree it does seem like two different worlds.

(LW): It really is. I try to share with people that the last thing we're out to do is gloat, let's be thankful we have jobs and are weathering it ok. It's like I told the campus, you build up an experience base in dealing with things like this. It's our seventh year in a row dealing with the budget and we had some private tested strategies that seem to be working for us. We'll just keep moving forward.

(RM): We kind of went back and forth here. You went from the 2007-2008 to the present, is there anything I sort of left out?

(LW): Yeah, I think the other thing people haven't noticed, and that's a sign of a good thing, is the transition in the administrative leadership was quite extensive from 2007-2008. A new provost showed up on campus, Dr. Susan Koch and Gavin Leach as Vice President of Finance. When I looked during the winter semester of 2008, which is 2007-2008 year, the president's council of 27 members, 15 of them were either new to the school or new to their job. We increased the number of the president's council, I think we are at 31 right now and two thirds of the current president's council is new to Northern or new to their jobs. In 2007-2008 when Dr. Koch appeared, we moved to an in house general council and **Cathy Boleyn** joined us. We have been outsourcing our legal services, and now we are saving money by having an inside house. Tried and true people like **Carl Paste** retired, and then you

have young people like Kathy Richards stepping up. I don't think people recognize the transition in our report to the Higher Learning Commission and AQIP for their visit; the job classification that had the shortest length of years of service was senior administration at less than five years. I think people experienced it without a hiccup. I know the Board of Trustees was very worried about that. I told them we are going to be very methodical, we are going to look for the best available athletes, and landed some very good and competent people. The trick now is to hold on to them. This year we lost **Dean Sanalos** moving on to a very big program at Ball State. We are trying to think of different models of faculty on how a college of business will be governed in the short-term. Again, I'm confident we will find competent leadership in that area. In 2007-2008, we had **Kam House**, who was in here for 35 plus years, who was replaced by a young Paul Lang. Dean Rashad is a brand new College of Business dean. It was making **Terry Citoff** look like Santa Claus; he just received his 40-year pin along with you, Russ. Our last appreciation luncheon was last week. The transition in leadership should be quiet, should be thorough and shouldn't disrupt the ship. In 2008-2009 we are certainly gaining more experience; I think people have been wonderfully patient with that. That's something that's often not talked about on campus. The other transition is the board. The board that hired me was eight of eight appointed by the Republican governor, and now, a Democratic governor has appointed seven of the eight so the board itself has changed almost in its entirety. The transition in the Board of the Trustees and senior management has complimented the veteran teaching corps, although my understanding Russ, is the average age of faculty has dropped. There have been a significant number of

retirements and younger faculty filled them as well. I'm not sure of what that number is, but I was looking at our report and the average age of faculty is really much younger today than it was five years ago.

(RM): Just like the History department. I'm obviously the oldest one and the next person, DeFonso, came in the early 1990's and after that you have almost ten or twelve year reign. The bulk of the history department is from 2001.

(LW): Wow. That's a good example of that baby boom transition that demographers speak of. I think the other thing I'd probably offer for the record is that we've pushed very hard to increase the quality of our student athletes. Rebuilding the football program, rebuilding the basketball program, certainly rebuilding the hockey program, and I can now tell you that the average GPA of the varsity teams was about 2.4. Last year and this year, the average GPA of the team is now above 3.0. And they actually graduate on time at a rate better than of the normal student body population, so varsity athletes are staying on task and making academic progress. I'm very proud of it. And we've had more than our quota of people going professional and had very successful spring careers and we've seen the crowds grow. That's the natural by-product of winning more, even though we don't stress that with our athletes. And it continues to thrive; the recent news of the Olympic Committee of the extending their contract with Northern for fourteen more months is very welcoming. That means the 70-80 Olympic athletes that are on campus will be here for the next 14 months and hopefully longer. So that's been very, very good. Personally, I feel like I know where the saddle is and I feel better about knowing

how the institution lives and breathes and I'm so proud of what goes on here, the learning, and the student work. I regret that this year, more so than the past four years, found me off-campus more than I wanted to be. I was commuting to DC for three months now, trying to stay on top of this stimulus bill and federal appropriations. The other part of it is our fund raising has gotten better. So even in the teeth of a pretty severe recession, we've have two million dollar gifts, about ready to ink two more multimillion dollar gifts to the university so people's faith in our work is certainly being willing to be confirmed by the willingness of our major donors to step forward. I think I'm getting a little bit better at that too, but I continue to be proud of the town relationship that goes on. Our plays are well attended, our music concerts are well attended, our student lectures are well attended, and the DeVos museum seems to have community people in it all the time. We have community eating at Temaki's, our Japanese restaurant; I'm really pleased that we maintained healthy, porous orders with the town.

(RM): Just to make a comment about Temaki's, one of the complaints from the townspeople is that it closes in the summertime, and they are like, "Hey, we'd like to have this open year round." I think what you are saying is that Northern is kind of unique because they have terrible town and gown controversies and things that go back over years and we don't seem to have that.

(LW): We really don't and we've been very deliberate about that in getting the Carnegie Commission designation as a community-engaged university. This is very, very special and there are only 190 universities that have that of the 4,000 that are

in the country and we are proud to be one of those. We'll be challenged, but as I've shared with faculty, I'm currently on the board of American Council of Education that represents 2,500 universities and I've had a number of presidents offer to trade positions with me which I've politely declined. Northern is in a very good spot of growing reputation and it's far more visible and that was something that we wanted to achieve when we first got here. We needed to tell people that we do a great job with young people here and that seems to be happening. Five years has gone by really quickly. In fact I had to think, I didn't realize we had not met in two years. It's gone by quick!

(RM): As the historian, I tend to overlook the passage of time, and I look by and I think oh my, it's been five years, or ten years, and something has happened on campus and it seems like yesterday. It just occurs.

(LW): I can tell people are getting used to me because they don't know how long I've been here.

(RM): Six months?

(LW): Yeah, or they'll say, "is this like your ninth year now, or tenth year?" And I just chuckle quietly to myself about that.

(RM): Ok, anything we left out?

(LW): No, I think we touched the entire basis, seems like we've gotten caught up.

(RM): Ok, good, thank you.

(LW): Well, thank you, Russ. I guess what I would add as an addendum is 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 was characterized by a lot more partnership projects between Marquette General Hospital and Northern, everything from cytogenetic lab that's on our campus, staffed by their people and we now have their radiology and EMT training in the UC staffed by their people. They interact with our Nursing program and surgical technicians. Now we are sharing a little bit more knowledge technology wise, but we are starting to co-apply for grants. I think Rob Winn's project with the Upper Michigan Brain Tumor Center is just a fascinating step into a very needed area of research in solving brain tumors here and everywhere, primarily in patients in Upper Michigan and the UP. If anything, I'd be remiss about adding that active partnership between the Hospital and the University, which has taken a lot of dimensions. They are part of our trainers and sports medicine people, and so it's really an interesting partnership that is blossoming now. You hear we've been neighbors for a hundred years, but the last two years really have seen dramatic partnering activity on both the practice side and research side.

Interview #4- 2010  
Dr. Leslie E. Wong  
Northern Michigan University  
Marquette, MI  
October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010

(Russell Magnaghi (RM)): Interview with Dr. Les Wong, Marquette, MI October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Okay President Wong, the last time we met and did an interview was back in April of 2009, so we are going to be covering the period from that time up to the present. Would you comment on or highlight some of the things that happened during that time?



(Les Wong (LW)): In April of 2009 the recession was pretty well underway and the whole question of state funding certainly became an obsession for the administrative team and for the Board of Trustees. In April I had raised with the university community the whole idea of a variety of economic moves that ranged from freezes in salary, hiring and the whole idea of trying to stockpile money because the erosion in state revenues was very dramatic at that point. And the question of whether the first round of stimulus bill dollars would get to us in time was a key question. So, the issue before the campus, which I thought was really interesting, was first of all convincing them that there was in fact a very real economic threat. That was very difficult because the conditions in Marquette were so vastly different from conditions downstate and certainly in the urban areas. We weren't seeing businesses closing up, for sale signs in the lots and we still don't at this point in time. This is the fortunate aspect of being more closely connected to the extraction industry; mining, timber, fishing and water related natural resources. We're actually very protective of Marquette, Marquette County and the Upper Peninsula. Businesses in Escanaba and the Ironwood Plastics Company had significant contracts with General Motors and took a hit in terms of business. Up here at NMU, enrollment was hanging in there; we had sort of planned on going on a no-growth budget. It really made retention important so that we didn't drop off on enrollment but we had a couple of campus forums in the Spring to talk about everything from salary freezes to reassignments, the common things that were being mentioned on campuses around the country. And I remember it was fairly frustrating in April by that time because the community was not convinced that we

needed to do anything at that point. The administrative team went about fulfilling my request and that is to have a plan and not need it, rather than needing a plan and not having one. And so, the department heads to the president went through the president's council and put together reduction plans of 2%, 6%, 8% and 10%. And then the two vice presidents and I, in a very unsystematic way, looked at the possibility of what we would do in the face of a 20% reduction. The state was looking to be about 22-26% short and that cut would have meant somewhere near \$8-10 million to the Northern budget. Luckily, the money to rescue the banks set the occasion for President Obama to successfully pass the ARRA bills. The whole idea of stimulus bill money provided significant relief and the whole idea to stimulus bill money was that states were eligible for it if they did not reduce higher education and K-12 funding below the prescribed years. The passage of the Stimulus Bill was very significant and it meant that Michigan would not be looking to have a real sizable reduction. However, the challenge was how do you prepare when you know that Stimulus Bill monies were one-time monies? We had ongoing expenses, salaries, trying to compensate the fact of being staffed fairly, living up contracts etc. As those 2%, 6%, 8% and 10% proposals were put together, our commitment to the community is that we would know how to ramp up if we had to. We had plans firmly established. We did act upon some of the non-instructional kinds, in order to gain a number of efficiencies. By the end of Summer of 2009, we had made some administrative adjustments that I felt in conjunction with the Stimulus Bill dollars, allowed us to continue operation. We didn't have to reduce the size of the curriculum; we did make some adjustments in the assignment of term appointment

faculty. But by and large, the delivery of the curriculum was intact which was very nice. The summer really sort of became, up to this very day, a very elaborate sense of contingency planning because it was still Governor Granholm's ability to execute executive orders if in fact short-term shortages occurred but that luckily did not occur. But clearly the state at that time, spring to summer and early fall of 2009, the impact on revenue sharing and infrastructure service throughout Michigan were already starting to take effect. We saw the cutback in police, fire, civil services, civic services and cities. People were starting to alter the way they lived. We again, for the 2009-2010 year, planned on a flat enrollment picture as well. Again, we're very lucky our enrollment went up moderately. I think it was in the range of 2-2.5% if I remember right. So essentially it was a break-even enrollment time in the fall and really at that point it became how do we continue to be prepared, should things happen? For us, it was an interesting thing because in addition to stimulus bill money, there were a number of stimulus bill projects that if you could get your proposal in on time, you could potentially get funding and put people back to work. That's why here on campus, the whole possibility of funding was our number one project at that time and I think I mentioned in prior interviews though that our whole goal was to eliminate our dependency on a single fuel to generate heat and power for the campus. So the administrative team spent the summer putting that proposal together and insuring the license for the plant was planned to proceed forward as well. The EPA had granted the license for the plant and the Sierra Club challenged it. That challenge pushed us into EPA's court system and what the Sierra Club did was not challenge us in Michigan's EPA system but in the Federal EPA

system because our license followed Michigan code. And so, by taking this to the Federal court, we had to show that we met both Michigan and Federal standards but that slowed down the award of the license and eventually we settled with the Sierra Club late in the fall of 2009 when we simply said we would not burn coal at all. One of the conditions of our license is that we had never planned to burn coal but one of the license requirements asks, "What would Northern do if the snow is deep and there weren't any woodchips or wood waste products to burn?" And we were allowed to burn coal up to 10-15 days a month, only under emergency situations. With two power plants in town burning coal, the supply was large enough for emergency situations so, we indicated to our legal team that that was appropriate. The Sierra Club said, "Sorry, we either want absolutely no coal, even under emergency circumstances or we're going to continue to protest and challenge the license." That continuing challenge dropped us in priority from the Federal stimulus bill funds. To this day I believe that if they had understood that we never had intent to burn coal, we would be constructing that plant today. We literally lost out on \$65 million and a construction project that would have saved us operationally about \$1 million a year, 350 construction jobs for two years and probably up to 20-25 new permanent jobs at Northern, but that's the nature of their passion for environmental standards.

(RM): I'm just going to interrupt here. When all of these things happen, how do you feel? You're kind of caught in the middle but how do you feel? What goes through your mind?

(LW): It was certainly frustrating at times but for me it's not like a road race, it's more like backpacking and you lose your compass. You aren't carrying any GPS equipment but you know where East, West, North, South and you know where you need to be. And suddenly you come across valleys, forest, heavy brush and cliffs, and you just have to find your way to navigate around and through the obstacles. And that's how we felt during that time because we had great support from the community. We had communicated well with our local labor unions and environmental groups. Everyone understood that there was always creative tension between these groups. But it was pretty frustrating for a while there. I felt that there was a way in which to provide jobs in a failing economy, a way to help the university become more environmentally conscious with a biomass plant and research center. So, we had an academic program in energy that went down the drain as well. To this day, we still have not secured any funding for the biomass plant. We're looking at different models right now.

(RM): We didn't get that Federal money for the plant?

(LW): No, we totally lost it. We had the license and right now with the approval of the Sierra Club but it has an 18-month clock to it. So, this Christmas will be the end of a year and we'll have approximately six months, either to re-file and start over the licensing process or to begin construction. And so the clock is ticking right now. The frustrating part for me was that not only the economic and job benefits of the plant but the \$1 million a year savings which would have allowed us to plow that into academic programs and financial aid for students. It looked like a pretty good win-

win for everybody. In a way, that was a good discussion item on campus because at the time I was proposing that the campus go smoke-free. You couldn't divide the campus more perfectly in half. The vote was essentially 50/50; it was an overwhelming response. A chunk of the students that were for smoking took a libertarian stance stating that the administration had no right telling anybody how to live their life. So, we're going to look at a plan to enforce our current rules. Moving back to the economic situation on campus, I started to become very worried about the economic stability of our students and their families. We were starting to, in the fall of 2009, really experience students whose financial aid was the only source of income for their entire family. Parents were losing jobs and if you were a long way from home, your financial check to help you get through school was being sent home to feed families and hold onto their homes. The emergency situation for families went up dramatically but I think we had a 12-15% increase in students who wanted their financial aid packages reexamined and they have that right. What we took upon ourselves in the fall was not only to meet the financial aid needs of the student but also we knew we had to drum up more money and get into a very serious annual campaign. The annual campaign typically supports students and the NMU Foundation director, Martha Haynes, had to really focus this year to secure funds. We dropped all capital campaign projects. The vice president for finance understood that maintenance and emergency repairs would be about all we could do and again sort of knocking on wood hoping that we weren't going to have any emergencies. Luckily we didn't. Our efforts were going to provide an annual stable budget for faculty and departments to deliver the curriculum and at the same time identifying

new sources of aid dollars for students. Actually, I found in the fall of 2009 and winter semester of 2010, we landed a bid on the Olympic trials and the World Cup for speed skating. And not thinking that we would get both in the same year, in 2010 it was the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia and we were awarded the bid for both. It was really kind of a feather in our hat. So, amidst all this financial planning and focus on financial issues, we suddenly had the two premiere skating events in the world here, in Marquette. The top skaters of the U.S. team came here. If you wanted to be in the Olympics for skating, you had to come to Marquette; it was a very big event. Ninety days following the trials was the World Cup, which was the last major event to speed skating in the Olympics. Many of the international teams went from Marquette to Vancouver. Now we've got 30-35 international teams from Pakistan, India, Russia, Japan, Korea, etc. all on campus. We were on BBC, in Dutch and Korean newspapers and were providing a broadcast to Asia and Africa. There was actually an African skater here, however I don't think he got very far in the World Cup. But it was great to see the Berry Events Center and Northern get a lot of media attention. We counted being mentioned in over 70 international papers during the months of October through December, which was very exciting. I think the purpose, the whole Northern experience and purpose of the university was so exemplary during that time. And then you move into the Olympics in 2010 and we're very proud to have a number of NMU athletes make the Olympic team in cross country skiing and speed skating. We had a number of people chosen to be a part of the medical team as well. Our presence at the Olympics at Vancouver was very pronounced. It was again, a proud moment. I always remind everybody that during

that classic Canada v. U.S.A gold hockey game, only two schools were mentioned during the whole broadcast and one was Northern Michigan University because one of our alums son scored or was on the U.S.A team. He played very well and then there was mention of where Wayne Gretzky went to school in Canada. So, we got a free plug during the game. When I think back to last January of 2010, probably the most dramatic thing that happened on campus was my release of our two-step plan. We knew that the state was still being saved by stimulus bill dollars and those dollars were to be expended by January. The Board of Trustees voted at that time to use all of the stimulus bill dollars remaining as grants to students. One of the conditions of the dollars was that it contained or mitigated tuition increases for students. The Board had to, without discussion and said that our commitment to students was foremost. The decision at that point meant that the tuition bills that students are facing this semester, fall of 2010, were almost zero in most cases. That two-step plan I think was fairly significant because by January-February of 2010 we knew that the governor-released budget indicated that the cut to higher education was going to be 3.1%. The Senate a few weeks later announced the same thing, that they would endorse the governor's cut of 3.1%. The House was still out on a limb. I believe they were hoping for that they could get it lower and held off for a little bit longer but eventually the way the Michigan budget is resolved is the governor, Senate and the House all pass their version and it goes to a committee to resolve the differences. The committee would come to a compromise and it goes to the governor for approval or rejection. If it's rejected, then it's back to the drawing board. But, by the middle of the semester, sometime in March, we knew pretty well



that the cut for the fiscal year of 2010-2011 was going to be in the neighborhood of 3.1%. The two-step plan that my team and I put in front of the community identified a number of things we had to get done by June 30<sup>th</sup>. We took the remaining cuts to the academic side of the house; I think it was \$400,000 in terms of the overall budget. It was not a small amount of money but it certainly wasn't a large amount either. That was achieved with very few terminations of contracts of people. In fact, there might have been less than five termination appointments where a contract was not going to be renewed. But departmental budgets were able to stay intact. We merged academic computing and administrative computing into one unit. We recognized that the Board had cut the Human Resources budget. When June 30<sup>th</sup> rolled around, we had not only met the 3.1% cut but we had enough money saved to take into account potential inflationary costs. We also had some money saved against a possible drop in enrollment. Looking back, what we did was pretty smart because there was no drop in enrollment, so we didn't have to cover that. But we knew that we had to cover some of their 5.25-6% cuts in terms of the budget. That amount is the governor's passed budget plus our estimate of a 2.5% change in inflation, totaling about 5.6%. So, we got all of those step one things done and then the hard work began because the second step was all about positioning. What are some things that we could do in a campus wide planning scenario that would allow us to make some adjustments as the year unfolded but yet help us identify where we could invest some money? For example, the big thing in academics and the whole campus was charging the FRC to develop the criteria by which we would either eliminate programs or invest in six programs. But we didn't have a criterion at that

time so the charge to them was to spend summer developing that criteria under Dr. Crooks' leadership. They met a number of times during the summer and did an excellent job. In August we released the FRC's recommendations for adjustments. They're continuing to meet because the charge to them was, "Let's go through some drill, let's apply the criteria and find out what happens." I think there was rightfully some suspicion by faculty.

END SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

(LW): People thought that I had a list of my own secret six that I wanted to adjust. I didn't have any idea of what those six were.

(RM): Do you find that it is somewhat frustrating doing your job? There seems to be a lot of confusion surrounding this decision.

(LW): I'm not as evil as everyone thinks I am! That's where you had to make sure that you communicate often and well with people. You have to mix in a bit of humor to the seriousness because in tough economic times, conspiracy theories get generated in every corner of the campus and everyone is rightfully worried about it. "Am I next in getting cut?" And certainly if you were a recently hired faculty member, you were very worried about whether you would be kept on or released. We were reading nightmare reports from the west coast and other states.

(RM): Florida?

(LW): In Florida wholesale deductions and the sizes of the faculty and curriculum were cut.

(RM): In the spring of 2010 we were hiring two Philosophy faculty members and they asked me point blank, "What does the president and university plan on doing? Am I coming to Northern to spend a semester and then everything is going to go up in smoke?" I had to assure them from past experience that this would not happen and there is no indication of it. They came in from the outside hearing horror stories and probably went to universities for interviews and heard this type of thing.

(LW): There's a lot of fear on campus and that's when you have to work hard to make sure you earn people's trust and speak candidly. I remember the forum in the spring of 2009, a recommendation had come to me from all the unions that if we needed to eliminate jobs, rather than everyone freezing their salaries and being able to keep everyone, they unanimously voted that termination was a better option. If you've got to throw people under the bus, go ahead and do that, but we're not accepting a salary freeze across the board. I was quite surprised by that.

(RM): Your thinking goes back to the Great Depression where Ford and other companies went on three-day weeks to keep as many jobs as possible.

(LW): There were some raises scheduled in the multi-year contracts that people were owed because of the agreements. That's where my argument of saying, "Folks, I know you deserve this, this was a settlement and we're facing a significant reduction. If it occurs, if you are willing to amend your contracts and stay where you are, I'm not asking you to give any money back, just stay where you are, we could

avoid dismissing.” At that time our calculation was indicating up to 60 people employees for possible dismissal. I tried to make that argument, I met with the labor council and I said, “I’m not arguing with whether we owe you or not, we do.” I am convinced, even to this day, that the secret to winning in this recession is keeping people employed. The Labor Council unanimously came back and said, “We want what you owe us and if you have to unload people, do it.” I was very open with the campus that spring and I said against the advice of the unions and my own staff; I’m not going to throw people under the bus. We’ll execute some other strategies; we’re not going to terminate 50-60 people. I feel good about that decision. That’s when presidents and leaders suddenly realize that they have to suck it up. I could have eliminated those jobs and everyone would’ve said, “Yup, you had to do that.” But I went counter to the recommendations that had come to me from many sectors of the campus but it was the right decision. Interestingly enough the secondary wave of stimulus bill money was made available to states specifically for K-12 and higher education and that was part of the bill that was held in reserve. People didn’t pay much attention to it, it really wasn’t a second stimulus bill but it was the money we had used currently for aid to students. Those 50-60 people kept their jobs and we didn’t contribute to what I thought was a wrong-headed strategy. I think of it as a huge moral victory that felt very good. Granted we had to pay off our commitments to the contracts and tighten our belt in other ways but the bigger issue of not having to send out 50-60 pink slips made it right in my mind.

(RM): I have to interject from my own observation having been here for a long time and been at the bottom, probably like someone who was going to be cut. I never felt

that there was ever that feeling that I had had in the past. Now, the cuts didn't happen and life goes on but you don't have those negative potholes to deal with in the past, like, "Look what this guy did." It would have been very easy for you to agree with everyone, sign off on it and watch those people leave.

(LW): Thank you, it was a tough moment. I took a couple days to think about it. I said, "I don't want to talk budget; I want to think this through," and came back and said, "This is what I'm doing." Everyone said, "You know what, we're glad you made that decision, we can do this."

(RM): With education, things are always changing. And so what happens one day may not happen the next but something else does instead. I have it happen to myself with students, interns, jobs and whatnot.

(LW): Yeah, I felt fortunate. As we're looking back at last year, it may be healthy for the record to know that I did not accept any raises during this time. It's a quiet part of the story about me that I don't think is known on campus. I know that two years ago when I did it, the Mining Journal wrote a very nice editorial but I don't think people know that I did it the second year.

(RM): This happened with Vandament as well. He refused the raise but then this caused problems for his future hires of presidents because the president's salary was lower. So, You're maintaining that salary for the future but you've just returned on your own.

(LW): I think the Board is worried about that now. The discussion amongst the board members is that they do not want to repeat history. I know that it created some anguish for President Bailey when the board finally corrected that with her. So, they're trying to figure out a different way of doing that but I'm happy here. I think the fit between the university and myself continues to be a good one. I think that the respect and trust I have in the people around me has been reciprocated. When I ask people to consider an idea, "Can we tighten our belts and do such and such?" I'm just so blessed to have good people, faculty and staff that say, "That makes sense. We can do that." We've avoided a lot of issues that other Michigan campuses were still struggling with. Ferris State is currently into its second year without a contract. The campus is very tense. Eastern Michigan University and Oakland University are facing similar problems as well. We've not had that kind of turmoil on campus and it's a testament to everybody working hard.

(RM): I'm absolutely amazed when I hear these other stories in Michigan compared to how Northern has handled it. Everyone thinks that Northern is a mess but I haven't heard any talk of cuts, seen them or discuss them.

(LW): That was the whole exciting part this year; people understand that we're going on the offensive. We're not going to just simply react when someone says, "You've got to cut the budget and send this money back." I think that we're in a point in our evolution with my presence of campus to say, "What do great universities do? They assess their portfolio; do we need to be doing this?" I'll only use this example because I know we don't have that department, some schools have whole

departments in Medieval History and they don't enroll people well and people always wonder what's the relevance of it? Well, we're at that point where we're saying, "We're just not going to do any of the history anymore. We might do different kinds of history but not that one." The challenge for Northern now because of the FRC review, we're also asking the Athletic Department, which is a big part of the university budget, to reexamine their portfolio. Much like the academic people, we are offering the right diplomas and degrees for our students to help them in their career goals and also their employment goals. We're asking the sport teams, "Are we in the right sports? Are we in sports that were simply there because we've always been there? If we gave up one, can we start another that is more relevant to today's students?" Its nice because they're not simply saying, "Wong wants 3% back," but, "Wong is asking us to say, how do we want to spend our money?" And if you can justify getting more money, we're willing to now invest in those programs. So, I noticed that the Geography department last year went through a very long debate about changing their name to Environmental Science. But for me it came about some reflection and thinking on their part, a degree in Geography today doesn't have the same cache that it did when you and I were young. Nowadays, Geography is a very technical area. You have GPS and GIS issues, Geography tied to Economics, Public Policy and certainly Environmental Policy. I think they took a step in the right direction. It might very well afford them a better link with the Biology Department. I think students will benefit from these changes. The other reflection I have from last year was the incredible success that **Dr. Marcello Malentacchi** is having in rebirthing the International program. International enrollments this fall are up about 30% due

to Dr. Malentacchi's efforts. We were barely at 70 students last year at this time. We're almost at 99 students this year. It looks like for the spring semester; we'll go over 120 students. So, we're back in a groove where our international initiative has good life to it. We are close to solidifying some deals with some Caribbean and South American countries that I think for next year, will offer students an incredible experience to spend a semester in Brazil and Bolivia. We're very excited about that. I'm really happy with the faculty hires that have occurred; Pat Brown as the department head in Biology and JP in Mathematics. I always thought replacing Dr. P was going to be almost a near impossibility but we landed Dr. Valentine. I met with him yesterday and you could tell students are clinging to him like Velcro.

(RM): I've met him and am very impressed.

(LW): Like you said earlier Russ, sometimes you hear negative things about your university like, "we're never going to hire again, we're not hiring, we're terminating." That's not said at Northern, we're still hiring and we're probably going to make fifteen 10-year track hires this year. I think that's a pretty good thing. The other reflection I'll share with you regards our sports program. Dean Ellis, the head coach of the men's basketball team for 20 plus years, was having health issues and decided to step down. In a very dynamic search, certainly held by our alum Tom Izzo of Michigan State, we were able to lure Doug Lewis from Central State Ohio to join as the first African American head coach of a major sport at Northern. He has breathed new life into the program. He initiated Midnight Madness a week ago, the first time Northern has ever done that. It's the first day in which the basketball team, by NCAA



rules, can practice together at 12:01 and he said that we had 700 people in the gym. There were more people at 12:01 at that event than at any other previous men's game for the last two years. And so, he's really got students excited about basketball. The NCAA is going to do something interesting; there's always been kind of a chauvinist thing that the men play second and the women play first. This year, the women play second and the men are playing first at 5:30, so the women are getting primetime and we're very excited by that. You know, last year we had three teams in post-season play. The hockey team was in the Sweet 16 for the first time in 15 years. The football team also had a winning season. So, much like the level of play for academics had gone up dramatically, I think it's pulled everybody up. I think the Athletic program is back in the right groove; teams are winning. This year the volleyball team is 18-1 and ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the country. The team GPA is 3.0; there aren't very many D2 programs where the collective GPA of the student athlete was above a 3.0. As I reflect backwards, I think the Senior Administrative Team, the vice presidents and their assistance are the core of the team, remained intact. I think all of us were subjects of recruitments backwards by other campuses and that's a testament that people recognize that we are doing good work and whether its Gavin Leach, Cathy Dehlin or Cindy Paavola, there are people that approach them about considering moving to other institutions and they've all chosen to stay. A good administrative talent means that hopefully our positioning as the years go by will remain that we'll continue to be able to do interesting things. I think that's significant. People often don't think that holding onto administrators was a terrific thing. I thought the same thing when I was younger. I guess that's the nature of the

academy but now that I'm president, if you have a successful team then the challenge for the president is keeping that team intact and refreshed.

(RM): Having an institutional memory and experience is very important.

(LW): Yes and they know all the players now. I was reflecting with the Board during the September meeting of the approximately 30 people who were at the President's Meeting and two-thirds of them were new in their position or to the institution. Senior staff has the least seniority of all the work groups on campus in five or less years in their senior positions. They were a little bit surprised that when things are going really well, they think you've got veterans in there. They've been at it for a long time and it was a good reminder for them that we have some new employees and people new to their positions that had been promoted. But really our functioning at a high level is a testament to the institution. I'm very affectionate of John Smolens, a great writer and he was picked as the Michigan Author of the Year. We are also placing students into top-notch medical schools under Dr. Lucas' leadership. The productivity in your own department of History has just been phenomenal. Alan Willis is working on the Civil War history; that's been terrific. There are so many good things happening, they balance the whole budget crisis out and I always try to make myself maintain that balanced view. Although, my dad who's a very good businessman, always regretted that I never took business or accounting classes. He's probably chuckling now because that occupies a big deal of my time, parental revenge from the grave I guess.

(RM): Okay, well very good.

(LW): Yeah, its always good to kind of sit down and think about last year and reflect on what has happened since the last time we've been able to get together.

(RM): Great, thank you very much Dr. Wong.

Interview #5- 2012  
Dr. Leslie E. Wong  
Northern Michigan University  
Marquette, MI  
April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012

(Russell Magnaghi (RM)): Okay, Dr. Wong the last interview you did with me was in October of 2010 and what we've been trying to do is have an interview per year so that you can go over the highlights of your administration during that time. So we'll start with the end of 2010, we're probably talking about primarily November-December, I don't know if too much happened then we're really focusing on 2011.

(Dr. Les Wong (LW)): There really wasn't much happening towards the end of that fall term, the usual sort of chaos. I do remember that there was some quite exciting hockey games since the hockey team has really started to, you know feel itself.

We've got a couple of all-Americans and those kinds of things. So that kind of happened, but really a lot of excitement occurred during that subsequent spring term or the winter of 2011. Clearly the two things that we probably have to talk about a little bit was the gun incident on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and then obviously President Obama's visit a week later, which are two very big events. On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, Wednesday morning I was awakened at about 6:00 am by Mike Bath in security that had been alerted that an alum had picked up on a blog that is frequented by students etc., a threat to the campus. The threat was anonymous, but it identified myself, a location on campus, time of day and that person was going to wreak violence at that particular time. The fact that it appeared to have come from off-campus but with technology rush you can create a message in spot A and have it bounced off an number of places to have it come back to where you are. We didn't quite know where it was, we do know that the person alerting us was on the west coast and some of that enabled us to detect it fairly early. Well, Mike calls me and says, "we have a threat" and I said, "well you better read it to me." The minute he had completed the reading I said, "Mike, we've got to act." There is nothing that indicates that it was a prank or a joke or something like that. I activated our emergency response protocols that we've been working on and the team collected. We went through the critical questions that we felt are important to assess, not only the threat but our response to it, notified the FBI in Michigan, in this area the ATF is notified and then the state patrol are notified. And this is all occurring by 7:30am in the morning, so about an hour and a half later the response team has already been assembled at our designated meeting spot that is secure. We made a decision to

evacuate campus. That call was made about 8ish, Id' have to check my notes, but about 8:00-8:30. I was very proud of the campus; it took about an hour to get 11,000 people off campus. So, really by almost 10:00 o'clock, the campus was pretty empty, the news was out that there was a potential gun threat, all of our security people were called in, Marquette Police were now alerted and apparently what we did not know then, but we certainly know is that once Northern closes because of a gun threat, because the high school is so close by the Marquette Area Public Schools (MAPS) decides to close the entire district, not just the high school. We thought it would be just the high school because of their proximity. But their response was to close the entire school district. So, that was the next domino. Then the hospital decided that they obviously, because of their proximity, would lock up and go into a higher security mode. Businesses in our neighborhoods were all alerted and they could decide for themselves whether to close or not to close. Really the issue became getting our 11,000 people off campus in a hurry, securing the residence halls because obviously the students there can't go anywhere. And then the movement of the K-12 students throughout the district was a pretty big deal as well. By that time it was national news, by about 10:30-11:00 o'clock. Our team was assembled with the FBI etc. We were trying to go through who we felt might be suspects. Our technical people were now mobilized to trace the posting that was on the west coast. We actually helped the FBI track it all the way to Russia. Again it gives you an idea how smart some of the hackers are to bounce it. So at least we knew by 11:00 o'clock that the message was not coming from campus. Ironically, we had student conduct hearings for the two days prior, so Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and we did

have a number of young men who are very angry, because of the student conduct hearings and they became points of suspicion. And so the FBI went and had chats with the young men, actually arrested one of them, held him for 24 hours, and then released him. We really went into a mode of where we try to monitor all the television, tweets, facebook, etc from the central secure area so that we could contain rumors and innuendos. For example it gets pretty sensitive because perceptions run wild. We had a parent come in to get a daughter at one of the residence halls and they were spotted by others and the report was that there was a student being kidnapped out of one of the residence halls. It was actually a parent coming to get a child. So you get that and then you get just rumors that fifth, sixth and seventh generation down. One of our responses is to have a team of people monitoring that and then we would inform the tweet or the facebook, blog or even TV 6 "which you've just heard is not true and here's what we know and here's what we don't know." That was very critical in monitoring all of the public chatter that was going out. But clearly, the fear level had gone up traumatically. Our emergency response team is committed to staying together over 24 hours. The FBI assigned security for us. It was quite an experience for me because a bodyguard is assigned to me because I was named in the threat. I was the only one named by name and so the person goes with you everywhere, I mean everywhere! Luckily they were going to assign someone to Phyllis, my wife, but she was in Seattle visiting her son and grandchildren. Luckily she was okay. And then we start alerting people from the Board of Trustees to the governor. I got a call from the governor wanting to make sure that anything we needed, state resources were going to be put at our disposal.

And then the afternoon of that day was spent letting the professional people do their work. We were monitoring the campus, making sure that we were feeding people. Making sure that students, we felt had adequate protection in residence halls. Right around 5:00 or 6:00 o clock that day, our decision making moved to whether or not we were going to stay closed the next day or not. What I decided to do under guard was to visit the residence hall dining areas. I knew the students were quite afraid. I knew that we were going to feed them in a window of time. And so I came over to the Den and to the Marketplace (NMU Dining areas) and it was quite moving, I do believe there is video that exists over those visits. The provost and I, again with our bodyguards walked into the Den and the place goes silent. I said, "If you'd all come around here, I want to reassure you or your safety and we're going to feed you. We're asking your cooperation to stay in your rooms. Go from here right back to your residence halls. Study, do whatever, try not to walk around campus, etc." And then we were taken over to the Marketplace. And that was a little bit different because the scale is so much bigger. There were probably 400 students eating. And the minute I walked in, it was a little imposing and scary because the bodyguards are in tactical gear. They're dressed out.

(RM): Oh, the bodyguards weren't in plain clothes?

(LW): Oh no, they were in tactical gear with automatic weapons. It was very imposing but they were in the background, however it's hard to hide them. The Marketplace just went quiet and I did the same thing, "Could you just kind of huddle up here, I'd like to tell you what's going on, we're going to make sure, as you can see

from the people around you that your safety is our primary concern.” And then I went over walking about, and asked them to do the same that they would go back to their rooms stay in their rooms and so forth. It became evident to us by dinnertime that the people we were suspecting didn’t pan out. It was clear that the threat was from a remote area and we had gotten word that one other campus in America had got the same threat and it just substituted their president’s name.

(RM): So a verbatim threat.

(LW): Verbatim, absolutely verbatim. And that’s the one beauty of instant media attention because we’re on CNN, holding a news conference and it’s all over the country. Someone else gets the same threat and their going, “Hold it, we’re just watching Northern on television and we’re getting the same thing.” Within 48 hours there were five campuses in America that had gotten duplicates, other than the president’s name. So then the question became, “do we open up the next day or do we let people chill out?” It was the consensus of the group plus the FBI and their professionals that the quicker we got back into at Northern, the better off everyone was. And so we made the decision after dinner that we were going to be open the next day, and then that went out. The next day was the most unusual day of my 38 years in higher education because you have a campus coming together and we were very frightened. The fear level was quite high. I really am thankful for faculty, staff, who without any question just simply did what was expected of them. They got their students out of the way, students that needed help, received help. The best story of that is that as the library was being evacuated, a pregnant woman, I think she was in



her eighth month, (and I heard from her I should probably find out how she's doing, the child's about a year old right now) but in her panic broke her key to her car in the door lock. And here she's pregnant; she wants to get out of campus. And so one of our librarians literally, put her in the car and took her home. It was that kind of humanitarian good will, Good Samaritan that just makes you feel proud to be here. And there were a lot of those kinds of stories of students who were very scared, very frightened. The residence hall staff did an incredible job. So the next day was one of those, "Boy everybody's on pins and needles." The FBI thought it would be good that the bodyguards would then go to plain clothes and stay around in some fashion. But I went to the Starbucks; I wanted to walk around campus to make sure that people were feeling a little bit better. And we learned a lot from that. Our protocols are even better; the things that we've learned have been improved. The irony of the whole this is that on Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> the White House calls. We had been working with the White House, because we originally thought the president was very intrigued by our WiMAX deployment. His staff was asking a lot of questions, we thought we might get into the State of the Union address and that was our goal at that point. And he got so close to talking about rural technology etc, but it never appeared in the State of the Union address in January. So on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, he calls and he said, "We want to come visit you." I said, "That's terrific!" But all this other stuff goes down on a Thursday? And I say, "When does the president want to come." And they went, "A week from today, on February 10<sup>th</sup>." It was a great way to go from awareness, sensitivity, fear to great high hopes because the president of the United States has selected you to come all within 24 hours. And so now, February 4<sup>th</sup>, that

Friday, I believe it's a Friday, we're mobilizing now, the secret service showed up. They called us Thursday; secret service is on campus Friday, beginning their preparation for the president's visit. From that point on I guess, to connect the two events when the head of secret service sitting in my office in fact right where you are sitting now, I said, "You know what happened yesterday?" And he goes, "Yeah, we've been following. You guys did a great job." And I said, "Does that make you worried at all?" He said, "No, the president wants to come here and he's going to come here." So it was pretty good. He said that he was very complementary about how we handled the event from two days. **Cindy Paavola** for example, didn't sleep for seven days moving from the gun threat to arranging for the president's visit. The president really wanted to announce his rural digital initiative. And we're very grateful that he selected us as the location to deliver that because of our WiMAX. And I think the most exciting thing about it was that I had offered the Superior Dome, so that as many people as possible could see the president and I find out that he's kind of a small crowd guy. So he said, "You know, how about the Vandament?" And I said, "Well, we'll only pack in 1,100 people." And he goes, "Perfect. That's just perfect." So, then the issue became who got a ticket to come in and see the president. And so, our proposal to the White House was how about any student who has volunteered to lead a group on campus gets first shot, which they thought was fabulous. So, we wrote a computer program, picking out the president and vice president of every student club on campus and then randomly selected students from that. So that became the golden ticket to see President Obama. I was very thrilled because he came in and the media record was pretty good, going to Donkers

and doing all those things. What we had set up was, really a good experience. We wanted to show him how WiMAX could be used. So what we did was, Big Bay schools has been literally off the grid in terms of broadband, very slow dial-up I mean, 25 year old technology. What we had been doing was working on bouncing our WiMAX signal off of Granite Island into Big Bay Schools and so our proposal to the President was that we would arrange the first full motion 4G video conference between the middle school in Big Bay and President Obama sitting in the Wildcat room, over in the PEIF. And we would bounce that conversation off Granite Island into Big Bay and then into Negaunee Schools. We tested that for two to three days. We had to go out to the island and chip the ice off to fix some batteries and stuff like that. So there was a lot of really creative infrastructure because the boat that we put into the water had to go out and break the ice downtown to get the boat in the water and get the batteries and stuff onto it, go out to Granite Island and chip the ice, land the boat, get the batteries changed and get everybody home safely. The president is just a delightful man, much like President Bush, when he came in 2004. He wanted to meet our student body president and our board chair **Brian Cloyd**. This was a great opportunity to introduce him to WiMAX and he wanted to have the teleconference and I tell you those two schools did a great job too. They are very quite proud. When I told the president, "Mr. President, this is kind of like the invention of the telephone. This is their first teleconference." And he was just tickled about that whole event. And then the whole event in the Vandament was first rate. A personal memory for that, that will always stand out for me was that my middle son was able to come, and we had choice seats. So my son was able to meet President

Obama as he kind of went around and shook all of our hands, one of my favorite pictures. But then to be able, once in a lifetime, to introduce the President of the United States. So I think that I spoke and then a White House voice comes out to introduce the President and so he comes on right after me, so the crowd was buzzing by the time I walked out there it was pretty electric. He gave his speech and it was really memorable. As kind of a follow up to that, the White House on a number of occasions as well as the FCC has been calling us for our input on broadband technology and input since that time, to today. For example, the University of Massachusetts- Dartmouth setup their WiMAX and we're monitoring it for them right now. The Woods Hole Observatory, the research station in Chesapeake Bay; we are running their WiMAX system for them. And so we really do have a national expertise in this technology. And that has really been a wonderful sort of point of distinction, a very unique attribute of the university since that time. While I'm on that path, I guess as to kind of jump forward and go back a little bit, we're now looking at the possibility of expanding our WiMAX network across the whole Upper Peninsula. And so the ability to provide 4G services to community colleges for example, Gogebic, Escanaba, Iron Mountain, in Sault Ste. Marie and we're already up in Houghton. We think we'll be revolutionary in terms of bringing high speed broadband; it's really where we're going. And so, **Gad, Lisa and I** were at the FCC on March 5<sup>th</sup> of 2012 and we're moving ahead but that they've given us a green light to go ahead and do the engineering studies and we'll submit an application perhaps by fall of next year. We have support from each of those communities; they realize too that we'll be able to get remote high schools. Our

vision is that, not every high school can teach calculus, and that's always my example in the public that Kingsford might have two students that want calculus, Iron Mountain might have three students that want calculus, Baraga might have one student that needs calculus, while schools are cutting back its hard for them to find math teachers. The WiMAX might be able to bring calculus instruction or language instruction or social studies instructions to a lot of schools that can't afford to offer it right now. We think that's going to be a great opportunity.

(RM): Are we one of the few places, rural areas that will be covered by WiMAX over such a large distance?

(LW): Yes, we'll be the largest non-commercial entity. You'll notice on TV that Verizon and Sprint talk about their LTE deployment 4G and that's the next generation of WiMAX. And so, we'll reach a point in time where we'll probably upgrade to LTE as well. Both LTE and WiMAX are spectrum driven broadbands not phone based broadbands or fiber-based broadbands. That's why we have to go to the FCC all of the time to have a spectrum from what's called an EBS spectrum "Educational Broadband Spectrum" assigned to us. And right now we're the only entity in that EBS right now. So we're really the trailblazers. That was the intent of that spectrum, that's why it hasn't gone commercial. Decades ago there was enough foresight to see that if this becomes a big deal, there has to be some commitment to education to have available spectrum to deliver materials. I wish I knew who the person was; it was really quite an insight for someone to be that far ahead in their thinking, its really paying off right now.

(RM): I think that a lot of people saw that that would be very useful but then its actually setting something aside to make it happen.

(LW): Exactly

(RM): You can sit and talk about the theory but unless you...

(LW): That's a very good point

(RM): activate it doesn't happen.

(LW): And the comparable value of that much spectrum on the commercial spectrum is prohibited. We don't have the reserves of a Sprint or Verizon or AT&T as long as we keep to educational delivery and uses, the commercial people have no right with us. In fact we use them to back all data, off of the WiMAX network, so that's a good way for everyone. But we're not allowed to commercially rent out space or sublease it to other commercial entities; it has to be for educational content. There is a little piece in it where we're allowed to let governments use it. As an experiment right now we have all of the first responders for Marquette police and the fire department have laptops in their fire trucks and police cars with WiMAX enabled laptops. And that's working out to be a great experiment; it increases the efficiency of GPS locations for example or other information that they need to send. We told the FCC, "it doesn't look like this is prohibited, is it okay?" They said, "You guys are the first to set it up, see if it works." And it's working real nicely. It might be that in the expansion of this that, the state patrol, we've had a request from the DNR, that their trucks had 4G enabled laptops or WiMAX enabled laptops. All of the sort of

law enforcement/ public safety people are using our WiMAX right now, so its really good win-win situation for everyone. So those are two really big events and then obviously the governor's digital proposal. The other line of thinking that has happened from that up to today is **Dave Behen** who is Michigan's CIO, the chief Technology officer or chief information officer, is really interested in what Northern is doing can be duplicated in other rural areas, essentially north of Mt. Pleasant, the Thumb or some of the remote areas of northern lower Michigan. They're learning a lot from us on how to do the engineering, the feasibility studies regardless of what technology you use, so that's turning out to be an interesting way to end. And they are looking at how is it possible that state services in the UP could be delivered via the WiMAX network and we'll have to get that cleared through the FCC as well. The latest request we've had is whether or not health service through the hospitals can be uploaded and downloaded onto the WiMAX network, particularly if it was non-profit. The whole idea of telemedicine, there's this new thing called real-time patient monitoring. If Les has a heart implant, what they'll do is hook up a Bluetooth to it, and the Bluetooth goes into a transponder in the laptop, which is hooked to WiMAX which sends the signal to my physician. And if there is any irregularity in my heart, it signals the doctor in real-time and he calls me on the phone. It says, "Les, you've been notified." It's like your home security system, except it's your heart. Some doctors are experimenting with a notion that if I'm a diabetic and I forget to inject myself with insulin, that a transponder will signal the physician or nurse, the nurse calls me and says' "Les you forgot to inject yourself. You better do that within the next 2 minutes." The whole issue of telemetry for patient monitoring is quite

powerful, particularly if you are in the more remote areas in the UP, it could be a lifesaver.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

(LW): Exactly, I think that bringing those areas into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and again, it's the experience with President Obama and Big Bay schools, this is the first time that full motion video shows up in a fifth grade classroom and its 2012 and they're finally getting services that many people in the cities take for granted. Let's see, during the rest of the spring, boy we were riding that way pretty nicely. A lot of the requests for that spring really emanated from the president's visit and you know, Mike Bath and Cindy were asked by a number of colleges to come in and help them design emergency protocols. One of the things I probably should mention that really is not great news is that the number of shootings on campuses has gone up dramatically. I think everybody worries about it; it's not an isolated thing anymore. There were 55 gun incidents where a student was actually injured by a weapon on campuses this past year. We always hear about the murders that were sad events in Oakland yesterday. Where a student pulls out a gun and fires it into the air at a party has occurred with more frequency. Many states are now trying to pass legislation where if you have a concealed carry permit you can carry your gun on campus, which we're fighting with all of our strength to not let that happen in Michigan. The mix of drugs and alcohol, guns and young people, is not a great track record.



(RM): The other part of that is, you get returning veterans with potential mental problems.

(LW): Yes. And I do think the mental health issues of students will be the defining issues from 2012 onward. I think that is a problem that we're aware of, I'm not at all confident that we're ready for that. I think that counseling centers on college campuses are incredibly overworked across the country. The other news in the springtime was the governor's first year in office and he was saddled with an enormous budget problem. And we knew that things were going to get a lot worse before they got better and that was confirmed towards the middle of May, and officially on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, that despite an enormous amount of work in Lansing by Northern's team, the governor decided to implement a 15% general fund reduction for all fifteen public institutions. We had been planning on 12%, I was hoping it was closer to 10% and it came out to be 15%. For Northern that meant we would return \$6.77 million of general fund dollars back to the governor.

(RM): Well this was money that was already was on campus?

(LW): I'm sorry, well actually, no it wasn't. But it....

(RM): It was earmarked?

(LW): It was earmarked. When our budget started on July 1<sup>st</sup> that was when the cut occurred even though the subtraction of the money didn't occur until the state's budget starts on October 1<sup>st</sup>. We had about two months to get ready for that. You didn't have time to get shell-shocked, probably the most dramatic cut in the history

of Michigan, if not at that time across the country. Now since that time, the record has been broke. California has done 15% or more multiple times now. New Hampshire did almost 40%. There is no comfort to be afflicted here. I thought it was pretty dramatic. It meant that we had to set our values in motion and our approach going forward is really two-pronged. We wanted to preserve as many jobs as we could. To this day, I'm still convinced that it's not the deficit that's hurting us. Unfortunately the high-end Nobel Prize winning economists agree with me but none of the politicians do. So whether it hinges to our response was, keep as many people employed as we could, the second leg of the stool was to protect the curriculum and the third leg of the stool was to maintain adequate support to students and what I call the secondary tier of support; the labs, tutoring centers, career centers, counseling centers, the things that help our students succeed outside of the classroom, we wanted to protect those as well. What happened is that a lot was asking the campus to move to a different health care plan, we're in the process of achieving that. We did not fill any of the positions that became vacant by retirement or departure. And that was similar between 36-52 positions that went unfilled. I think I remember the governor offered an early out program that year, and we had a number of employees take up the governor's offer. We didn't replace many of those either. And so, even though we lost a lot of employment wise, we didn't have to go to people and say, "I'm sorry you're not employed." I think that was very nominal. I probably should be double-checked, I was told there were only three people, and I feel terrible for those three. That really was the spring and the summer piece. And then the governor's model was to keep any tuition increases below 7.9% or we'd be

penalized. And the board made the very tough decision to raise tuition 7%. But we also, as we typically do, increased the financial aid and those kinds of things. So that got executed during this past summer and fall. Our work was making adjustments to this budget seem really minimal, making sure critical bases were touched, making sure the resources in terms of energy and campus safety were in place, making sure that we had coverage by the teams in different kinds of places. It really went that the support staff and administrators, and even to a great degree faculty, their jobs became larger in scope, they didn't get any deeper, but they certainly got larger as we had to cover so many vacant spots. Then again, just wonderful complements to the entire employee force for stepping up and doing what was needed. We wanted to make sure that students feel like it was a budget cut. At least the feedback I've gotten this year during fall term and this term is that that appears to be the case but that people know that were stretched pretty thin. Winter graduation we were blessed to have one of the premier African-American women be our graduation speaker so, Johnnetta Cole was on campus, she currently is the director of the Smithsonian's African-American museum, and just a wonderful spirit that came in December and was our commencement speaker. This coming spring we'll have Ada Deer, one of the leading women Native American leaders in the country, will be the commencement speaker.

(RM): She was never here?

(LW): She was never here at Northern.

(RM): We had some other Native American lady... She was the big leader in determination in .....

(LW): Exactly, I think, we're just very proud that this year, in our attempt to celebrate women in leadership positions that we've got two very prominent, national women leaders in their respective areas, so I'm looking forward to Ada's visit and participation in commencement.

(RM): Then there were two other things that you might want to comment on. You established Temaki & Tea and then the Friday, closure on Friday.

(LW): Yeah. Last summer was very dramatic in that we decided to go to a four day and ten hour work week and do some assessments of energy savings etc, our goal was to see if we would save at least \$60,000. The number that I've seen has been, the savings were closer to \$95,000. This summer we're going back to 4-10's and the good scientists will make sure that we replicate the study to see if that's true. Our understanding is that Lake Superior State University is going to experiment 4-10 summers as well. And so that was very positive and I think that for moral, I certainly welcomed having a three-day weekend and summers in the UP are pretty spectacular. The other pieces that we knew that were going to have to be cut were entrepreneurial. And so, we opened up Temaki & Tea across the street at the old Hardees restaurant. And, I forget the name of the juice...

(RM): Smoothie King?

(LW): Smoothie King is part of the operation there. That has exceeded all of our expectations. Again, what we try to do is to use the revenue to employ students, to contribute to the scholarship fund, and to help us in other areas in terms of paying bills. So that's been very successful, this has opened up Melted, in Hedgecock, and if you like comfort food, having a grilled cheese, nine types of grilled cheese deluxe sandwiches is absolutely phenomenal. And that's been very successful. Simply Superior Catering is their new name has been doing wonderful as well.

(RM): And that was also in development in 2011, the name change?

(LW): Yes.

(RM): Now, has there been any criticism, complaints from local businesses?

(LW): A little bit, sure. There was a belief that there was an unfair advantage, in this. But what we're public about was that we were going to pay taxes, as if we were a regular business and we do, at Temaki and Smoothie King, that it is from our auxiliary offices, so there are really no general funds being used in that operation. For example, we try to tell people a lot of the news reports say that we've gone off campus with Temaki & Tea but Temaki & Tea is on campus. It's right next to the Dome, on our property. So it might look like its off campus but it is on campus, its well used by employees and students. Again, it employs a lot of students. The 4-10 work week has worked out well, the golf course that was gifted to us three years ago is doing very well, and as we've promised, the donor, all the net proceeds from the golf course goes into the scholarship fund. This past summer, my wife Phyllis in addition to **Joann Wright** organized the first blueberry golf festival for non-golfers

and all the proceeds for that went into an emergency fund for students. Buy a book, fix their car, pay for a doctors visit, feed themselves or their children and they were able to put close to \$16,000 in it this summer. I've been told they've got quite a lineup going for this summer, blueberry festival. I guess what I should probably close on is the governor has kept his promise that he said that the 15% cut would be the last that he would foresee. His proposal was released in January of 2012 and we're scheduled for a 3.4% increase. The senate has recommended a 3.1% increase, the House is in the same ballpark of about 3.4%, so it looks like the economy of Michigan is moving in the right direction and there's a renewed vigor to reinvest in public higher education. So this spring that we've had a different experience Gavin and Paul Lang and I have been thinking about how to grow the school again rather than having an eleventh consecutive year of cut discussions.

(RM): Is that where's it's been?

(LW): It will be eleven consecutive years of reductions; we've lots nearly 35% in budget over the decade. I think the other news I should probably share for the tape, we're nearing the end of our search for a new provost. Lang has done an excellent job as an interim; the board will make a decision in their May meeting and a recommendation for me, for the new provost. And we're also nearing the end for a search for a new athletic director. Those are two key positions. We also completed a major branding study. There will be some recommendations on how we might be much more effective with branding efforts across the campus with the hopes of improving enrollments. We've deployed a plan that my team and I created before

summer, for a four and four idea that we developed a model by which could add 400 new students within the next year to two years, through retention, through athletic expansion and investments in athletics in some marketing and actually in faculty hiring. Right now we're nearing the end of what we call "enhancement searches." There will be eight new faculty that we're going to invest in, clinical lab science, two in art and design for example, exercise science and we think they'll add capacity to bring us successful programs where there has been waiting. And the other piece that is still yet to be resolved, maybe the next time we talk we'll be talking about it but the potential sale of Marquette General Hospital, our neighbor, to Duke LifePoint was a major game changer for Marquette. The fifth or sixth largest private for-profit hospital chain in America and Duke University moving in next door as early as this summer, will have a lot of effects on the university in terms of health programs, in terms of research that might be done.

(RM): Research through the hospital but also possibly through Duke University?

(LW): Yes. Michigan State now, because of that, wants to locate some researchers up here in Marquette from the College of Human Medicine. Blue Cross has said that they will invest in research done under department ship of the university and the hospital as well.

(RM): So this is all since the discussion of the changeover?

(LW): Right. And so as early as this fall, over the next three to five years the hospital might very well add up to 400 new jobs across the street. They're looking at using the University Center (UC), do our biology and chemistry faculty want to setup co-

research projects and can students participate in those. I mean everybody is very excited about the possibilities, but the closure of that isn't anticipated until mid-to late summer. So a lot of it is planning what if kinds of thinking but there is no doubt that having a very prestigious research university and a very large successful hospital chain move in next door has some great things to do for Northern over the next year. If anything that might be the single largest consumption of our planning time. I should also mention we were about ready to hear about the construction of the new academic building. We originally planned to remodel Jamrich and it actually came out to be a bigger achiever if we were too build a new building and take down Jamrich Hall. We started the construction of the biomass plant this past week over by the power plant and in about a month we'll start the demolition of Carey Hall. And so Carey Hall will be coming down so, the physical layout of the campus will begin to take on a really different appearance, much more in line with our master plan that was released in 2008. So we're pretty excited about that and we're hoping the reinvestment in higher education will enable Northern to hire the faculty and staff that will be needed to take full advantage of this opportunity. So I'm anticipating some really exciting things for Northern.

(RM): So things aren't gloomy?

(LW): Far from it.

(RM): Negative? It's just sometimes that you kind of get that spin out of the media.

(LW): Yeah. And its easy when you've been reducing things for eleven consecutive years that all of a sudden you think, wow you build new partners across the street



and if you remember the health research from the 1960's and 1970's, good tension has effects on your health, just like bad tension. So I've been telling people, let's find a good balance and be ready for a lot of good stuff that's going to happen on campus.

(RM): Well that's sort of, I guess, one of the exciting things about being in Michigan. You're on an economic roller coaster is that it dips down and loony. My hope and position is that when that happens is, plan, and get everything organized. Don't go negative. Plan, and then put your plans on file and hold them there, then when things improve, pull them out and move ahead.

(LW): That's right.

(RM): That looks like the way things are going.

(LW): I'm really proud of our people here because we do have a can-do attitude and we're really a community of people that want to be here. And it makes for a very different climate on campus, we care about each other and certainly, as I shared today, the example of the gun threat on campus, you really learn more about people when the going is tough, and it couldn't get more scary than the possibility of gunfire on campus, luckily nobody got hurt and it never happened. But it was a testament to the cooperation and goodwill of this place when we're really threatened. And now as we sort of see some sun as we're looking out this eleven-year tunnel, people are starting to feel pretty good about that. It's certainly a different context for next year.

(RM): Any final thoughts?

(LW): I'm pretty excited, I remember my convocation speech of eight, it was a magic number, lucky number for Chinese culture, it is turning in to be true. A lot of very positive things have happened for Northern. I had fun with it because I identified eight areas that we're trying to focus on this year. And it looks like we did pretty well on all eight of them.

(RM): Now did you pick that, did you pick it or did it just come up?

(LW): Well, I picked it on purpose because this year is also the year of the dragon, which is also a very powerful year in Chinese culture, and so I sort of matched up the year of the dragon with lucky number eight and boy, its just, sometimes folklore has a lot of truth to it because as we're talking, the opportunities in front of us are pretty positive. We go out to communities and say we think this is a good place to send your children and anybody that wants to get a college degree. We can point to a number; I'm pretty excited about things that are happening. Plus it's a great place to come to. A very good place. I think as we hire new faculty and take a look at our staffing needs, a lot of these opportunities I feel very good about this year. The issues, like you say, can you get ready and be prepared, the economy can roller coaster on you pretty quickly. There's a different feel to this one, I think the country, I hope, learned their lessons from the Great Recession of 2008-2010 and hopefully we'll do things to avoid getting into that situation again.

(RM): What year did you come?

(LW): In 2004

(RM): So you were here, prior to 2008?

(LW): And then eight was fine because it was my eighth year here. So all the numbers seem to line up.

(RM): Oh, I see

(LW): Lucky number eight, my eighth year here, and in many ways the other part of it is true, my children are producing grandchildren at a ferocious rate this year. I'm going to have six grandkids by the end of the month.

(RM): Oh really?

(LW): Oh yeah.

(RM): And they're all relatively recent?

(LW): Oh yeah, four of them are all within two years of each other. The twins, our oldest two were born two years ago, but the other four will all be born within the last year.

(RM): And how are you enjoying being a grandfather?

(LW): I love being a grandpa.

(RM): Do you get to see them often?

(LW): Yeah, we try to get out, not as often as we would like of course. On a fairly quarterly basis. One of us, grandma in particular, gets out there pretty quickly.

(RM): Now, where are they? Seattle?

(LW): No, he got moved to North Carolina, Ft. Bragg, so they're all on the Eastern Time zone. So the youngest, the soldier son is in Ft. Bragg, my middle son is in Boston and the oldest is in New York City.

(RM): One's in music?

(LW): He became a lawyer.

(RM): Really?

(LW): We teased him that he went to the dark side here, the real dark side. He sold his studio, he wanted to be a lawyer, he wanted to be a public defender and he's currently the public defender for the city of Boston, and loves it, defending the little guy. It was always in his blood to take care of the little guy or gal. Our oldest one is still working in the mathematics area for a private company in New York City and our second one is a captain in the U.S. Army.

(RM): And now they're all married?

(LW): Yes, they're all going to end up with two children each now.

(RM): Well that's fun.

(LW): Yeah, it's a lot of fun. You never quite understand what a parent is until you have your own and you really don't understand the joy of being a grandparent until you become one.

(RM): It's one of those things you have to experience.

(LW): And they're all good Wildcats.

(RM): I presume they all have some Wildcat attire?

(LW): Oh my gosh, yeah. We would not allow them to wear any kind of memorabilia from another place other than where grandpa works.

(RM): Now as they get older, it will be even more fun because you can communicate with them and interact and play, when they're babies you kind of look at them and that's it, but as they get older you can play.

(LW): Its funny you mention that because our two older ones are almost three years old now and they get one Skype and we talk to each other through the laptops.

(RM): At three?

(LW): Oh yes. I get a little signal and its, Clara and she wants to ask me my opinion of something, and its just two minutes here and there, its very special.

(RM): So it's not like in the old days, you'd see them four times a year and that was it. Now you can go and visit with them...

(LW): In real-time, a couple times a week. The joys of technology. If nothing else, I think that really has been the biggest social import that technology's bringing people closer together, particularly families. It was a dream, the 28 months my son spent in Iraq, might have been the longest 28 months in my life but being able to communicate with him on a regular basis through the laptops was good for him and certainly good for us. I couldn't imagine being a parent during World War II with the

kids out in the war somewhere and you get a letter once every four to six months maybe that would have just been horrible. And then the other thing I should probably say, this was the winter that never was.

(RM): But you sat up here, with the lake in front of you and the lake stayed blue the whole time.

(LW): You know, you look out today, its brilliant blue, not a cloud in the sky. It's been like this all winter. It's just unbelievable.

(RM): Over the years, I've shoveled a lot of snow and I think this year was the lowest I've ever seen. A foot, foot and a half and so on. Sometimes its three-four feet or throwing snow up in the air and blowing and whatnot and this year was not a winter.

(LW): You got to read books see? That extra couple books because you weren't out there shoveling and stuff.

(RM): Okay, well very good thank you!

(LW): You're welcome.